



# Chronicles of Ordinary Racism

Fifth white book on racism in Italy

by Lunaria



2020



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## *Introduction*

This is a special white paper.

It looks back over twelve years of Chronicles of Ordinary Racism and closes in the midst of the protests that have broken out all over the world at the cry Black Lives Matter.

These pages, as well as the handwritten signs and slogans of the thousands of young people who took the streets, denounce that there is a tight, systemic and perverse interweaving between the wrong words used by those who have power, distorted representations of facts, the violent offenses of those who comment online and the physical racist violence perpetrated individually and in groups - sometimes using the power that comes from their institutional role.

Young people in Minneapolis, like those in Rome, Milan, Bologna and other Italian cities, are telling the world with simplicity and immediacy, that rebelling against inequalities and discrimination is a good and just thing.

They remind us that the most engaging and conscience-motivating battles are those promoted by those who suffer injustice on their own skin.

They give us hope, reminding us that when rights and dignity are violated and trampled shamelessly and with arrogance, indignation can trigger unexpectedly and spontaneously, even without the support of structured organizations.

We needed this spontaneous, widespread, pervasive, in some ways surprising and exciting rebellion.

Because racism is not a virus, it has its roots in the history of the “Belpaese” and is, above all, institutional racism.



We did affirm this already in 2009, when we published our first white paper. And we have repeated it from 2011 onwards, every day on our website [cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://cronachediordinariorazzismo.org).

In this fifth report we, once again, bring evidence for this with the analysis of the 7.346 cases of racism we have documented between 1 January 2008 and 31 March 2020 and the twenty-two exemplary stories. As always, framed in a political, social and institutional context that the essays contained in the first part of the book help us to retrace.

To look beyond the decade is important because many tend to ascribe the rise in discriminations and racist violence that took place in our country in particular from 2018 onwards to the success of the propaganda of some illustrious right-wing leaders. Just as, specularly, the momentary crisis of visibility and consensus, has been sufficient to declare in a very hasty manner the end of the spread of the most violent forms of racist propaganda.

The key word in these pages is, therefore, memory.

It is memory that helps us to reconstruct the indissoluble interweaving of migration, migration policies and racism, which has characterised the history of our country since the 1980s. Racism has been accompanied, in recent years, by Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsyism, but it is mainly migrations and asylum seeking that have hegemonised the public debate and inspired the most serious physical violence.

It takes much more than the momentary fading of more explicitly discriminatory noise to mark a turning point.

The young people who are demonstrating while we write this introduction are also calling for the rethinking of the political agenda, on languages, on forms of



protest and mobilization and on the main lines of the Italian public debate on racism. A reflection that we felt the need to propose starting from the awareness that the great wealth of initiatives and interventions of solidarity scattered throughout the Italian territory are counterbalanced by a still insufficient propensity to network collaboration and a level of analysis that still remains too dependent on the emergencies imposed by institutional policy.

Again, stopping and looking back may perhaps help us in our search for greater clarity, consensus and strength.

The “the knee on the neck civilization”<sup>1</sup> is not a destiny. We can fight it if we recognize in the insults, racist propaganda, institutional discrimination, denied workers’ rights, segregation of camps and detention centres, punches and kicks thrown against “blacks”, “refugees”, foreigners, Jews and Muslims, Roma, Sinti and Camminanti people that we remember in these pages, the darkest signs of an entire economic and social system that is structurally based on the growth of inequalities.

A system that together we can change.

Before wishing you a good reading, I would like to express my special thanks to all the people who have helped and supported us in these twelve years: to the most experienced activists and researchers, as well as to the many young people who have become more and more passionate about the *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo* work.

Without their patience, willingness, dedication and perseverance, Lunaria would not have been able to engage so deeply in this daily battle for rights, against privileges, all forms of inequality, discrimination and racism.

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<sup>1</sup> It is the headline of a good article by Alessandro Portelli, *il manifesto* 14 June 2020.



# **PART 1.**

## **The political and cultural context**





## A decade of racist infamy

*Annamaria Rivera*

### **The massacre of Florence, the role of the far right**

In Italy as elsewhere, the public attitude and debate on racism and the rights of migrants, refugees, minorities are, as I have been writing for some years, mostly characterized by the lack of the sense of development, processuality and of long duration.

This is what I call *the rhetoric of the first time*. In the face of serious or extreme racism acts, what prevails in the collective consciousness as well as in media, institutional and political actors, and even among some left-wing intellectuals is the tendency to remove the premonitory signs and antecedents and to underestimate or ignore the propaganda, the policies, the legislative measures that have contributed to create a climate conducive to the most brutal racism.

This has also been the case over the last decade, which has been characterized by peaks of racist violence. The massacre of Senegalese citizens which took place in Florence on December 13, 2011, at the hands of the neo-Nazi militant Gianluca Casseri, should have been considered the expression of a tragic leap which, favored by a progression of antecedents, would not remain isolated.

The massacre took place when Casseri, holding a gun went on the indiscriminate hunt for "niggers", killing 54-year-old Diop Mor and 40-year-old Samb Modou, both street vendors. His third target, 34-year-old Moustapha Dieng, survived remaining permanently paraplegic. Before committing suicide, Casseri proceeded to the market of San Lorenzo, in the center of the city, and seriously wounded 44-year-old Cheikh Mbengue and 34-year-old Mor Sougou.

What makes this episode so alarming is the fact that it was carried out with coldness and determination, not in a marginal, degraded environment, characterized by



conflicts of proximity, but in the heart of Florence. In addition, there was no personalization of the targets, sought out solely because "niggers".

A similar episode in any democratic country would probably have alarmed institutions to such an extent as to induce them to outlaw extreme right-wing formations (CasaPound, Forza Nuova, Veneto Fronte, Skinheads, Avanguardia Nazionale, just to name a few). Disbanding these groups would have been an implementation of both the XII provision of the Italian Constitution, which prohibits "the reorganization, in any form, of the dissolved fascist party", as well as the Scelba and Mancino laws<sup>2</sup>.

On the contrary, although CasaPound explicitly refers to itself as fascist, racist and claims to be an heir to the Italian Social Republic, the movement was allowed to run in electoral competition and even scoring a couple of mayors. The same is to be said for Forza Nuova which regardless of its neo-fascist, if not neo-Nazi, ideology and practices, also took part in regional, political and European election.

Among Forza Nuova's usual racist raids, is the well-known "Bangla tour", a systematic punitive expedition carried out, particularly in Rome, against helpless Bangladeshi citizens. Between 2012 and 2013 at least fifty of these raids have been acknowledged by trial, labeling Forza Nuova an "extreme right-wing National Socialist" formation. The raids were mostly carried out by minors, as a sort of rite of passage to militancy.

### **Third millennium fascists and their political groundwork**

Growing during the political and cultural hegemony of what in Italy has been called Berlusconiism, and legitimized during the first Conte government, thanks to the work of the Minister of Interiors, CasaPound, Forza Nuova and similar groups have been

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<sup>2</sup> A small signal on the direction of silencing hatred came in February 2020 when the "Rights of the Person and Immigration" section of the Court of Rome rejected Forza Nuova's appeal against Facebook's decision to remove its accounts, arguing that it explicitly refers to fascism and spreads racist ideas. On the other hand, on December 12, 2019, the same Court, ruled against Facebook when Casa Pound appealed for the same reason.



able to incite a sort of "popular" xenophobia, using the mendacious concept of "war among the poor". As if between "natives" and migrants there were symmetry of power and as if the extreme right, propaganda and institutional racism did not play a role. Over the last decade there have been scores of such episodes. I will mention a few.

In November 2014, in the working class suburb of Tor Sapienza<sup>3</sup>, in Roma, a crowd of residents, led by a group of people from the fascist extreme right, staged assaults, threw stones, firecrackers and molotov cocktails against a Sprar (Protection Service for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) and a First Reception Centre for minors. Such violent attacks to buildings that hosted asylum seekers or foreign minors have not been isolated cases. Extreme right groups were often, if not always, part in these episodes.

On December 6, 2016, again in Rome, in the working-class neighborhood of San Basilio, a family of Moroccan origin, with three children, tried to enter the popular housing flat which had been assigned to them. The family was "greeted" by barricades a violent protest and racist insults from a few dozen residents, unconcerned by the children's sobbing. The family ended up giving up the idea of moving into the flat.<sup>4</sup>

On September 28, 2017, in the Roman "borgata" of Trullo, some people belonging to Forza Nuova and "Roma ai Romani" (which is defined as "the popular wing" of the former) instigated and led a group of residents in order to stop the eviction of an Italian family who illegally occupied a popular housing in order to prevent the entry of the legitimate assignee, an Italian-Eritrean family. The "protest" soon degenerated into a clash between the extreme right and the police: three agents were wounded and three neo-fascists were arrested, among them the Roman leader of Forza Nuova.

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<sup>3</sup> See the contribution dedicated to this case of Veronica Iesué in Part II of this report.

<sup>4</sup> After about a month that family will get another accommodation in the village of Tor Sapienza.



On May 6, 2019, again in a working-class neighborhood of Rome, Casal Bruciato,<sup>5</sup> a small crowd of residents, again headed by CasaPound members, tried violently to prevent a Rom mother, who was holding her baby girl, from returning home. The working-class housing was regularly assigned to her family, consisting of no less than fourteen people. Between screams, shoves and unrepeatable insults, the two finally managed to get home, but only because they were escorted and protected by the police in riot gear, while a man from CasaPound threatened to rape the young woman.

If extreme right-wing formations have an easy game in stirring up popular resentment and directing it against the most vulnerable scapegoats, it is also due tangible reasons. To name a few, the absence of urban regeneration projects, consequently the progressive impoverishment of Roman suburbs, the rarefaction of public housing, the miserly and/or irrational management of the allocation of social housing<sup>6</sup>.

Such episodes are not a peculiarity of suburbs in large urban centers such as Rome. Palata, in Lower Molise, just over 1,600 inhabitants and a recent history of progressive depopulation rose against a reception center. On August 30, 2016, some, led or otherwise instigated by Forza Nuova, as well as encouraged by the hostility of the mayor himself and the entire municipal administration, set fire to a building intended to house twenty-four exiles, including seven young women and three children. Immediately afterwards, a "development and security" committee, set up ad hoc, managed to collect 900 signatures on a petition against the center. In spite of this and thanks to the firmness of the Prefecture, the group of asylum seekers could be housed in the same building the following October.

Gorino Ferrarese, a hamlet of Goro home to 641 souls, rose to the honours of the chronicles when its population in October 2016 erected barricades against twelve

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<sup>5</sup> See the contribution of Elisa Pini in Part II of this report.

<sup>6</sup> For a broader analysis Annamaria Rivera, "Il caso di Palata", *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Quarto Libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Lunaria, Roma 2017, pp.181-183.



refugee women (one of which eighth months pregnant). Women and their children were to be hosted in a hostel in the area. Such a Lega inspired disgraceful protest proved to be a success, as giving in to the blackmail of the barricaders, the prefect of Ferrara would divert women and children elsewhere<sup>7</sup>.

The fact that xenophobia and racism, often legitimized and/or increased not only by the extreme right, but also by the media and institutions, even by center-left governments, can prosper among subordinate classes is neither new nor surprising. This is what happens in moments characterized by economic crisis, social downgrading (real or feared), decay of the welfare state and when political parties from the left tend to disappear from working class neighborhoods)<sup>8</sup>.

### **Racist violence, up to martyrdom.**

It was not unpredictable that Gianluca Casseri might one day have an emulator, also due to inadequate reactions to the gravity of the massacre in Florence, especially on the part of national institutions. And this while the anti-racist movement and the Senegalese community, the Florentine one in particular, were clamoring for the closure of the CasaPound local headquarters.

And emulation there was. On March 5, 2018, in the heart of Florence, another racist crime was committed. Roberto Pirrone, 65, killed 53-year-old Idy Diène, also a travelling salesman of Senegalese origin, on the Vespucci bridge. Diène was shot six times and killed with a blow to the head. The victim was chosen as target only because he was a "nigger". The murderer said he killed in order to divert his suicidal impulses towards a scapegoat<sup>9</sup>. It is not the only link with the 2011 massacre: Diène,

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<sup>7</sup> Grazia Naletto, "Le Barricate di Gorino", *ibid.*, pp. 184-189.

<sup>8</sup> In this regard, it is worth pointing out that arguing, as is the case even with some left-wing intellectuals, that it has nothing to do with racism, but only with social malaise, that the fact that "ordinary" people light fires or raise barricades against the reception of foreigners in their town means forgetting that the Nazi pogroms were also favored by conditions of social unease.

<sup>9</sup> On September 2019, although the sentence will be reduced due to the shortened trial, Pirrone was sentenced to thirty years.



who had worked in that city for more than twenty years, was a cousin of Samb Modou, one of the victims of that massacre, and had married his widow.

Those that I've mentioned are not the only cases of extreme racist violence, which on the contrary, systematically is a constant during the decade we are dealing with. If I have reported them, it is also to underline how racism has spread to such an extent that it can also align in a city like Florence and strike "well-integrated" individuals. This shows that social integration does not necessarily shield immigrants, refugees or people belonging to minorities from serious discrimination or violence.

After all, Mohamed Habassi, a thirty-three year old of Tunisian origin, was also "well integrated". Following an atrocious sequence of torture and mutilation, Habassi was killed in Basilicagioiano, a village in the province of Parma, on the night between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2016 by two citizens of Parma, Luca Del Vasto and Alessio Alberici, backed by four hired accomplices of Romanian nationality. The two were sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment, with the aggravating circumstances of premeditation, cruelty and futile motives. The victim had been "punished" for not paying the rent for the apartment in which he lived, owned by Del Vasto's partner.

I've focused on this case to point out not only the complicity of newspapers and other national media in not putting enough attention on the issue of racist violence (the episode was covered only by local media),<sup>10</sup> but also the growing, widespread indifference of national media<sup>11</sup> even to the most brutal racist violence. This is both a clue and an indication of the increase in hostile attitudes towards migrants and minorities. In this regard: an analysis of anti-migrant opinions and inclinations, by Vera Messing and Bence Ságvári, based on data from the European Social Survey and

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<sup>10</sup> Three subsequent articles dedicated to this case have been published in 2016 by the newspaper *Il Manifesto* and my blog on MicroMega- online. A broader piece entitled "The Martyrdom of Mohamed Habassi" is contained in the already mentioned Fourth White Paper on Racism in Italy in 2017 (pp. 96-99). The first three have merged, with a Post-scriptum, in A. Rivera, *Racism. Acts, words, propaganda*, Daedalus, Bari 2020, pp. 91-103.

<sup>11</sup> With the exception of the newspaper *La Stampa* that dedicated to this case two articles of Franco Giubilei.



published in 2019, places Italy in first place with 8.7%, followed by Hungary (8.5%), the Czech Republic (6%) and Austria (5%)<sup>12</sup>.

### **Deadly exploitation in ghettos**

There is another category of violence which has contributed to increase the wave of racist crimes is that in which seasonal farm workers of foreign origin are victims. Thus, showing that racism is in no way separable from the structure of class relationships<sup>13</sup>. Not only are these workers over-exploited, underpaid, deprived of the most basic rights, but they are also excluded from social life in the contexts in which they work, as they are confined in what are not by chance called ghettos. The workers are forced to dwell in made up shantytowns, tent cities and other formal or informal settlements, usually in precarious sanitary conditions, and often with no basic services such as electricity or even running water.

Subjected as they are to extreme forms of exploitation - favoured by the *caporalato*, an illicit form of recruitment and management of the labour force in certain areas of the country - these workers, made more than vulnerable also by the residence permit renewal blackmail are easy targets of all kinds of abuse, attacks, physical violence up to murder. Some of them are also held captive in ways that can be described as slavery.

Fires are not uncommon in the ghettos. Becky Moses, a Nigerian woman of 26 was reduced to ashes in the fire of the tent city of San Ferdinando (Reggio Calabria) in 2018. Moses was staying in San Ferdinando after having to leave Riace as her application for political asylum was rejected. Later on the same year, 28-year-old Eris Petty Stone, a worker also of Nigerian nationality, was burned alive in the explosion

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<sup>12</sup> Vera Messing, Bence Ságvári, *Still divided but more open. Mapping European attitudes towards migration before and after the migration crisis*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Budapest, 2019, p. 34: <file:///C:/Users/standard/Downloads/Stilldividedbutmoreopen.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> See Robert Miles, «Racisme institutionnel et rapports de classe», in Michel Wieviorka (s.l.d.), *Racisme et modernité*, La Découverte, Paris 1993, pp. 159-175.





of a gas cylinder in the sheds of the former industrial complex "La Felandina" in Bernalda, in the province of Matera.

One of the most recent cases is the murder of Soumayla Sacko, a 29-year-old from Mali, who also lived in the tent city of San Ferdinando and who, as a delegate of the grassroots union, was very actively involved in defending the rights of farm workers. On June 2, 2018, in the area of San Calogero, in the Vibonese area, he was shot in the head with a rifle while helping two fellow workers, Drame Madiheri and Fofana Madoufoune, also of Malian origin, to recover old pieces of sheet metal from a furnace which had been closed for a decade and sealed by the Prosecutor's Office. His murderer, the farmer Antonio Pontoriero, could be identified, arrested and tried only thanks to the testimony of the two, who later, in order to escape the death threats, paid for their courage with the forced abandonment of San Ferdinando.

The death Soumayla Sacko coincides with the debut of the first Conte government, which would be soon identified with the anti-immigration and anti-asylum policies and the explicitly racist daily propaganda of its Interior Minister Matteo Salvini. The Lega's leader influence is the reason for the institutional silence on the assassination. There was no form, albeit symbolic, of participation in the mourning. What was left was an awkward and hasty homage to the memory of the victim by the prime minister during his inauguration speech.

A case which reminds us of the long duration of Italian neo-racism - functional also to forms of labour exploitation - and illustrates its progressive social and political trivialization is the murder of the South African Jerry Essan Massalo. Massalo, a de facto political refugee was killed on the evening of 24 August 1989, in the fields of Villa Literno. His murder was also publicly and solemnly condemned by the highest representatives of the institutions, who attended the State funerals. On the following September 20 a strike was called for the first time by immigrant workers. On October 7 a huge national demonstration in Rome would mark the first protest of the Italian anti-racist movement. Moreover, it was this murder that pushed the government in power at the time to pass the first legislative measure "on the condition of the





foreigner", later converted into the so-called Martelli law, no. 39/1990. Although unsatisfactory, it eliminated the clause that reserved asylum only for refugees coming from European countries.

Only now, in times of lockdown, when the Covid-19 pandemic prevents immigrant workers from moving to other agricultural areas for equally seasonal jobs<sup>14</sup>, has Italian society realized the importance foreign labour.

### **Roma, Jews, Muslims: historical targets that remain relevant**

During the last decade, all of this has been associated by the resurgence of the two most structural forms of racism: anti-Gypsyism and anti-Semitism. Aforesaid forms both have experienced a marked progression during the first Conte government. If we were to report here the constant violence against the Romani population (Roma, Sinti and Caminanti), the repertoire would be so long that it would require a book. Suffice to say, according to surveys carried out by the Pew Research Center, (which investigates how Romani, Muslim and Jewish minorities are perceived in a number of European countries) year after year Italy is in first place for anti-Roma hostility: with 83%, according to the most recent survey published on October 14, 2019<sup>15</sup>.

Among the cases of aggression and violence directed towards ethnic and or religious minorities, the burning of the Roma settlement near Cascina della Continassa (Turin, 10 December 2011) is certainly worthy of mention. The outstanding quality of the aggression is due both to its typicality - the crucial role of legends and rumors -, and to the ambiguity of non right-wing political actors. After a teenager had reported that she had been raped by two Roma – an account which latter proved to be false - around five hundred people stormed the camp, some destroyed the caravans and shacks with fire, forcing about fifty Roma to flee. The procession was also attended

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<sup>14</sup> Adriana Pollice, *Bloccati dal virus nei ghetti, senza cibo e senza lavoro*, "il manifesto", 19 aprile 2020: <https://ilmanifesto.it/bloccati-dal-virus-nei-ghetti-senza-cibo-e-senza-lavoro/>

<sup>15</sup> See Pew Research Center, *European public opinion three decades after the fall of communism*. 6. *Minority groups*, october 14, 2019: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/minority-groups/>



by Paola Bragantini, then president of the district and local chairman of the Democratic Party, who would later be elected MP.<sup>16</sup>

Equally disturbing are the progressive jolts of verbal and factual anti-semitism. The episode that took place in Rome, where twenty stumbling blocks dedicated to the memory of Shoa victim families Di Castro and Di Consiglio, were vandalized. It seems more than plausible that the episode may be the product of the anti-Semitic inclination of the first Conte government. This anti-semitism was not "bleached" by the visit to Jerusalem made by the Lega leader Salvini a couple of days later. The indulgence towards neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups, the obsessive polemical references to George Soros by the Minister of the Interior, the participation of the Minister for the Family, Lorenzo Fontana, to a conference (19 and 20 January 2019) where also anti-semitic thinkers were speaking have legitimized and increased a trend that was already present.

This tendency is confirmed by the survey conducted by the *Eurispes Research Institute*, between December 2019 and January 2020, on a sample of 1,120 cases<sup>17</sup>. The fallacies according to which Jews control economic and financial power and also the media are shared by 23.9% and 22.2% of the sample respectively. According to *Eurispes*, in 2004 2.7% denied the Holocaust, while today the percentage has risen to 15.6%. Finally, it should be considered that a good 61.7% believes that the most recent episodes of anti-Semitism, among which two physical attacks and repeated threats against senator and Shoah survivor Liliana Segre, are nothing more than isolated cases.

In the course of time anti-islamism has also taken on an almost structural character. One could cite numerous cases of aggressions and violence, which have punctuated the decade. Suffice to say that, from the moment of its appearance on the public scene, the Lega (once known as the Northern League) has placed discredit, hostility

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<sup>16</sup> For a broader analysis of this case see the contribution of Paola Andrisani in Part II of this report.

<sup>17</sup> See Eurispes, *Risultati del Rapporto Italia 2020*: <https://eurispes.eu/news/eurispes-risultati-del-rapporto-italia-2020/>



and aggressiveness towards everything that has to do with the Muslim world at the centre of its identity building and political propaganda.

### **Institutional racism, its *tanatopolitics***

While true that so called institutional racism, peaked during the first Conte government, it needs to be said that its history shows that a role was also played by some centre-left governments. Limiting ourselves recent times, it was during Paolo Gentiloni's tenure (center-left) that Law no. 46, of 13 April 2017, known as Minniti-Orlando ("Urgent provisions for the acceleration of proceedings in matters of international protection, as well as for the fight against illegal immigration"), and Law no. 48, of 18 April 2017, known as Minniti ("Urgent provisions for the security of cities"), were approved. Accompanied by a decidedly security, repressive, discriminatory ideology, these laws have paved the way for the two notorious Salvini decrees, which were later converted into laws: No. 132 of December 1, 2018, and No. 77 of August 8, 2019.

Among other evils, the first Salvini decree eliminated the residence permit for humanitarian reasons, thus resulting that today at least 400 thousand people are deliberately illegalized. Although the two laws represent the culmination of institutional racism, they do not seem to upset the current government at all. Regardless of a different coalition, the Prime Minister has remained in office and apparently demonstrated caution in impeding the repeal of the above mentioned laws. Nor, even in the midst of a Covid-19 pandemic, has he emptied the state camps for migrants to "repatriate", let alone regularize the irregulars.

It must also be recalled that with the aforementioned Gentiloni government, the process of delegitimization of the NGOs was intensified: the Code of Conduct adopted by the Minister of the Interior, Minniti, with its countermeasures and sanctions, impeded and/or criminalized their search and rescue operations at sea - formally passed to the notorious Libyan Coast Guard - making landings increasingly difficult or impossible. It is also thanks to this legacy that the first Conte government



and especially his multi-minister Salvini, often supported by the M5s government allies, were able to take to the extreme what, to paraphrase Michel Foucault, I have repeatedly called *tanatopolitics*<sup>18</sup>.

In the end, the Conte bis government has not changed pattern. Evidence is the inter-ministerial decree of April 7, 2020 (which by the way has a very dubious juridical legitimacy) that has forbidden the entry to NGO ships in the Italian territorial waters declaring “not safe” all the ports of the Country because of the Covid-19 pandemic. This decision was taken while the “Alan Kurdi”, a ship owned by the German NGO Sea Eye, was wandering in the Mediterranean with 149 people on board.<sup>19</sup> In the meantime, another 250 were adrift on four small boats, from one of which a desperate appeal had been launched by Alarm Phone volunteers. Neither Italian nor Maltese authorities sent any rescue. Only thanks to the intervention, on April 13, of the small ship “Aita Mari”, of the Basque NGO Salvamento Marítimo Humanitario, that 44 of the people adrift, including the young pregnant woman who had called for help through Alarm Phone, were rescued.

This same organization, which denounced another serious case of ignoring the duty to rescue shipping law by the Maltese and European authorities, notwithstanding informed that another 55 people (63 in fact) - who left Libya on the night between 9 and 10 April 2020 in a very precarious dinghy - were adrift in the Maltese SAR area, “preferred to leave twelve of them die of hardship or drowned, while orchestrating the forced rejection of survivors in Libya, a place of war, torture, rape”<sup>20</sup>

Albeit to a different extent, in short, the last three Italian governments seem to have in common a strategy which is also consistent with the orientation prevailing among

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<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *“Bisogna difendere la società”*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2009 (ed. or. 1997).

<sup>19</sup> When the ship had been wandering for ten days, it had had to move off Termini Imerese because of the worsening sea conditions. Furthermore, on 16 April, three people in extreme psychological conditions, including a 24-year-old young man who had attempted suicide, were disembarked by the Italian Coast Guard. Finally, on the evening of 17 April, the rest of the rescued people will be transhipped from “Alan Kurdi” to the ferry “Raffaele Rubattino”, made available by the Italian Government, on board of which they will spend the quarantine period, waiting to be “redistributed” between various EU countries.

<sup>20</sup> Alarm Phone, *Come le autorità maltesi ed europee hanno lasciato morire persone in mare e riportato i superstiti nell’inferno della Libia*, 16 aprile 2020: [https://alarmphone.org/it/2020/04/16/dodici-morti-e-un-respingimento-segreto-verso-la-libia/?post\\_type\\_release\\_type=post](https://alarmphone.org/it/2020/04/16/dodici-morti-e-un-respingimento-segreto-verso-la-libia/?post_type_release_type=post)



the countries of the European Union. These policies, deliberate as they are cynical, reduce thousands of human beings, fleeing to the Mediterranean or trapped in Libyan camps, to a state of not only bare-living, deprived of all rights, but also bare-living, anonymous and irrelevant.

*April 19, 2020*



## Media information on racism, a mixed bag

*Paola Barretta*

Both in Italy and Europe migration has been an often debated phenomenon, both by politicians and civil society. Media, reflecting the most relevant social phenomena, have also devoted considerable attention to this issue and have given voice, in some cases, to violent reactions and rejection from social and political sectors. This overabundance of information has brought out the existence of a rhetoric based on "ethnic-racial" stereotypes and prejudices.

Already in 1997, scholars such as René Gallissot and Annamaria Rivera, noted a trend in media communication: "Today, political and media discourse, in Italy and France, only takes on the negative dimension of ethnicity, to talk about wars, massacres and other behaviours considered as barbaric, savage, premodern. [...] more and more frequently the neo-racist discourse in Europe uses the term ethnicity as well as culture, giving them a racial meaning"<sup>21</sup>.

It is especially in recent years that "hostility against black people is expressed in Italy and Spain, with messages and speeches that come to evoke the forms of expression and terminology of biological racism. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, people of Muslim faith and Roma are the privileged/designated target groups of discriminatory and violent political rhetoric"<sup>22</sup>.

In fact, in 2018, there is an exceptional/atypical recurrence of episodes of aggression and physical injury against black citizens. This trend was also

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<sup>21</sup> R. Gallissot, A. Rivera, *L'imbroglio etnico in dieci parole chiave*, Edizione Dedalo, Bari 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Lunaria (Ed.), *Words are stones. Analisi dell'hate speech nel discorso pubblico in sei paesi europei*, International Report 2019: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/pubblicazioni/>.



confirmed in 2019: during the election campaign phase for the European elections, Amnesty International's monitoring revealed that immigration, religious minorities and the Roma were the issues that caused more online controversy<sup>23</sup>.

Is it possible to identify a responsibility of media in spreading and amplifying a climate of hostility and rejection towards "foreigners" and minorities? Is it possible to determine narrative "recurrences" that have accompanied the treatment of migration and the foreign presence in Italy, and therefore legitimized discriminatory discourses? Although in a synthetic and not exhaustive way, the following pages will try to provide an answer to these questions, retracing the lights and shadows of mainstream information in Italy<sup>24</sup>.

It is current shared opinion among scholars and media experts that media operators are responsible for spreading and consolidating ethnic-based prejudice by concluding that individual behaviours are common to entire communities. Such comments/attitudes also led to the subsequent legitimization of racist opinions in public debate.

From this point of view it can be affirmed that journalism itself is responsible, albeit often unintentionally and unwillingly, for the propagation of symbolic racist content, which, in the definition of the sociologist Enrico Caniglia, corresponds to "a social climate of hostility and rejection towards individuals and

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23 Amnesty International Italia, *Il barometro dell'odio, Elezioni europee 2019*: <https://www.amnesty.it/cosa-facciamo/elezioni-europee/>.

24 The data reported refers to analyses contained in reports from Carta di Roma/Pavia Observatory. These diachronic analyses include the main national newspapers (Avvenire, Corriere della Sera, Il Fatto quotidiano, Il Giornale, La Repubblica, La Stampa), the prime-time news of the Rai, Mediaset and La7 networks and specific thematic focuses on an annual basis (e.g. comparison of information in the main European public broadcasters, immigration in TV infotainment, analysis of case studies on Facebook and Twitter).



minority groups to which prejudices and strongly negative stereotypes are associated"<sup>25</sup>.

The juxtaposition immigration/crime, and the consequent and arbitrary conclusion that people of certain nationalities behave in certain given ways, is among the elements of greater continuity that arise over the years. Some episodes of chronicle fill the media agenda, highlighting how national belonging (Romanians and Albanians in the late 1990s, North Africans in the mid 2000s, Africans, Nigerians and migrants in general since 2016) is an explanatory variable of crime.

As early as 1997 (on April 19), in Capriolo (province of Brescia) the headlines in the news and press reported the following crime: "They rape a woman and torture her husband". "Two bandits break into a house. The Slavic or Albanian bandits try to rape his wife"; "Lega Nord (Northern League) demands for more control over foreigners". Only a few days later, retraction came: "It wasn't the Slavs not the Albanians but the woman's lover caught by her husband".

In 2001, in Novi Ligure (province of Alessandria), on February 22 media report: "Mother and son killed by a gang of thieves: Slavs or Albanians, they are certainly foreigners"; "We need the death penalty"; "The inhabitants point the finger at the immigrants: it's them". A few days later was retraction time: "The immigrants had nothing to do with it: the crime was committed by the woman's daughter and her boyfriend.

Years later, in 2006, another heinous crime, known as the "massacre of Erba" (province of Como), occupies for days and weeks the headlines: "Massacre in Erba in the Como area: a 25-year-old Tunisian with criminal records stabbed his wife

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25 E. Caniglia, "I codici deontologici alla prova. La regola di rilevanza nella rappresentazione giornalistica delle minoranze", *Problemi dell'informazione*, n. 2, Il Mulino, Bologna 2019, pages 315-337.





and son to death and exterminated the family"; "Massacre in the family: a previous offender of Moroccan nationality released on pardon, woman's flatmate wanted"; "His name is Azuz Marzuk, responsible for the murders"; "We must send them all away, from the first to the last". A few days later, the information was retracted: "The perpetrators of the massacre are the family's neighbors, Olindo and Rosa Romano<sup>26</sup>.

The above is the framework in which "foreigners" - migrants, Italian citizens of foreign origin and refugees - are presented as violent, as a cause of insecurity in Italian cities and towns, as an element of disturbance of the public quiet villages and towns, as possible terrorists, as carriers of diseases, as incapable of respecting the rules of civil coexistence, as "invaders" of public spaces.

On July 26, 2019, following an episode of crime occurred in Rome and when the outcome of the investigation was still pending, media point their finger against two "North Africans" as (alleged) perpetrators of the murder of Vice-Brigadier Cerciello Rega. " Rome, Prati neighborhood, the thief reacts and hits Vice-Brigadiere Cerciello Rega to death: ....North-Africans"; "Vice Brigadier stabbed by a Maghreb man, police is looking for the two North Africans who escaped on foot"; "The police is hunting two North Africans who have killed for 100 euro and a cell phone"; "Tall, of North African origin, one with highlight streak and the other with a tattoo on his arm, they were wearing jeans and sweatshirts: here is the identikit". A few hours later, two young American citizens (presumably) authors of the murder, are arrested.

Such media attitude is potentially dangerous and can have the effect of identifying foreigners, immigrants or refugees or even Roma or Sinti, as a social

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<sup>26</sup> For further details, see the chapter written by Paola Andrisan in this report.



category to be pointed out when criminal episodes occur as well as the effect of fueling a spiral of fear, distrust and anger towards them.

As Gallissot writes, this phenomenon is one of the matrices of the neo-racist narrative because it "naturalizes" nationality, a gift of nature (therefore of privileges, rights, status), and on the contrary blames, negative traits, responsibilities and, consequently, exclusion of rights. It is precisely at this stage, from 2007 to 2008, that the Order of Journalists and the Italian National Press Federation, with the support of international associations and organizations, draw up a set of simple principles that journalists are required to follow regardless of what they think of immigration and immigrants.

Four rules (appropriate use of terminology, identity protection, use of sources, respect for the substantial truth of the facts) which because of their simplicity can easily be respected even by those who have a political vision that is even hostile to immigrants<sup>27</sup>.

From 2008 to 2013, the media narrative is characterized by a "discreet" racism especially in relation to criminal episodes often told with emphasis put on elements of "ethnicization".

As pointed out by the historian and political scientist Marco Revelli when seven Chinese workers lost their lives in the fire that broke out in December 2013 in Prato, in Macrolotto: "It may seem strange, but the names of the seven people dead hardly ever appear. Neither in the articles that reported on the episode nor in the many media reviews issued in the following weeks... Of "our" people on the scene or arrived at different times we know every detail, name, surname, even

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<sup>27</sup> Please consult: <https://www.cartadiroma.org/editoriale/linee-guida-2018-carta-roma/>.



nickname [...] But we do not know the names of the bodies reduced to ashes. The non-presence of a ghost people..."<sup>28</sup>.

A form of media silence that does not tell about the victims of tragic episodes like the one in Prato or those lived in conditions of exploitation and deprivation. A form of selective activation of the attention (a selective focus) that guides the media in choosing events coverage on the basis of geographical origin. Foreign nationals, immigrants and refugees rarely make it onto the prime-time agenda in the news or on the front pages of newspapers.

If and when it happens, it is because the news is so relevant that cannot be ignored.

In 2011, for example, in the aftermath of the "Arab Spring" and the intensification of migratory flows, public debate started focusing on the so-called "immigration emergency" and statements such as "immigrants must go home, it is better not to move them to the northern region, let's keep them in the South" were very frequent<sup>29</sup>.

Narratives focused on pietas and the dramas behind the escapes or the initial choices, an attention to the humanitarian issue, balances sometimes the scaremongering and discriminatory narratives.

Then between 2014 to 2016 we enter a new phase in which media attention to migrants and refugees becomes central. In 2015, figures are impressive, both in the press and on TV: the headlines that the major Italian newspapers have dedicated

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28 M. Revelli, *Non ti riconosco. Un viaggio eretico nell'Italia che cambia*, Einaudi, Turin 2016.

29 G. Milazzo, M. Marchese, "La rappresentazione mediatica delle crisi umanitarie nel 2011", in Medici Senza Frontiere (a cura di), *Le crisi umanitarie dimenticate dai media 2011*, Marsilio Editore, Venice 2012, page 141.



to the topic increased from 70 to 180 percent, compared to the previous year; news report in newscast have quadrupled (the highest figure in 11 years)<sup>30</sup>.

While foreigners are commonly depicted as invaders, potential extremists and as a menace to public safety, on the other hand it persists a moving/touching and more human narrative on migrants as was the case in the aftermath of the publication of the photo of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian child who died on the Turkish coast, or after the spread of photos of families camped along the Balkan route waiting to reach Europe.

At the same time, the importance given to (the focus on) migration contributes to provide greater visibility of criminal episodes in which "foreigners" - Italian citizens of foreign origin, migrants, refugees - are protagonists as victims and not perpetrators.

In July 2016, the aggression perpetrated by the right-wing football fan Amedeo Mancini that caused the death of the young Nigerian Emmanuel Chidi Namdi, occupied the news agenda for days and was widely condemned on media.

In the same period, another episode echoed on the front pages of newspapers and prime-time news: a twenty-six years old man from Mali, Sekine Traore, was shot dead by a carabinieri, who had intervened to quell a brawl broke out in the slums around the labor camps of San Ferdinando. The episode triggered a debate on the workers labor conditions in the countryside in the Southern part of the country, who also victims of crimes and abuse by criminal organizations.

These episodes become an opportunity, albeit with different editorial choices, to condemn and stigmatize racism and the perpetrators of acts of discrimination and violence on ethnic and national grounds.

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30 Associazione Carta di Roma, *Notizie di confine*, III Report, December 2015: [https://www.cartadiroma.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Rapporto-2015\\_-cartadiroma.pdf](https://www.cartadiroma.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Rapporto-2015_-cartadiroma.pdf).



The main Italian newspapers and newscasts on the main TV channels (Rai, Mediaset and La7), all condemn unequivocally racism, although following the developments of the investigation and the resumption of the debate on immigration adopting different editorial choices. The information, therefore, remains within the confines of "tolerance" and, indeed, interviews with the victim's widow as well as with representatives of African communities, day laborers and associations close to workers, shed light on cases and contexts in which racism takes shape and acts.

In the same year, these cases condemned and stigmatized by the "traditional" media, became the occasion of a violent ideological clash between accusations of racism on the one hand and excessive "bleeding heart" towards immigrants on the other. The shadows of racism thicken especially on social media.

"The debate on social media is characterized by a de-humanisation of the language: racist and sexist insults appear along with exaggerated judgements in a virtual conflict between opposing parties; anger take the upper hand over mourning, shattering every bond of social and civil contract. The main protagonists are transfigured from symbols of victims into executioners, to confirm or reinforce stereotypes and generalizations about the groups they belong to, be they refugees, Africans, Nigerians, immigrants all of them<sup>31</sup>."

The next phase, which also includes a good part of 2019, can be defined as "racism in words" in public, political and media debate. There is a progressive liberation of the racist vocabulary, which "is one of the components linked to the return of the "race", as also emerges from some broadcasts on Tv that happen to host theses

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31 Associazione Carta di Roma, *Notizie da paura*, V Rapporto, December 2017: [https://www.cartadiroma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Rapporto-2017 -cartadiroma\\_small.pdf](https://www.cartadiroma.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Rapporto-2017 -cartadiroma_small.pdf).



extolling the extermination of the Roma, or propose the black people/ape association".<sup>32</sup>

Among the events that start a phase of continuous and repeated opposition between "us" and "them", with a progressive "clearance" in the public and media debate of insults and racist invocations against "foreigners", there is a case of crime. The rape, in Rimini, carried out by 3 minors of Moroccan origin, and an adult of age originally from the Congo and provided with humanitarian protection, occupies the media agenda for days. Some news programmes also dedicate 9 reports in the same edition<sup>33</sup>.

This contrast feeds on various episodes that reinforce negative frames, where the presence of migrants and refugees is associated with "invasion", the threat to the security of citizens, to which are added those for diseases and "aggression" to Western cultural identity, and degradation, and which legitimize suspicions and threats that in the media arena are accompanied by the use of racist expressions.

The tone is that of the "shouted" accusation that amplifies the grudges and wipes out the more cautious voices, the only antidote to the spread of negative associations and discrimination, "they are protected, these people who enter, delinque, they do everything, even give them the house, the money, they give them everything. The accusations of collusion with the traffickers brought against the NGOs, the difficulties in the management of migratory flows, the blocking of the proposed reform of the law on citizenship, criminal cases of marked "brutality", evictions and unrest in reception centres occupy the front pages of the local and national press and the opening headlines of the news. And they create a climate conducive to the spread of social resentment and rejection.

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<sup>32</sup> S. Pasta, *Razzismi 2.0. Analisi socio-educativa dell'odio on line*, Editrice Morcelliana, Brescia 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. Associazione Carta di Roma, *Notizie da paura*, cit.



This is the phase in which some journalistic reports establish associations in a voluntary way, echoing a climate of polarization, political confrontation and consolidation of opinions intentionally aimed at strengthening certain binomials: immigration and violence, immigration and religious radicalism, immigration and poverty.

A symbolic racism that feeds on redundancy, often devoid of information content that would be essential in news stories, and dense, on the contrary, of emotional elements and morbid, disturbing details. This happens often with local news that report national information in an apparently neutral way, hiding the re-proposal of clichés. The treatment of the case of Don Biancalani is emblematic. The parish priest, after having uploaded in his social profile the photos of some asylum seekers swimming in the pool, is overwhelmed by waves of xenophobic and racist insults. Invited as a guest in some information program, the priest is still in the dock, considered to be co-responsible for the noise triggered on social media, not so much because of the photograph of immigrants in the pool, but because of the sentence that accompanied it ("They are my homeland, racists and fascists are my enemies"), considered provocative. Therefore, the focus is on the parish priest, rather than on the virulence of the messages and statements on social media.

This trend continues and consolidates in the following year, 2018, when - in the two months preceding the election campaign - the word "nigger" is counted in the newspapers 57 times, almost once a day, written inside articles that quote phrases like: "dirty nigger", "nigger of m...", "niggers come to steal, to kill our women...", "I don't let a nigger docto touch me...", "shut up nigger".

## **Border lights**



Among the main responsibilities of the traditional media in the story of migration and its protagonists are the generalizations of countries and groups of people, aimed at simplifying the reality, but which end up preventing its understanding. A bad representation is not only a misrepresentation based on misinformation, but also one that chooses to "tell someone else's story without considering their point of view, i.e. to tell only a part of the story, a unique story, without listening to the protagonists".

From this point of view, the second half of 2019 shows some important results: a greater contextualisation, the voices of victims of racism, the decrease in the use of stigmatizing terms.

From the first point of view, there is the presence of reports in which migrants and refugees are presented in "normal" urban contexts without references to the conceptual area of "degradation" and poverty. On the contrary, in the prime-time information, solidarity between foreign workers and Italian trade unionists, who participate in their struggles, is highlighted. This news represents the most positive and proactive frame in which to place the voices of immigrants and refugees: "it is the interviews with workers, often exploited, who ask for more rights, or, simply, the possibility of enjoying the elementary rights of every worker, such as a decent wage or insurance against accidents at work"<sup>34</sup>. Some Tv reporting insists on the role of organised crime in labour exploitation, shifting the focus from the management of migration flows to the "caporalato" and irregular work.<sup>35</sup>

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34 *L'Africa mediata*, Dossier sulla rappresentazione dell'Africa, ottobre 2019: <https://africamediata.amref.it/>.

35 Associazione Carta di Roma, *Notizie senza approdo*, VII Rapporto, dicembre 2019, disponibile qui: [https://www.cartadiroma.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CdR-Report-2019\\_Final.pdf](https://www.cartadiroma.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CdR-Report-2019_Final.pdf).





The second positive change lies in the wide visibility to cases of racism, giving voice to the victims. These are interviews with foreign citizens who have suffered acts of discrimination or violence because of their ethnicity. In addition, there are voices from communities that tell their lives within a plural society.

Finally, there is a decrease in the use of stigmatising words such as "clandestine", "gypsies", "nomads". "Clandestine" has a strongly negative connotation, as well as being legally incorrect when it comes to migrants requiring forms of international protection. Despite this, the use of the term clandestine has entered the current language and is still widely abused in the headlines of newspapers, there were 168 headlines in 2018, an increase compared to previous years (1.6% compared to 1% in 2016, on the total headlines)<sup>36</sup>. In the last three months of 2019, this trend is reversed: there are "only" 19 titles that carry the word "clandestine", and they do so because of editorial choices. And overall 2019 closed with a more positive balance sheet than in previous years, returning to the values of 2016: the word is present in 1.1% of headlines (out of 168).

Similarly, over the years, a decline in inappropriate terms such as "gypsies", "nomads", "vu cumprà" has been noted. The use of the term "nomad", often incorrectly used to describe permanent settlements of Roma and Sinti, has decreased significantly over the years: after a peak use in 2014 (176, equal to 1.3% of the securities), the presence of "nomads" in the securities has decreased significantly, with 23 securities in 2018. In the first half of 2019, the trend is reversed and, on the contrary, returns to its central role, particularly in relation to the story of the family of Roma origin, "expelled" from the social housing assigned

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<sup>36</sup> The database is provided by the press review of the Associazione Carta di Roma, which collects daily the headlines and articles with migration relevance and their protagonists.



by the Municipality of Rome in Casal Bruciato, an area in the outskirts<sup>37</sup>. There are 27 headlines with the word "gypsy", in reference to the threats made by a Roma woman to former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini. In the last months of 2019, the term was not used in headlines.

As noted by the political scientist Ilvo Diamanti, the last months of 2019 open the way to a new trend that marks a drop in insecurity towards "foreigners" of 10 points compared to the same survey conducted in the previous year. "The interpretative key used to explain this trend refers to habit. A message proposed and repeated for a long time creates inurement. In the end, this redundancy produces counter-intuitive effects. As it "normalizes" events and processes that, precisely because they are repeated and amplified, stop being frightening. While they become a daily refrain, they enter everyday life [...] While in this case, the "trivialization of the foreigner" and the "migrant" indicates a feeling of "acceptance" towards a phenomenon emphasized and amplified well beyond the real measures"<sup>38</sup>.

The story of "recognition" therefore remains the simplest and most effective way to create empathy, an antidote to racism and discrimination. And it is precisely in the phases in which the climate of hostility and permanent confrontation subsides that it is essential to promote a journalism that is participatory and open to new alliances with civil and scientific community.

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<sup>37</sup> See the following contribution of Elisa Pini dedicated to this case.

<sup>38</sup> Associazione Carta di Roma, *Notizie senza approdo*, cit..



## The parable of the Italian reception system

*Sergio Bontempelli and Giuseppe Faso*

### 1. Reception: the end of a cycle

#### 1.1. Italian migration policy and residential reception: a recent link

In recent years, it is common perception that *immigration policies* and government choices concerning *migrants' residential hospitality* in Italy are linked.

Public debate has stressed this links at times by highlighting the costs, other times the benefits that would come from government commitment to provide hospitality to refugees in dedicated/*ad hoc* facilities.

This way, reception centers have been seen as one of the most visible and debated aspects of the national migration policies. This focus on hospitality is quite recent though. Still ten years ago, in 2011, the hosting capacity of Sprar - the network of reception facilities established in 2002 – did not exceed 3.000 beds throughout the national territory<sup>39</sup>.

This situation changed drastically in 2011 following the Arab spring and political upheavals on the southern shore of the Mediterranean that triggered new migratory flows<sup>40</sup>.

In the early stages of the crisis, the Berlusconi administration sought to reactivate the usual ejection mechanism with the aim to repatriate migrants to their countries of origin. However, the collapse of several Northern African

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39 Cfr. SPRAR Servizio Centrale, *Rapporto annuale del Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati. Anno 2012/2013*, Digitalia Lab srl, Roma 2013, page 52.

40 Cfr. S. Bontempelli, *Da «clandestini» a «falsi profughi». Migrazioni forzate e politiche migratorie italiane dopo le Primavere arabe*, in «Meridiana», n. 86, year 2016, pages 167-179.



regimes and the consequent absence of institutional interlocutors led to a stalemate.

The island of Lampedusa became filled with newly arrived migrants that could not be transferred anywhere else. Many of them sought asylum gaining a temporary right of residence since the authorities could not eject them until the final decision on their asylum applications.

The only way out consisted in hosting the new migrants and distribute them across the country. However, since Sprar did not have the capacity to meet the current needs, the government appointed the Protezione Civile (Civil Protection) to set up an additional facilities' network for such emergencies.

The new reception mechanism - called «Emergenza Nord Africa- ENA<sup>41</sup>»/ (“North Africa Emergency”) – was created side by side with the Sprar, it did not replace it.

Both were aimed at the same categories of migrants, namely asylum seekers but while Sprar – which kept its function unchanged - was managed by the municipalities, Ena was run by the Protezione Civile through prefectures.

When Ena facilities were closed down in February 2013<sup>42</sup>), they were substituted by CAS (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinari), under the supervision of the Interior Ministry. Thus, reception policies have continued to be characterised by the existence of two parallel systems.

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41 The Ena reception system was created following the DPCM 12-02-2011, which declared a state of humanitarian emergency in the national territory in relation to the exceptional influx of citizens from North African countries.

42 In the decree issued on February 12, 2011, the end of the “state of emergency” was set to December 31, 2011. Later, with the DPCM issued on October, 10, 2011, the deadline was postponed until December, 31 2012. Finally, through the Ordinance 33 (issued on December, 28, 2012) of the Head of the Department of Civil Protection, the final closure of the centers was set to December 28, 2013.



Meanwhile, as a result of the considerable increase in number of arrivals by sea<sup>43</sup>, governments had to improve the accommodation/hosting capacity of the mechanism/system in place (of the existing facilities). As of December 31, 2016, Cas were hosting 137 thousand migrants and Sprar almost 24 thousand<sup>44</sup>. Nearly 35 thousand people were employed in the sector<sup>45</sup>.

### 1.2 *The end of a cycle*

The agreement signed with Libya by the then Minister of Interior Marco Minniti in 2017 have considerably reduced the number of arrivals by sea. The total number of migrants arrived by sea have decreased from 180,000 in 2016 to 120,000 in 2017, to 23,000 in 2018 and 11,000 in 2019<sup>46</sup>.

In addition to that, a number of measures to reform the reception system had been put in place along with an increasingly intense activity carried out by the prefectures aimed at withdrawing/revoking hospitality from an increasing number of beneficiaries. By doing this, Prefectures have literally emptied the Cas centres. According to a survey conducted by Duccio Facchini, between 2016 and 2019 the withdrawals involved at least 100,000 people<sup>47</sup>.

Thus, as early as 2017, the Italian reception system began to downsize and the decrees by Matteo Salvini – the then Interior Minister - adopted the following

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43 For data on arrivals by sea in these years please see Redazionale, *Gli sbarchi in Italia negli ultimi 10 anni* in «OpenPolis», website, <http://bit.ly/2LUUp2xW>, article from 5-2-2018, e Centro Studi e Ricerche Idos, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2017*, Idos, Roma 2017, page 122.

44 Cfr. Idos, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2017*, cit., page 141.

45 Cfr. InMigrazione and Oxfam Italia, *Invece si può! Storie di accoglienza diffusa*, Oxfam, Rome 2019, <http://bit.ly/393hO5C>, page 2. This is an estimate to be taken with great caution, because there are no official data on the number of workers employed in the sector.

46 *Cruscotto statistico giornaliero*, December 31, 2019, <http://bit.ly/32DWQIk>.

47 D. Facchini, *I 100mila esclusi dall'accoglienza dalle prefetture italiane*, in «Altroeconomia», n. 221, December 2019, pages 10-16.



year <sup>48</sup> considerably reduced migrants' access to protection and cut services offered in reception centres. According to an estimate by the Fp-Cgil, these measures have also led to a reduction in the number of staff employed in the sector with a cut of 40%<sup>49</sup>.

The Minniti and Salvini decrees therefore closed the historical cycle that was opened in 2011<sup>50</sup>.

By attacking the right to asylum and the agreements with countries of origin and transit in the name of the so-called "containment of migratory flows", residential reception has once again become a relatively marginal phenomenon, which, however, has kept a central role in the framework of the migration policies. However, it has kept a central role in the frame to which migration policies are conceived: the invasion, the alleged improper condition of the asylum seeker, reduced to a migrant who "clogs the courts with appeals", etc..<sup>51</sup>.

## 2. The exhaustion of the centre-model

### 2.1 Before Minniti-Salvini: the exhaustion of reception

It would be a mistake, however, to think that the decrees introduced by Minniti and then Salvini are the sole or main cause for the end of this cycle since the reception system had already exhausted its functions before their promulgation.

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48 Here we make reference to the Decree 113/2018, converted into Law 132/2018, and to the new national specifications on Cas as per Ministry of the Interior Decree 10-11-2018.

49 Cfr. M. Franchi, *Già 5mila licenziati nei centri per l'immigrazione*, in «Il Manifesto», ed. online, 7-04-2019, <http://bit.ly/38azKdy>.

50 To understand the substantial continuity between the two ministries, please read E. Gargiulo, *Una filosofia della sicurezza e dell'ordine. Il governo dell'immigrazione secondo Marco Minniti*, in «Meridiana, Rivista di storia e scienze sociali», n. 91, 2018, E. Pugliese & M. Vitiello, *Di Minniti in peggio, decreti anti immigrati e crisi della solidarietà*, in «Inchiesta», website visited on 3-10-2018, <http://bit.ly/3800MUB>, and the contribution of Andrea Pennacchi, a comedian with a strong satirical streak, *Andrea Pennacchi e il monologo del suo Pojana: "Orizzonti di mona"*, «Propaganda Live», on La7 TV channel, episode aired on 14-02-2020, available at <http://bit.ly/3a4cuiu>.

51 Milena Gabanelli, *Migranti, una proposta da 4 mld. Perché può funzionare*, Corriere online, 13 August 2016, <http://bit.ly/2I2TxRg>.



In some respects, it was the events happened in 2011 - that led to the creation of a parallel emergency system additional to Sprar - that triggered a crisis dynamic.

As a matter of fact, from that moment on, (public) hospitality aimed at asylum seekers began to be perceived primarily as a form of custody (and therefore control) of unwanted and undesirable people.

While Sprar - established years earlier also thanks to the deployment of several associations - had among others the aim of promoting migrants' social inclusion<sup>52</sup>, Ena and Cas centres seemed to have as their only goal to empty landing places like Lampedusa.

As for the asylum seekers and their settlement trajectories, there was no specific provision in the Ministry of the Interior's new measures, at least in the early years. It is no coincidence that the quality standards held by Sprar centres - which required, for example, host newcomers (reception) in small groups, and qualified operators in charge of facilitating migration social inclusion and the acquisition of status - were never entirely extended to Cas, except for generic references in some ministerial circulars<sup>53</sup>.

The ambiguities of Cas centers have thus generated an overall de-qualification of the reception system. The lack of clear and specific qualifications and competences required by the managing bodies, have turned asylum centres into

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52 About the origins of the Sprar system please see ICS – Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà, *L'utopia dell'asilo. Il diritto di asilo in Italia nel 2005*, Edizioni Gruppo Abele, Torino 2006, pages 87-99, and M. Calloni, S. Marras & G. Serughetti, *Chiedo asilo. Essere rifugiato in Italia*, Università Bocconi Editor, Milan 2012, pages 107 and following. On the standards of reception guaranteed by the Sprar centres before the Salvini decrees please see G. Faso e S. Bontempelli, *Accogliere rifugiati e richiedenti asilo. Manuale dell'operatore critico*, Cesvot, Firenze 2017, pages 39-40.

53 See, for example, the instructions given by the Ministry of the Interior in the Circular Letter n. 14906, 17-12-2014, *Afflusso di cittadini stranieri a seguito di ulteriori sbarchi sulle coste italiane*, available <http://bit.ly/circolare2014>.



a hunting ground for cooperatives, associations or companies looking for an easy profit.

In the space of a few years, several Cas centres set up by Prefectures have ended up managed by entities without any expertise. There are many well known cases where tenders to manage Cas centers were won by cooperatives or by hoteliers and bed and breakfast owners who had no knowledge of the needs of asylum seekers and who might have been pushed by the opportunity to pay off their debts thanks to State funding.

Episodes of «mala-accoglienza» (bad reception) have been documented for years now and in the worst cases, they have involved forms of organized crime<sup>54</sup>. These episodes have been used by the right wing to impose further limitations to the right to asylum<sup>55</sup>.

Cas managing bodies are often completely unaware and unrelated to the Sprar original purposes. Also, many of the people employed have internalized an idea of hospitality meant as surveillance and control of dangerous or deviant people. Cas employees are more and more seen as guardians, responsible for supervising migrants and controlling their movements and behaviour. In many cases Cas centers have become real correctional structures where strong limitations to migrants' freedom are applied<sup>56</sup>.

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54 Y. Accardo e G. Guido (a cura di), *Accogliere: la vera emergenza. Rapporto di monitoraggio della Campagna LasciateCIEntrare su accoglienza, detenzione amministrativa e rimpatri forzati*, Campagna LasciateciEntrare, Roma 2016, in <http://bit.ly/32vuxeY> and Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo, in [http://bit.ly/cronache\\_malaccoglienza](http://bit.ly/cronache_malaccoglienza).

55 An example of the right wing rhetoric on the issue is: M. Giordano, *Profugopoli. Quelli che si riempiono le tasche con il business degli immigrati*, Mondadori, Milano 2016. For a review of protests against the opening of centres see Lunaria, *Accoglienza. La propaganda e le proteste del rifiuto, le scelte istituzionali sbagliate*, focus n. 1/2017, Roma 2017, [http://bit.ly/lunaria\\_accoglienza](http://bit.ly/lunaria_accoglienza).

56 See G. Faso e S. Bontempelli, *Accogliere rifugiati e richiedenti asilo*, cit.





## 2.2. From "correctional" reception to non-reception

The idea according to which reception is assimilable to correction was widespread among Prefectures, local officials, managing bodies and operators/workers of the centres. It then was widely transposed in the measures adopted at Ministry of the Interior and government level. Emblematic in this sense is Minister Minniti's work, which has given a strong authoritarian and disciplinary imprint on Cas activities and responsibilities.

Usually, when one thinks of Minister Minniti's measures, reference is made above all to the decree on asylum, known as the "Minniti-Orlando decree"<sup>57</sup>. However, as regards migrants' reception, of much more importance is the decree issued in March 2017, with which the Ministry of Interior amended the national tender specifications for Cas centers.

It specifies the standards that the Prefectures must require from the managing bodies: it is therefore a measure designed to regulate in detail the life of a Cas<sup>58</sup>. The specifications introduced in 2017 are openly inspired by a corrective, and in some ways punitive idea of reception. Cas are first and foremost equated with Cie/Cpr, i.e. facilities designed to forcibly repatriate migrants - and not to receive them in view of their inclusion, as it should be for asylum seekers.

The decree issued in March 2017 established undifferentiated rules valid for both the reception centres and detention and deportation facilities. This equivalence introduces rules particularly strict. For example, workers' presence around the clock to perform a constant control over migrants.

The managing body is obliged to certify each entry or exit of guests through the use of an attendance register and/or a personal badge. External visitors (friends,

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57 Decreto-legge 13/2017, then Law 46/2017: *Disposizioni urgenti per l'accelerazione dei procedimenti in materia di protezione internazionale nonché per il contrasto dell'immigrazione illegale*.

58 Ministero dell'Interno, Decreto March 7, 2017, *Approvazione dell'allegato schema di capitolato di gara di appalto*, in <http://bit.ly/minniti2017>.



relatives, worship ministers, etc.) must be authorized by the Prefecture, and meals can no longer be prepared independently by guests (as it was in small facilities), but they are provided by a canteen service<sup>59</sup>.

The reception centers have thus become like small barracks where time is regimented and rules that restrict asylum seekers' freedom of movement are applied. These rule have - at times - been interpreted in an even more vexatious way: emblematic is the case of the Prefecture of Florence, which issued two circulars that forced guests to return by 8 p.m. while centers' staff was requested to check migrants' personal correspondence (in violation of an explicit constitutional provision)<sup>60</sup>.

This authoritarian twist has profoundly changed the role of managing bodies and staff. The main activity of the centres has increasingly been that of imposing rules that migrants must respect in order to deserve hospitality. According to a survey conducted by Duccio Facchini<sup>61</sup>, many Prefectures have revoked migrants' right to stay in reception centers in all the cases of violation of the internal regulations, even minor infractions<sup>62</sup>, putting asylum seekers on

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59 Sul capitolato Minniti si veda: D. Facchini, *Accoglienza dei migranti: ecco come l'Italia torna indietro di dieci anni*, in «Altroeconomia», ed. online, 19 Maggio 2017, <http://bit.ly/2DL7X6z>; CNCA (Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità di Accoglienza), *Il "decreto Minniti" rischia di favorire strutture per migranti inadeguate e speculazioni intollerabili*, comunicato stampa, 13 Aprile 2017, dal sito CNCA, <http://bit.ly/2sKCoHP>; Senato della Repubblica, XVIII Legislatura, *Relazione sul funzionamento del sistema di accoglienza predisposto al fine di fronteggiare le esigenze straordinarie connesse all'eccezionale afflusso di stranieri nel territorio nazionale (anno 2017)*, Roma 2018, <http://bit.ly/3976bum>.

60 Cfr. Prefettura di Firenze - Area Diritti Civili, Cittadinanza, Immigrazione e Diritto di Asilo, *Capacità economica dei richiedenti asilo ospiti dei Cas - Vigilanza*, circolare prot. 0123513 del October 5, 2018 and Prefettura di Firenze - Area Diritti Civili, Cittadinanza, Immigrazione e Diritto di Asilo, *Orario di rientro degli ospiti nei centri di accoglienza*, circolare prot. 0126306 del 11-10-2018. For a review of these documents: A. Simoni, *Biking while black. Riflessioni a partire dalle recenti circolari del prefetto di Firenze*, in «Questione Giustizia», November 30, 2018, <http://bit.ly/3cd2Zj0>.

61 D. Facchini, *I 100mila esclusi dall'accoglienza*, cit.

62 Information on this expulsion activity from the centres is partial and sporadic. And it is a pity, because a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the revocation decrees would be very indicative of the choices made by Prefectures.



the street. The European Court of Justice has declared this practice to be unlawful<sup>63</sup>.

The terms of the contract between the Italian government and the reception centers have been further modified in late 2018 by the then Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini. Reception has been limited to essential services provided to migrants while activities - such as vocational training, Italian language courses, etc., - aimed at social inclusion have been cancelled.

Also the average cost per migrant went from 35 euros to 20 depending on the size of the centres<sup>64</sup>.

The most evident consequence – as per some accurate surveys<sup>65</sup> - has been the disengagement of those managing bodies with a strong social vocation, replaced by for-profit entities able to invest in large centres<sup>66</sup> and obtain considerable revenues.

These latter entities would save on the services provided to reception centers' guests, who are now inmates amassed and under constant surveillance<sup>67</sup>. This system would make the wire tapped words pronounced by Salvatore Buzzi, the manager of one of these entities (now convicted), come true: "Do you have any

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63 European Court of Justice, November 12, 2019, causa C-233/18, Zubair Haqbin Vs Federal agentschap voor de opvang van asielzoekers, <http://bit.ly/2wSt0E4>. It should be noted that the Court prohibits the withdrawal of reception even in the case of serious violations: in Italy, many guests have been put on the street for minor or derisory violations of the rules imposed by improvised managers: hence the cancellation decided by the various Regional Administrative Courts (to which not all revoked of course had access).

64 Ministero dell'Interno, November 10, 2018, *Fornitura di beni e servizi per la gestione e il funzionamento dei centri di prima accoglienza, di cui al decreto legge 30 ottobre 1995, n. 451*, in [http://bit.ly/capitolato\\_salvini](http://bit.ly/capitolato_salvini).

65 Action Aid e Openpolis, *Centri d'Italia: la sicurezza dell'esclusione. Grandi centri per grandi gestori*, in «Openpolis», sito web, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2TdSFOQ>.

66 A. Camilli, *Il decreto Salvini ha favorito il «business dell'accoglienza»*, «Internazionale», Febbraio 17, 2020, <http://bit.ly/2wQ99Fr>.

67 "The Cas have become dormitories, the operators have a very strict control function that severely limits the guests' ability to find a job or carry out any other activity outside the centre": this is how Emilia Bitossi from the Naga association of Milan", statement reported by Annalisa Camilli in the mentioned article.



idea how much money I make on immigrants? Drug trafficking is less lucrative”<sup>68</sup>.

### 3. The right wing and the new reception framework

#### 3.1. *The cultural offensive of the right*

In recent years, the terms of the public debate on the issue of immigrants have been imposed/dictated by the right wing. Themes discussed have been migrants' invasion, their social dangerousness, the privileges they enjoy ("they stay in five-star hotels", "they stay here doing nothing", etc.); all this in a framework of public insecurity.

These denigrating images have met the consent of a large share of Italians. Given this scenario, asylum seekers are no longer seen as people in danger, who have fled their countries to seek protection, but, more and more often, as “illegal immigrants” generously housed in hotels or as “fake refugees”, namely economic migrants seeking asylum instrumentally, for the sole purpose of obtaining a residence permit.

The strategies of the centre left - in response to the proclamations of the right wing - have been insufficient and often even subordinate<sup>69</sup>. Without questioning the terms imposed - such as migrants invasion, insecurity, etc. - the effectiveness of the proposed solutions is hard to imagine.

Just like Minniti and the majority of centre-left politicians, also authoritative commentators - from Federico Rampini<sup>70</sup> to Milena Gabanelli<sup>71</sup>, just to give two

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68 Cfr. Redazionale, *Mafia Capitale*, Buzzi: “Con immigrati si fanno molti più soldi che con la droga”, in «Il Fatto Quotidiano», ed. online, 2 Dicembre 2014, <http://bit.ly/2TlAAyv>.

69 In these cases, as illustrated in a well-known book by George Lakoff, the frame of the right is strengthened: "when we discuss with someone of the opposite side using their language, we activate the frames of that side, strengthening them in those who listen to us at the expense of our own" G. Lakoff, *Non pensare all'elefante!*, Chiarelettere, Roma 2019, p.7.

70 Cfr. F. Rampini, *La notte della sinistra. Da dove ripartire*, Mondadori, Milano 2019.



examples - instead of opposing the watchwords imposed by the right wing, have reacted by reassuring the public opinion and indulging people' fears, true or presumed.

This way, it is reinforced the idea that immigration is a source of insecurity that must be limited and only "deserving" migrants - who can adapt and do not bother – can be welcomed.

Emblematic is the case of the so-called "Accademia per l'integrazione" (Academy for integration) in Bergamo, a sort of reception centre organized in military style<sup>72</sup>. The "Academy", created by the Municipality of Bergamo in cooperation with Caritas, was enthusiastically introduced by the TV program "Le Iene" in the episode of November 11, 2018<sup>73</sup>.

Academy's "deserving" guests - namely, those who accept without rebellion the disciplinary practices imposed by the managers - are "rewarded" by supporting them in their job search. After that TV programme, an petition on Change.org<sup>74</sup> – signed by 165,377 people - asked for the implementation of a proposal by the Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani (Italian Association of Municipalities), according to which "deserving" migrants should have been "rewarded" by obtaining a residence permit, as per Bergamo model.

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71 "The fears of citizens, who see increasing degradation in many marginal neighbourhoods where they live, should not be ignored". "We must put ourselves in their shoes and reassure them, governing the phenomenon with a pragmatic and realistic vision". (M. Gabanelli, *Migranti: la politica del «non fare»*, on *Corriere* online, article from February 2018, <http://bit.ly/2T5O9eE>).

72 "During their stay in the facility, the "pupils" - all males - are subjected to a rather strict discipline. Military rituals and habits are an integral part of the routine (...). The alarm clock is at 6.30 a.m., six days a week, and is followed by a sort of gathering in the corridor, with martial-type gestures. All participants are dressed in the same way: they wear a blue suit - in fact a uniform - with the words "Academy for Integration. Thanks Bergamo". They have to keep beds and common areas in perfect order, otherwise they may be punished (...). Mobile phones are "granted" only at certain times of the day: at night and briefly during lunch". (E. Gargiulo, *Il sogno dell'integrazione genera mostri*, «Global Project», website visited on January 4, 2019, <http://bit.ly/gargiulo2019>).

73 See <http://bit.ly/ieneaccoglienza>

74 See <http://bit.ly/3a9Lj5R>



The case has been analyzed by Enrico Gargiulo, who noted that the "Bergamo model" does not question the policy framework on migration and social integration and indeed it only confirms the undisputed equation between immigration and insecurity. Gargiulo also observes how the so-called Academy has brought to completion a bipartisan political path started earlier, with the requirement for the so-called "economic" migrants of language and civic education skills, as a condition for the issuance or renewal of the residence permit. These paths of civic integration were then extended, in different ways, also to asylum seekers and holders of international protection.

"The logic of integration as a duty", concludes Gargiulo, "has not only been extended to new categories but it was linked to the request for availability of free work. With the Academy, therefore, a circle is closed. The "good" immigrant, now, is the one who, even if not "economic", accepts to learn a job without being paid because considered incapable or without will"<sup>75</sup>.

### *3.2. Benevolence and civic integration*

Gargiulo is right to argue that the bipartisan political path had started earlier. We can reconstruct it by going back to a speech published in 2000 by Guido Bolaffi - Head of Cabinet of the then Minister Livia Turco - that focused on the "benevolence" of the government (centre-left coalition) and the justified sarcasm expressed by two experts on the matter like Enrico Pugliese and Sergio Briguglio<sup>76</sup>.

The logic of "benevolence" makes the idea of asylum as a right disappear. Only "deserving" migrants can enter and remain, and the right becomes benevolence.

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<sup>75</sup> E. Gargiulo, *Il sogno dell'integrazione*, cit..

<sup>76</sup> Cfr., "Benevolenza" in Giuseppe Faso, *Lessico del razzismo democratico*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2008, pp.31-34.



When another centre-left government resumed this path in 2006, “the idea of merit and the logic of social control became part of migration policies”<sup>77</sup>.

It was then the Minister of the Interior Amato who – in 2006 - launched a *Charter of Values* which was decisive in the process of making immigrants inferior. The Ministry also arranges a “Security Package”<sup>78</sup> which was then be finalized by the Leghista Minister Maroni. Due to space limitations, we will not reconstruct the path that brought to this securitarian philosophy which both centre left and centre right governments share – though using a different rethorical language on the issue<sup>79</sup>.

### 3.3. In the shadow of (“perceived”) insecurity

Following the aggressive rhetoric of Minister Salvini, the tendency is to forget that the full assumption of insecurity as the main issue in relation to migration dates back to Minister Minniti, who stated that people’ fears are to be reckoned.

Perception that replaces reality returns in documents and declarations by Minister Giuliano Amato first and ten years later by Minister Minniti.

But instead of questioning distorted perceptions through systematic reframing actions<sup>80</sup> involving replacing offensive slogans and the relaunching of different ideas and projects - it has been accepted as a fact that fear and insecurity are not due to actual crime, but to a perceived one.

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77 E. Gargiulo, *Integrati ma subordinati. La civic integration tra precarietà e stratificazione*, in V. Carbone, E. Gargiulo e M. Russo Spena, *I confini dell’esclusione. La civic integration tra selezione e disciplinamento dei corpi migranti*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2018. The book is essential to recreate the establishment of the “civic integration” system, which can only be mentioned here.

78 See the entries “Valori”, “Percepito” and “Per delinquere”, in G. Faso, *Lessico del razzismo...* cit. and A. Rivera, *Regole e roghi*, Dedalo 2009, pp.135-137, or G. Faso, *Dall’Accordo al Piano di integrazione dei titolari*, in *I confini dell’esclusione...*, cit., pp. 139-169.

79 For a complete history of securitarian policies please see Wolf Bukowski, *La buona educazione degli oppressi. Piccola storia del decoro*, Alegre, Roma 2019.

80 Cfr. G.Lakoff, *Non pensare...* cit..





But if the perception of the reality is distorted who is responsible? Who contributes to misrepresentations of migration as a phenomenon if not politicians and media? And who more than them can (could) reset the public debate?

Instead, the debate (so to speak) takes place among those like Galli della Loggia – one of the most influential newspaper columnists - who affirms that "in the case of Italy, immigration has represented an opportunity to exercise illegality, a widespread illegality, of which people have for obvious reasons taken note", and those who mistake a social representation (the constructed image of the increase in crime) contradicted by the decline in crime (a 20-year trend verified on data) with a sacrosanct perception to deal with: accepting it.





## Of hate and beyond. A decade of violent and racist rhetoric online and offline

*Paola Andrisani*

When, 10 years ago, we started talking about something vaguely resembling the so-called "hate speech"<sup>81</sup>, we had no idea what it would become or how it would evolve over time<sup>82</sup>.

The gradual discovery of the (negative) potential of the Internet, from 2009 onwards<sup>83</sup>, as well as its instrumental use and the exponential growth in the use of social media have left us with barely a glimpse of possible future outcomes. The Web runs too fast, and online hate follows.

News coverage increasingly reports of people or groups attacked verbally with stigmatizing and discriminatory expressions, especially on the Web. At the institutional and organised civil society level, initiatives are multiplying to try to stem an ancient phenomenon, that is carried out through new and increasingly sophisticated means<sup>84</sup>. The use of the Web as a vector of incitement to hatred raises new questions, requiring the search for adequate responses at the legal level and means to counter these practices inspired by violence. These steps do not always keep pace with the changes in the phenomenon.

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<sup>81</sup> See. P. Andrisani, "Facebook: le nuove forme di razzismo online", in Lunaria (Ed.), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Secondo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Edizioni dell'Asino, 2011, pp.151-153.

<sup>82</sup> From January 2007 to March 2020, in the online database of [cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://cronachediordinariorazzismo.org) as many as 3,737 (out of a total of 7,567 cases, so almost half) cases of "racist propaganda" were collected, of which 2,101 more closely related to "hate speech", hate speech and incitement to hatred.

<sup>83</sup> The first studies on online hate speech, civil rights in cyberspace and the new challenges posed to society by the Internet were published in the US in the late 90s.

<sup>84</sup> Among the most recent initiatives, in May 2020, was launched Chi odiia paga (COP), the first Italian legaltech platform that represents people targeted by online hate (from misogyny to xenophobia through Islamophobia, homophobia, anti-Semitism) against the related crimes of which they are victims. In July 2019, on the other hand, the campaign to support and help to hate victims on the web, *Odiare ti costa* was launched, wanted by Tlon and Wilde Side law firm of Bologna, on the initiative of the association "Pensare Sociale".



The responsibilities for the propagation of online speech are manifold: some politicians use it as a tool to search popular consensus; social media does not delete it in the name of freedom of expression – though few steps have been taken in the wake of 2020 US presidential campaign; public and institutional functions do not always seem to fully understand the power of hate speech on social media and its effects in real life.

In the long run, hate speech has been normalized and legitimized, with the effect of reproducing prejudices and stereotypes towards its chosen targets. In this scenario, complex phenomena such as migration, besides being treated with populist rhetoric and simplistic slogans, are the object of easy speculation, which generates confusion and misinformation<sup>85</sup>.

Delimiting the contours of hate speech remains a complicated task, even as social media have changed the very idea of what public discussion is. The public sphere is no longer populated by news media companies, but increasingly and pervasively, by individuals, non-professional subjects, who constitute a galaxy of informal news sources. Every day, all of us, in a more or less conscious way, can share information or content online, which could be potentially discriminatory and used to attack specific groups.

The discovery of the Stormfront.org<sup>86</sup> forum in 2011 was in this sense enlightening and began to set the pace and showed the reach of hate speech.

It quickly went from "trivial" offensive online games<sup>87</sup>, groups and profiles explicitly and grossly racist, or pages of parties with openly xenophobic content (for example,

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85 A report released in September 2019 by the Oxford Internet Institute (OII), 'The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation', shows that organised social media manipulation has more than doubled since 2017. The report is the result of a three-year monitoring, which reveals the actions in place to disseminate diverted information on social networks through the use of algorithms, automation and Big data, with the ultimate aim of manipulating the public sphere. The report is available here <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/cybertroops2019/>.

86 See the chapter in this report.

87 As an example: "Bounce the clandestine", an application developed in early summer 2009 available on the official Facebook page of the Lega Nord, and "Stomp on the Gipsy", the "prize game" that appeared in 2011 on the Facebook page of Forza Nuova Roma Sud.



the pages of many local sections of Forza Nuova, CasaPound and Lega Nord), to a subtle and less obvious forms of racist verbal violence, often disguised as alleged information<sup>88</sup>.

In these years numerous efforts have been made at the regulatory level<sup>89</sup> as well as progress in the adaptation of international conventions while there was also more active cooperation from social network companies<sup>90</sup>. The regulatory framework in Italy, though, is still inadequate. There is no specific legislation on hate speech and the legal vacuum is filled by the application of the laws that regulate the "incitement to racial hatred", "propaganda of ideas based on superiority and racial hatred", "insult, defamation and threat".

From 2014 onwards the discussion on hate speech online and more specifically on social media finally got momentum. The overlapping of forums, social media, media becomes clear (let's call it "Stormfront model"). With this awareness came the implementation of those laws that we have referred to above also for Websites and social media pages and accounts.

Thanks to case against Stormfront.org (2013), today there is a judicial precedent on the matter that could help write a new history of the fight against hate speech in Italy<sup>91</sup>. Even that story is far from over, as the last appeal is still in progress (in 2020, ed.), it could still open scenarios which perhaps will go beyond the criminal sanction.

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88 See P. Andrisani, "Il perverso intreccio tra odio virtuale e odio virale", in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Terzo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, 2014, pp. 115-122.

89 One of the last acts comes at the end of January 2020, when the "Working Group on the phenomenon of online hatred" was set up by the Minister of Innovation Paola Pisano, in agreement with the Minister of Justice Alfonso Bonafede and the Undersecretary to the Council Presidency with responsibility for Publishing Andrea Martella. The group is aimed at identify the trends, map possible technological tools to combat it, identify the ways in which social networks companies can contribute to limiting its impact on society in compliance with constitutional principles.

90 The Code of Conduct on the unlawful incitement to hatred online was initialled on 31 May 2016, in accordance with Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law and in accordance with the national laws transposing it. Available here: [https://www.altalex.com/~media/Altalex/Annexes/2016/Annexes%20free/hate speech code of conduct en%20pdf.pdf](https://www.altalex.com/~media/Altalex/Annexes/2016/Annexes%20free/hate%20speech%20code%20of%20conduct%20en%20pdf.pdf).

91 For a non-exhaustive collection of criminal cases on hate speech, see: Lunaria (edited by Antonello Ciervo), *Discorsi e reati razzisti, condotte discriminatorie. Gli orientamenti della giurisprudenza più recente*, 2017, available here: <https://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/rassegnagiurisprudenza.pdf>.



But repression is not sufficient to adequately face and drastically reduce hate speech online.

If the Stormfront case brought focus on Web and forums, in more recent years we saw the rise of racism smear on social networks. The cases of the insults against Cecile Kyenge<sup>92</sup> and Laura Boldrini (Minister and President of the House of Parliament) mixed racism and sexism. The rising of the social media hate speech determined, after 2017, the development of several counter-narrative initiatives<sup>93</sup>: so as not to "punish" only with exemplary sanctions<sup>94</sup>.

While rigorous censorship and harsh punishment of racist discourse, and the production of a counter narrative are useful and indispensable, there seems to be an awareness that without questioning the structural foundations of racism, all the emphasis placed on the fight against hate speech risks becoming a mere rethorical exercise. The election campaign that preceded the general election on 4 March 2018 highlighted all the changes that had taken place in previous years, with a peak in the spread of hate speech that continued to influence public debate in the following months. 2018 also drew many people's attention to the "role played by discriminatory, stigmatising and all too often disparaging and offensive political propaganda, particularly against migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and Roma"<sup>95</sup>.

After more than 10 years, when everything has been said and written about, what can we add to the debate on hate speech in Italy?

*Blocking is also social. Facebook and its recent evolutions*

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92 See, D. Zola, "La ministra diventa un capro espiatorio: il caso Kyenge", in Lunaria, *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Terzo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, 2014, pp. 203-209.

93 See, P. Andrisani, "Fuori controllo. Quando i social media scavalcano il "muro" del razzismo", in Lunaria, *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Quarto libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, 2017, pp. 63-73.

94 See: "La "viralità" positiva. I social network come strumento innovativo di denuncia dell'odio in rete", in Lunaria (a cura di), *Focus n. 4/2018, Il ritorno della razza*, June 2018,: [https://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Focus-N4\\_ilritornodellarazza.pdf](https://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Focus-N4_ilritornodellarazza.pdf).

95 See: Lunaria (Ed.), *Le parole che fanno male. L'hate speech politico in Italia nel 2018*, 5 Giugno 2019: [http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/0\\_IT\\_WAS\\_REPORT\\_17luglio2019.pdf](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/0_IT_WAS_REPORT_17luglio2019.pdf).



It is certainly useful to analyse the ascending and descending parables of social media, how they have changed, and how they have contributed to the spread of racist propaganda. Facebook is not the same as it was 10 years ago. Replaced by Twitter first, and Instagram and Tik Tok, it sees on the one hand a sharp drop in users; on the other hand, a radical change in the use that its subscribers make of it and the ways the company fights hate speech.

In 2019, Facebook founder & CEO Mark Zuckerberg proposed equal rules for all online operators on violence and fake news, privacy, data portability and election protection. Ten months after that manifesto<sup>96</sup>, and after a summit with the European Commission to agree on common rules, the social network released a white paper<sup>97</sup> containing some open questions on online regulation and proposed guidelines to push companies to "responsibly balance values such as security, privacy and freedom of expression". It also plans to implement forms of censorship, considering "the impacts of decisions on freedom of expression" and developing an "understanding of the capabilities and limitations of technology in content moderation". Finally, it introduces criteria of proportionality and necessity to decide how to delete content deemed violent.

A crucial case in this regard is that of September 2019, when Facebook and Instagram decided to censure the pages of two neo-fascist political parties, CasaPound and Forza Nuova, and the accounts of numerous exponents of these movements because of the repeated forms of incitement to hatred and violence contained therein. This tougher policing content was something completely new and it reveals the complexity and multiplicity of the interests at stake. There are at least two major issues: the public or private dimension of social networks, and the scope for action by

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96 See: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/mark-zuckerberg/a-privacy-focused-vision-for-social-networking/10156700570096634/>

97 "Charting a way forward: online content regulation" focuses on what Facebook considers to be the most urgent issues to resolve. First: preserving freedom of expression while taking action against online hate speech. Second: increasing control over internet platforms. Third: establish the objectives of the Web regulations. Fourth, to decide whether or not to entrust the definition of harmful content online into a law.



providers in the case of illegal conduct committed within their platforms and, in particular, in the case of hate speech.

The Facebook's press release<sup>98</sup> in which the reasons for the blackout are explained brings some questions: can social networks, as owners of the platforms that host the content entered by their members, freely dispose of the digital content of its users? On the other hand, social platform companies can no longer be allowed to act as if the issues of online hatred, fascism and racist verbal violence were private issues between the offender and the offended.

After the removal of the pages, two appeals were filed under Article 700 of the Italian Criminal Code, one by CasaPound and one by Forza Nuova. The appeals, which were filed in different courts, resulted in two opposite decisions. The first ruling, issued by a court that deals with business matters (order of 12 December 2019)<sup>99</sup>, was favourable for CasaPound, with an attached order to pay the legal costs of Facebook<sup>100</sup>; the second, issued by the section that deals with individual rights and civil immigration in February 2020<sup>101</sup>, led to a complete rejection of the application by Forza Nuova and the obligation pay the costs of the dispute.

The first measure, although of a precautionary nature<sup>102</sup>, ordered the reactivation of the CasaPound page, and the personal profile of its administrator. On the basis of the assumption that the relationship between Facebook and its users "is not comparable to the relationship between two private individuals of any kind, since one of the

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98 Facebook had decided to obscure those pages because "people and organizations that spread hate or attack others based on who they are have no place on Facebook and Instagram. Candidates and political parties, as well as all individuals and organizations present on Facebook and Instagram, must respect these rules, regardless of their ideology".

99 Tribunale di Roma, Dec. 12, 2019, sezione specializzata in materia di Impresa, n. 59264/2019 R.G. available here: <https://globalfreedomofexpression.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/sentenzacpifb.pdf>.

100 Facebook has, however, filed a complaint against this measure because "there is concrete evidence that Casa Pound has been engaged in organized hatred and has repeatedly violated our rules".

101 Tribunale di Roma, Feb. 23, 2020, Sezione diritti della persona e immigrazione civile, n. 64894/2019 R.G., consultabile qui: <http://www.questionegiustizia.it/doc/Ordinanza-RG-648942019-Forza-Nuova-art700.pdf>.

102 See: B. Sietta, "CasaPound e l'ordinanza contro Facebook", ec. 2019, *Valigia Blu*, here: <https://www.valigiablu.it/facebook-casapound-ordinanza/>.



parties, Facebook, holds a special position". The "speciality" of such position would require Facebook, according to the Court of Rome, to adhere, in its negotiations with users, "to respect the constitutional and regulatory principles", which constitute "for the Facebook subject, at the same time, condition and limit in the relationship with users who request access to its service". Hence, again in the judge's opinion, the violation of the "right to pluralism" by the social platform, to the detriment of CasaPound which could not, in this way, express its political messages<sup>103</sup>.

As for the second ruling, of opposite sign, the legal reasoning follows different tracks. First of all, there is a strong reference to international conventions on freedom of expression and the manifestation of thought. From this normative introduction, the Court of Rome moves on to the description of the importance of Facebook in the viral diffusion of hate and discriminatory discourses. In particular, a statement by the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression is recalled, according to which "a discriminatory or hate expression, left uncontrolled, can create a climate and an environment that pollutes the public debate and harm even those who are not users of the platform". The judge writes: "Most of the content and general tone of the plaintiff's work (Forza Nuova), and therefore its purpose is of negationist nature, and thus in conflict with the fundamental values of the Convention, as expressed in its Preamble, namely justice and peace. It notes that the applicant attempts to mislead Article 10 of the Convention by using his right to freedom of expression for purposes contrary to the letter and spirit of the Convention. Such purposes, if tolerated, would contribute to the destruction of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Convention".

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103 The Ordinance underlines the pre-eminent role of Facebook "with reference to the implementation of key principles of the system such as the pluralism of political parties (49 Const.), to the point that the subject who is not present on Facebook is excluded (or strongly limited) from the Italian political debate, as evidenced by the fact that almost all Italian politicians daily entrust their Facebook page with political messages and the dissemination of ideas of their movement".





And again, reporting in a timely manner examples of post indictments (containing cases of hate speech) the judge writes: “The episodes described above would be enough on their own to believe that based on community standards and contractual conditions, Facebook had the right to terminate the contract with the users, who as administrators managed the pages of the various articulations of Forza Nuova. On the contrary, on the basis of the internal and supranational rules and their constant application in the above mentioned jurisprudence and the Code of Conduct signed with the European Commission, Facebook actually had the legal duty to terminate contracts, since it is clear that the reference to the ideals of fascism in a great number of public initiatives and public events qualifies Forza Nuova as a "hate organization", according to the above mentioned contractual conditions and community standards”. As a result of these two measures, and given the conflicting results, beyond the value of such a removal, it would be questionable whether it would be appropriate to leave such sensitive issues only in the hands of the internal policies of social networks<sup>104</sup>, or whether it would be more appropriate to provide for co-regulation regimes with the competent authorities, possibly also operating a sort of *a posteriori* censorship, on the recommendation of the same platforms, if the judicial authorities deem it appropriate<sup>105</sup>. At the same time, it would be necessary to make a leap beyond the social and the screens, and return to everyday real life.

### *Hate speech and beyond*

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104 In September 2019, Facebook set up the Oversight Board, a sort of Court of Appeal that will rule on decisions regarding the deletion of content. An independent body that will be called upon to protect freedom of speech but also to establish its limits. For more information, see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-49735795>.

105 In this sense goes the Regulation containing provisions on respect for human dignity and the principles of non-discrimination and hate speech issued by AGCOM on May 15, 2019, whose Article 9, paragraph 1 states: "The Authority promotes, through co-regulatory procedures, the adoption by providers of audiovisual media services, as well as on video sharing platforms of measures to counter the dissemination on the network, and in particular on social media, of content in violation of the principles sanctioned to protect human dignity and for the removal of hate content". Disponibile qui: <https://www.agcom.it/documents/10179/13511391/Allegato+23-5-2019+1558628852738/5908b34f-8c29-463c-a7b5-7912869ab367?version=1.0>.





To sum up: after 10 years and more monitoring racist verbal violence, where are we? Far from the shouted rallies of the former leghista mayor of Treviso, Giancarlo Gentilini who advocated the “cleaning of the streets from all these ethnic groups that destroy our country”, invoking a revolution against “nomads and gypsies” - he was condemned for these words in 2013. Time has perhaps helped us forget the racist sermons from Father Tam, known for his sympathies with Forza Nuova and his commemoration of the dead of Salò Repubblica. Over time a long list of cases have also arrived in the courtrooms and have been sentenced.

Among the many, we can remember the case of Mario Borghezio, a leghista elected official who, during the radio program "La Zanzara" (April 2013), expressed his opinion on the appointment of Cecile Kyenge as minister, stating, among other things, that “Africans are Africans and belong to an ethnic group very different from ours”<sup>106</sup>.

In July 2013, Roberto Calderoli, elected official and former minister, was at some Northern League event in Treviglio when he warmed the audience: “Every now and then I open the government website and when I see Kyenge's picture I am flabbergasted. I'm an animal lover for God's sake. I've had tigers, bears, monkeys and everything else. But when I see the appearance of an orangutan coming out, I'm still shocked”.

Joe Formaggio, mayor of Albettone (Vicenza), who, again during the radio program La Zanzara, said: “We do not want non-EU citizens. We don't want anyone here to come and fuck with us”. And then referring to the hypothesis that some asylum seekers could be hosted in his town, and in relation to the houses identified to give hospitality, he reiterated: “Either we wall them up or we fill them with shit; I wonder

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106 In January 2019, Borghezio was definitively condemned for “defamation aggravated by racial hatred”.



what does an immigrant searches in Albettone, where he risks his life. They must understand that we are racists”<sup>107</sup>.

The list could go on, illustrating how racist rhetoric has crept into our lives over the years through numerous ways of expressing it.

The last wave was the stigmatization of “Chinese people” (which would involve many other Asians or anybody having some kind of Asian features), who were identified as plague spreaders even before the Covid-19 virus had reached Italy.

At the end of January 2020, after the outbreak of the epidemic in Wuhan, the Italian media started a using an aggressive language which went hand in hand with cases of synophobia.<sup>108</sup>.

The perfect example of this new wave is the statement of the President of the Veneto Region, Luca Zaia, who, during a television broadcast on Antenna 3, said: “We have all seen them eat live rats or this kind of thing. The hygiene habits of our people, the Venetians and the Italian citizens, the education we have, is that of taking a shower, of washing oneself, of washing one's hands often, of a particular personal cleaning regime. Same with food: rules, refrigerators, expiry date. These are cultural facts”<sup>109</sup>. Zaia's words could represent the 2020 synthesis of what we have been trying to define as "hate speech", understood as words and expressions uttered with the aim of

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107 In June 2018 he was condemned by the Civil Court of Milan for “discriminatory behaviour and incitement to racial hatred” against Roma and migrants (compensation for damages of €12,000 and payment of legal fees to the associations of Milan “Lawyers for nothing” and Asgi, who had filed the case against him).

108 See: Grazia Naletto in section 2.3.2 of this report.

109 It may seem paradoxical, but the first case of hate speech collected in the [cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://cronachediordinariorazzismo.org) database and dating back to March 2007, reports very similar arguments about the alleged lack of respect for hygiene by migrants. In this case, it was the CISL of Florence that denounced that some bus lines would be at the mercy of “hordes of foreigners” who “do not pay the ticket, dirty, are vulgar”, so much so as to force other passengers to get off the bus. “Poor cleanliness and disrespect for non-EU Roma and Albanians would turn the bus journey into a kind of hellish circle”. And in July 2009, also in Florence, Bianca Maria Giocoli, city councillor of the PDL, reporting alleged episodes of “incivility” occurred on bus lines No. 29, 30 and 35, said that “the Chinese spit on the ground. Once a Roma woman who was at the back of the bus peed, there was a trickle flowing on the floor. Albanians, Slavs, Chinese, squatters, Roma, they all stink. There are gypsy gypsy gangs occupying all the seats, they stink to high heaven, they are filthy, they scratch everywhere, they spread lice around”.



mortifying, denigrating, dehumanizing and inferiorizing the people to whom they refer, as well as encouraging and fomenting prejudice, hostility, if not gratuitous violence against one or more groups and individuals.

The huge number of cases collected in our online database in recent years shows a certain constancy in the discriminatory logic and targets, with variations on the theme depending on the perceived emergency of the moment. If analyzed one after the other they give an idea of how hateful speeches and words have been refined over time and how they follow social media trends. All together they sculpt an all-round definition of hate speech that international conventions or official documents, in their more institutional guise, fail to grasp.

Yet, here we do not want to give here yet another definition of "hate speech"<sup>110</sup>. Rather, taking advantage of the experience made in recent years, we would like to try to make an overall reasoning about everything that surrounds it and, above all, feeds it. It is not just "hate", and it is not just "hate speech". Rather than fossilizing on the concept of hate itself, therefore, we should try to work, from now on, on the concept of "racist propaganda", which is undoubtedly more capable of rendering the various facets of the phenomenon, at least with reference to the various serious forms of verbal violence that affect migrants and minorities. The issues and perspectives that would open up, then, would be multiple only if we could shift our attention a little further on the historical, social, cultural and political processes that over the years have favoured the spread and rooting of stereotypes, prejudices and clichés of discriminatory, xenophobic and racist matrix<sup>111</sup>.

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110 For an analysis of definitions and literature see: Lunaria (Ed.), *Words are stones. Analisi dell'hate speech nel discorso pubblico in sei paesi europei. International Report*, 2019: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/Report-pagine-singole.pdf>.

111 Let us recall that, on October 30 2019, the Italian Senate approved a motion to establish an Extraordinary Commission to combat intolerance, racism, anti-Semitism and incitement to hatred and violence. First signatory of the motion was Liliana Segre, Senator for life and survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp. The approval led to an episode on the sidelines of the debate: the refusal, from the benches of Forza Italia, Lega and Fratelli d'Italia (who had abstained) to stand up and applaud the senator.



And in this process, we cannot but look at the "protagonists" of racist propaganda. Too often, in these past years, their role, though central and decisive for the understanding of the phenomenon, has been almost ignored or, in any case, often taken to the background, just to give visibility to the problem itself. But who are those who spread and reproduce hatred? With the Anglo-Saxon term "haters ", international communication experts define the people behind a virtual or real alias who uses internet platforms to express their hatred towards other people, certain specific categories of subjects, an idea or an object. In Italian, we could translate it as "those who hate on the internet". These are people who hate and attack precisely because they have no other arguments to dialectically and culturally oppose to target that triggers their feelings of fear. This is precisely the reason why many of the haters identify, to compensate for their fragile and vulnerable identity, with certain social groups or ideologies: with their sports team, with an extremist ideological group, with a nation, with a social group, with a political party, with a religious group. They therefore renounce their incomplete and shaky identity, to replace it entirely with that of the group or ideology with which they identify totally. The motivations that push "normal" people to eliminate all inhibitions and become serial haters can be many: from boredom, to the search for attention, from revenge to the pleasure of doing harm to others, freely expressing their frustrations. Ultimately, there is no single category of "hater", but different types that identify themselves in relation to the motivation that drives them to hate.

The hater, today, is less and less an anonymous "keyboard warrior" that launches a tweet and hides behind a fake profile. Today, the hater wants to be recognized. He claims his negative feelings because he no longer feels alone, but rather he feels legitimized by the social context that surrounds him. A radical and worrying change, while the targets of the offenses and the scapegoats remain the same. Therefore, controversial proposed measures such as the "social media banning" or the introduction of the obligation to use an identity card to subscribe to social networks,



are neither sufficient nor adequate to try to fight haters. We should instead ask ourselves what these people are like in normal life, away from the screen and keyboard and start looking at them through different lenses. Hatred often simply turns against everything that constitutes "otherness", that is, what I "must" hate in order to have an identity, to be "I". As Umberto Eco wrote: "It always takes someone to hate to feel justified in one's own misery"<sup>112</sup>.

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112 U. Eco, *Il cimitero di Praga*, Bompiani, Milano 2010.



## **2009-2019: ten years of antiracism in Italy, a country squeezed between fear and reception**

***Grazia Naletto***

"Don't be afraid", "I welcome". Two campaigns, two intentionally evocative titles. In between: ten years of the Italian anti-racist movement. The imagery recalled by these very different is closer than it seems and tells a lot about the path followed in these intense decade.

The "Don't be afraid" campaign was launched on March 18, 2009 by a group of organizations<sup>113</sup> that did not intend to resign to a climate of hostility and violence against foreigners that had been on the rise in the country since 2008. The implicit target of the campaign was the unscrupulous wickedness of the Minister of the Interior of the time, the leghista Roberto Maroni, whose rhetoric and deeds in the two-year period 2008-2009 were inspirational for the security package approved by the Berlusconi government<sup>114</sup>. The declared target of the campaign was the worrying spread of racism. The word racism, however, was not mentioned, the promoters chose the word "fear" instead, internalizing the very imagery it was meant to deconstruct.

On June 18, 2019, ten years later, a similar coalition<sup>115</sup> launched *Io accolgo*, a campaign that aims to give voice to that part of society that does not recognize itself

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<sup>113</sup> Acli, UNHCR, Amnesty International, Antigone, Arci, Asgi, Cantieri Sociali, Caritas Italiana, Centro Astalli, Cgil, Cir, Cisl, Cnca, Comunità di Sant'Egidio, Csvnet, Emmaus Italia, Federazione Chiese Evangeliche in Italia, Federazione Rom e Sinti, FioPsd, Gruppo Abele, Libera, Rete G2 Seconde Generazioni, Save the Children, Sei – Ugl, Terra del Fuoco, Tavola per la Pace, Uil.

<sup>114</sup> "The increase in episodes of intolerance and racist violence that we are witnessing are worrying symptoms of a short circuit that risks degenerating and that distances us from the pivotal references of our civilization". This is a sentence taken from the *Manifesto for a national campaign against racism, indifference and fear of strangers*.

<sup>115</sup> A Buon Diritto, ACLI, ActionAid, AOI, ARCI, ASGI, Caritas italiana, Casa della Carità, CEFA, Centro Astalli, CGIL, CIAC, CIAI, CIR, CNCA, Comunità di S. Egidio, CONNGI, Ero Straniero, EuropAsilo,



in the representation of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees offered by another leghista Interior Minister, Matteo Salvini. He, better than his party comrade who preceded him, managed to set the tone to the Italian public debate on migrations before entering government and, just like Maroni, once a minister, matches his xenophobic rhetoric with administrative acts and regulatory reforms designed to leave a deep mark on the lives of thousands of foreigners in our country.

I welcome is a slogan that distances itself more explicitly from the dominant public imagination, it takes side in favour of the idea of welcoming, calling the public to assume a responsibility in solidarity.

In 2009, as in 2019, the attempt was to redirect the gaze of a part of the public opinion in the direction of the principles of equality, solidarity, non-discrimination. We chose to operate on the collective imagination (the representation of foreign citizens) hoping to move the centre of gravity of public policies on migration and asylum towards the horizon of rights.

In the first case, the chosen strategy was to use and overturn the picture proposed by the adversary: "do not be afraid" is addressed to those who have been told for months that the foreigner poses a threat to "our" security. In the second case, you opted for frontal opposition: you (the govt.) reject, I accept.

The thread that links these two different communicative strategies helps us reconstruct, in brief, the richness and creativity expressed by the Italian anti-racist movement during the last ten years, but also its limits and the challenges ahead. It is

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Federazione Chiese Evangeliche in Italia - FCEI, FOCSIV, FOCUS Casa dei diritti sociali, Fondazione Finanza Etica, Fondazione Migrantes, Forum Terzo Settore, Gruppo Abele, ICS Trieste, INTERSOS, Legambiente, LINK-coordinamento universitario, Lunaria, Medici Senza Frontiere, NAIM (National Association Intercultural Mediators), Oxfam, Rainbow4Africa, ReCoSol, Refugees Welcome Italia, Rete della Conoscenza, Rete Studenti Medi, SaltaMuri, Save the Children Italia, Senza Confine, UIL, Unione degli studenti, Unione degli universitari, UNIRE.



the rough and hardened thread that has warped "the trap of permanent emergency"<sup>116</sup>.

### *Permanent emergency*

The category of "emergency", which is essential to fuel "fear perceptions", has crossed the public debate on migration throughout the decade. Few thousands of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti citizens still living in different kinds of settlements (informal, camps and equipped areas) have led to the proclamation, in 2008, of a "nomadic emergency" in three Italian cities. The arrival of about 62 thousand migrants from Egypt, Tunisia and Libya justified the proclamation, in 2011, of a "North African emergency".

The *economic and social emergency* brought back by the effects of the global crisis that began in 2008 has been evoked. Then came the *security crisis*, supported by bizarre interpretations of crime statistics, by an over-representation in the media of crime stories and by the misleading representations of the terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic radicalism that shocked Europe. After that was the *humanitarian crisis*, which in particular between 2014 and 2016, has found the country's public system unprepared for the new demand for reception without; the health one, which is more frequently referred to in the periods of intensified arrivals of migrants by sea (end of 2013-2015; 2017).

Almost without interruption, the gaze of governments, the media, and therefore also of a large part of public opinion, has only looked at the border and has forgotten the approximately five million foreign citizens who reside permanently in our country: migration policies have remained at the centre of public attention, progressively cornering social inclusion policies.

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<sup>116</sup> F. Miraglia, G. Naletto, "1989-2019: 30 anni di antirazzismo in Italia" in Giovannetti M., Zorzella N. (a cura di), *IUS MIGRANDI. 30 anni di politiche e legislazione sull'immigrazione in Italia*, Franco Angeli editore, Milano 2020 (in corso di pubblicazione).





The Italian anti-racist movement was thus pushed to concentrate its efforts on guaranteeing the right to arrive and be welcomed and to sacrifice a large part of the collective elaborations that in previous decades had tried to keep together the right to migrate with social, civil and political citizenship rights, in order to imagine a new social model plural, polycultural and based on equal rights<sup>117</sup>.

Squeezed between the real emergencies (those generated by the numerous regulatory reforms that have progressively weakened the protection of foreign citizens in our country) and those represented by a public debate manipulated in a cynical (and smart) way by nationalist, xenophobic and racist movements, we have been trapped in an agenda mostly defined by others.

The denunciation of the countless forms of institutional discrimination and the attempt to obtain justice in the courtrooms; the organization of public protest, the attempt to reduce the inhuman effects of the policies of rejection; the promotion of grassroots solidarity actions in the social, educational, housing and work fields and the performance of a *de facto* substitute role for institutions in the provision of essential services (from reception to social and legal orientation, health care for undocumented persons, victims of trafficking, and so on), have all been priorities that have left little room for the creation of collective places of relationship and longer-term cultural, social and political interventions.

This was the background that characterized the commitment of the antiracist work in the last decade. Without this work, the living conditions of many foreign citizens would be much worse than they already are.

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<sup>117</sup> We refer not only to the experience of the Antiracist Network of the late 90s of the last century, but also to the important elaborations from the Migrants' Table of the Social Forum that in the two-year period 2001-2002 analysed in depth the role played by the work of migrants in the process of neo-liberal globalization.



Below we try to retrace in brief, while the details we refer to can be found in the archive of our Website [cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://cronachediordinariorazzismo.org) and in previous editions of this White Paper.

At the beginning of the decade, the movement is forced to confront the strategy of fear put in place by the Berlusconi IV Government, which took office on May 8, 2008, which brought to the extreme consequences the security slippage of migration policies initiated by previous governments. One of the first acts of the Berlusconi IV was the approval of a scheme of measures that will become the 2008-2009 "security package" and will deeply frame the relations between Italian society and foreign citizens<sup>118</sup>.. A few days later, on May 21st, 2008, the proclamation of a state of "nomadic emergency" in the cities of Naples, Rome and Milan, completed this "program" of institutional racism against foreigners and Roma, Sinti and Caminanti.

The anti-racist movement expresses very strong opposition to the adoption of these rules and manages to prevent the abolition of the ban on reporting undocumented foreigners to the PS authorities by teachers and doctors which would have undermined the guarantee of the right to education and health. This is also thanks to the great commitment and involvement of schools and doctors' associations. The inadmissible proposal to census Roma citizens living in the camps and to take their

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<sup>118</sup> With various legislative measures, the Berlusconi government tightens the rules on immigration: the introduction of the aggravating circumstance of the penalty for foreign citizens without a residence permit and the crime of illegal entry and stay; the introduction of the tax on stay and the integration agreement; the extension to 180 days of the time spent in Temporary Residence Centres (CPT) and their renaming in Identification and Expulsion Centres (CIE); the limitation of the right to family reunification; the amendment of the Consolidated Law on Local Authorities, with the extension of the powers of mayors in matters of security and public order are some of the most relevant provisions. See: A. Caputo, "Immigration and legal policies: from the 1998 Consolidated Text to the recent interventions on security", and G. Naletto, "The normative legitimization of discrimination and racism", in G. Naletto, (edited by), Report on Racism in Italy, Manifestolibri, Rome 2009.



fingerprints, including children, is also stopped, thanks to a strong mobilisation of civil society<sup>119</sup>.

Immediately after the entry into force of Law 94/2009, the pillar of the Leghista "security package", the fifth of the seven amnesties/regulations that have marked the history of immigration in our country is launched. Law 108/2009 contains a provision that allows the "declaration of assistance and support activities for families" (art.1-ter) by employers. It will be called the "amnesty scam" because it is very selective and because many of the approximately 294 thousand citizens who apply are swindled by unscrupulous accountants and lawyers who, in exchange for fees that reach several thousand euros, promise to take care of the practice of the stay and the finding of a job, but in many cases are limited to producing fake documents.<sup>120</sup>

Against these unjust requirements and against the entry into force of the security package, on October 17, 2009, a national demonstration brings 150 thousand people from the anti-racist movement in Rome, its demands will return in future mobilizations<sup>121</sup>. A year later, on October 30, 2010, eight immigrants climbed on a crane at the Brescia metropolitan shipyard to protest against the amnesty scam. They ask for a residence permit for all those who have applied for it, the withdrawal of the

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<sup>119</sup> As Filippo Miraglia recalls, "On July 8, 2008, the ARCI organizes in Rome, where mayor Alemanno supports this infamous project, a demonstration in which more than 3 thousand people, among them many celebrities and politicians, have their fingerprints taken in protest: now file us!, in F. Miraglia, G. Naletto, cit.

<sup>120</sup> See *Parlare civile. Comunicare senza discriminazione*, here: <http://www.parlarecivile.it/argomenti/immigrazione/sanatoria-truffa.aspx>.

<sup>121</sup> These are the points of the call to convene issued by the Committee on 17 October: No to racism, Regularisation for all, Repeal of the security package, Reception and rights for all, No to rejections and bilateral agreements providing for them, Net break in the link between the residence permit and the employment contract, Right of asylum for refugees and displaced persons, Final closure of the Identification and Expulsion Centres (CIE), No differences among Italians and foreigners in access to rights, Right to work, health, housing and education for all and everyone, Maintenance of residence permit for those who have lost their jobs, Against all forms of discrimination against gay, lesbian, transgender people, Alongside all workers and women workers fighting for the defense of the workplace.



security package and the release of the residence permit from the employment contract.

On 5 November, in Milan, five immigrants climbed the former Carlo Erba Tower, for the same reasons, supported by the *Immigrants in Italy* Committee. Three of them remained on the tower for almost a month.

The protests in Brescia and Milan were preceded, in January, by another self-organized mobilization in the deep South. Between January 7 and 10, what will be remembered as the "Rosarno rebellion" follows the racist attacks suffered by the foreign workers of the Plain, reaping the anger and frustration accumulated in years of exploitation and abuse. On the afternoon of the 7th, between 1.30 pm and 2 pm, shots from an air gun hit two African farm workers. A few hours later, four hundred migrants organized two roadblocks on Highway 18 and in another area of the town, then they walked to the city centre and damaged some cars and shop windows. Another march followed the next day. The rebellion triggered a "hunt" against immigrant workers which ended with the "voluntary" departure of 250 of them and the shameful deportation on police buses to Bari and Crotone of 748 more<sup>122</sup>.

It is always the farm workers who promote another important struggle a year and a half later: from the Boncuri farm in Nardò, in the province of Foggia, on July 30, 2011 the first self-organized strike of foreign farm workers employed in tomato harvesting. Workers asked for regular contracts, to increase the price per case or to be paid per hour, to abolish the "caporalato" irregular recruitment system, the opening of an office for employment in the countryside, safe public transport systems, sanitary facilities in the fields, houses and services<sup>123</sup>.

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<sup>122</sup> See the chapter by Veronica Iesué in this report.

<sup>123</sup> AA.VV., *Sulla pelle viva. Nardò: la lotta autorganizzata dei braccianti agricoli*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2012; Y. Sagnet, *Ama il tuo sogno. Vita e rivolta nella terra dell'oro rosso*, Fandango, Roma 2012.



Years later, the slums of the plain are still there, the conditions of exploitation have even worsened. Many workers have lost their lives in the countryside. And even today a surreal debate is taking place on whether or not to launch yet another selective regularization to deal with the shortage of agricultural labour due to the Covid-19 emergency. Those first protests of farm workers were nonetheless some of the most relevant experiences of self-organisation of migrants.

Also in 2011, a circular issued by the Minister of the Interior on April 1st closed access to the Identification and Expulsion Centres (CIE) and Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers (CARA) to journalists and anti-racist activists. The Circular offers the opportunity to restart the campaign for the closure of the detention centres even if, initially, the objective of LETCHEIN is to obtain the withdrawal of the circular. Especially in the initial phase, the campaign manages to involve a wide network of journalists and activists who obtain the support of several parliamentarians in organizing numerous visits to the detention centres that will help bring to light many violations and also to obtain the release of some illegally detained migrants. At the end of the year, the Maroni circular was revoked by the Minister Cancellieri. In the following years, LasciateCIEntrare continues to carry out valuable work in monitoring the CIEs, denouncing many cases of mismanagement of the centres, supporting the protests for their closure from Turin to Rome, from Trieste to Bologna. A goal that still remains totally unacknowledged by politics.

In May 2011, during a very aggressive election campaign in some large municipalities, the Lega Nord and Forza Italia publish a petition and put on posters stigmatizing Roma and Muslim people. Naga, a historical antiracist association in Milan, promotes an anti-discrimination appeal that for the first time in May 2012



leads to the important condemnation of a political party for discrimination on the basis of Article 2, paragraph 3 of Legislative Decree 215/2003<sup>124</sup>.

In the meantime, the promoting committee of the campaign "L'Italia sono anch'io" (I am Italy too) takes shape, with the aim of reforming the Citizenship Law n. 91/92 and introducing the active and passive electorate at local level for foreign citizens with a residence permit<sup>125</sup>. The campaign brings together 19 organizations and activates about 100 local committees on two citizens' initiative laws that will be filed to the House of Parliament, accompanied by 200,000 signatures, on March 7, 2012. An extraordinary popular mobilization that continues in different forms in the following years, in collaboration with the movement of young Italians without citizenship, with hearings and parliamentary meetings, sit-in meetings and press campaigns until the end of 2017, when the reform of the citizenship law is sacrificed by Parliament on the altar of the political majority<sup>126</sup>.

2011 is also the year in which the association Carta di Roma was born. The group launches a work of awareness and training in schools of journalism and in the world of professional journalists to promote proper information on migrants, refugees and Roma and minorities.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> See [http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/SentenzaNAGA\\_PdL+LN.pdf](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/SentenzaNAGA_PdL+LN.pdf). For a reconstruction of the facts, see later on the sheet dedicated to the event.

<sup>125</sup> The campaign was promoted by Acli, Arci, Asgi-Associazione studi giuridici sull'immigrazione, Caritas Italiana, Centro Astalli, Cgil, Cnca-Coordinamento nazionale delle comunità d'accoglienza, Comitato 1° Marzo, Coordinamento nazionale degli enti locali per la pace e i diritti umani, Emmaus Italia, Fcei – Federazione Chiese Evangeliche In Italia, Fondazione Migrantes, Libera, Lunaria, Il Razzismo Brutta Storia, Rete G2 - Seconde Generazioni, Sei Ugl, Tavola della Pace, Terra del Fuoco, Carlo Feltrinelli. The committee was presided by then Reggio Emilia mayor Graziano Delrio.

<sup>126</sup> The reform proposal obtained the approval of the House on October 3, 2015 and then silted up in the Senate in the following years, despite the pressure of the campaign and young Italians without citizenship. In 2017, public initiatives were organized on January 27, February 9, July 12, September 11, November 7, November 20 and December 20 and several meetings were held with representatives of the Senate, including the President.

<sup>127</sup> [www.cartadiroma.org](http://www.cartadiroma.org).



The entry into office of the "technical" Government, in November 2011, changes the context in which the movement finds itself working: the effects of the global economic crisis reach their peak and the axis of public debate temporarily shifts to structural policies; institutional rhetoric changes register and expels the most aggressive and discriminatory tones; the temporary decrease in landings leads to a reduction in the presence of migration on the political agenda. A few weeks after the Monti government took office, on December 9, 2011, Gianluca Casseri killed Modou Samb and Mor Diop in Florence and injured Moustapha Dieng during a racist raid in the centre of the city. The Government strongly condemned the incident. The reaction of the anti-racist movement was expressed mainly by the Senegalese community and the Tuscan associations that organized a national anti-racist demonstration in which about 20,000 people take part, on December 17.

2012 is above all a transition year. On 7 March, the first phase of the campaign closes. Italy is also in the process of handing over its citizens' initiative bills to the Chamber of Deputies, but Government and Parliament are busy on other fronts.

The organizations involved in the management of the reception system are engaged in an attempt to avoid that the end of ENA, scheduled for December 31, 2012, will result in the expulsion of thousands of people from the reception system, without a path of social inclusion for them. The problem arises especially for the most vulnerable people and, only for these, a circular of the Ministry of the Interior of February 2013 provides for the continuation of the reception extended to the Sprar<sup>128</sup>. In the month of September, the Government launched a new measure for the emergence of foreign labour (Legislative Decree 109/2012). Also in this case, the requirements (such as the need to prove the presence on Italian territory prior to December 31, 2011 with a document issued by the public administration and the

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<sup>128</sup> See Lunaria (Ed.), *I diritti non sono un costo. Immigrazione, welfare e finanza pubblica*, 2013, pp. 91-101, [http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/i\\_diritti\\_non\\_sono\\_un\\_costo-tot..pdf](http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/i_diritti_non_sono_un_costo-tot..pdf).





provision of high minimum incomes for the employers concerned) causes many problems and brings to the rejection of thousands of applications. Many associations and movements find themselves, therefore, involved in the promotion of a laborious task of pressuring on the prefectures and/or in the promotion of appeals against the rejections. Still in 2015, the procedure of emersion was not closed.

Some good news comes at the end of the year: the closing of the Italian section of the Stormfront website by Italian authorities and the arrest of four people involved in an investigation launched by the Rome Police Headquarters, also thanks to the reports of the associations<sup>129</sup>.

Since 2013, the numerous massacres of migrants in the Mediterranean have put migration policies back at the centre of the public debate and remain there almost uninterrupted until 2019. The drowning of 366 migrants near Lampedusa on October 3, 2013 marks the opening of a new phase that will force associations and movements to return to put all of their energies in the struggle to claim the right to arrive and be welcomed in Italy and Europe. The slogan "Let's stop the massacres" resonates in these years in many initiatives and mobilizations organized throughout the country<sup>130</sup>.

The Italian military mission Mare Nostrum started in October 2013 and saved the lives of more than 100,000 people was closed just one year later. Between 2014 and 2018, for a large part of the anti-racist world, the priority areas of intervention will therefore be two: dealing with the significant growth in demand for reception and intervene at sea when European States refuse to do so.

On the first front, many associations and social cooperatives are involved in the management of the binary reception system for asylum seekers and refugees: on the one hand the emergency system of the Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS)

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<sup>129</sup> See the profile of the episode by Paola Andrisani in this report.

<sup>130</sup> Probably the most important being the one in front of the Colosseum in Roma on June 15, 2015.





governed by the Prefectures, on the other hand the ordinary reception system for asylum seekers and refugees (SPRAR) managed by the municipalities. The number of people received has grown over the years: 66,066 in 2014, 103,792 in 2015, 176,554 in 2016, 183,681 in 2017, 135,858 in 2018 and they are still 105,142 at the end of 2019, despite the substantial closure of Italian ports to ships providing aid at sea. The sudden growth in the demand for accommodation causes quite a few distortions and several cases of mismanagement (mainly due to the role played in the reception system by unscrupulous private firms) that find great visibility in the media. The case called *Mafia capitale*, which Brings many people involved in the reception system to jail (December 2014), is just one of the episodes that will make news and will help to the campaign of delegitimization of the public reception system that is being skilfully exploited by the new leader of the Northern League.

Between 2014 and 2016 there will be a proliferation of conflicts in the territories that often see municipalities and national authorities in conflict, and the involvement of spontaneous and organized citizens' committees against reception projects. And this is precisely the issue that, together with that of the "landings", is ridden by the xenophobic and intolerant propaganda of the leader of the Northern League who, at least until mid-2019, manages to be central in the public debate. Perhaps it is no coincidence that on July 4, 2016, in Fermo, Emmanuel Chidi Namdi, an asylum-seeker hosted with his partner in a community centre in Capodarco, was killed in the street by a right-wing extremist. The demonstration of solidarity with his companion remains largely entrusted to the antiracist militants of the city; very few initiatives are organized in other cities.<sup>131</sup>

On the second front, as early as 2014, international NGOs (including Moas, Proactiva Open Arms, Life Boat, Jugend Rettet, Boat Refugee, Sea Watch, Sos Mediterranee,

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<sup>131</sup>See: Chiodo S., "L'omicidio di Fermo", in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo. Quarto libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Roma 2017.



Msf, Sea-eye, Mission Lifeline), intervene in the search and rescue missions at sea for migrants crossing the Mediterranean; in addition to these, in 2018 Mediterranea starts its all-Italian mission. Thanks to these missions, launched to try to fill the void left by Mare Nostrum and the progressive disengagement of European governments in sea rescue missions, thousands of migrants are rescued and saved. But in times of cultural and political hegemony of the right across Europe, saving people and welcoming them had become a sin.

And if on February 28, 2015 the leader of the Lega, who arrives in Rome to sanction the alliance with the most extreme right wing and involve them in his national party project, finds an active city movement that aggregates more than 20,000 people in a peaceful but very clear in its message (#maiconsalvini), on October 19, 2019 the Lega fills Piazza San Giovanni, without the city being able to organize anything significant to challenge it. Years of violent and pervasive xenophobic propaganda, the last year of the Gentiloni government and a year and a half of the first Conte government weakened the movement.

The humanitarian shudder<sup>132</sup>, which shocked Italy and Europe on September 3, 2015, when the photo of the body of little Alan Kurdi found lifeless on the beach in Bodrum went around the world, faded very quickly, to make way for a campaign of criminalisation of solidarity. From 2017, with the complicity of the Gentiloni Government and its Minister of the Interior, this campaign delegitimizes to a large part of public opinion the work of any person associated with the reception and solidarity with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

With the arrival of the new Minister of the Interior Minniti, the movement finds itself in a grip: on the one hand, the daily attack by the Lega and the extreme right movements on social networks and on the ground; on the other hand, the strategy of

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<sup>132</sup> A March of barefoot men and women, launched in a few days by director Andrea Segre, crosses more than 30 Italian cities on September 11, bringing thousands of people on the streets.



a Minister of the Interior who, with the promotion of two law decrees, accentuates the security positioning of the centre-left in matters of immigration and asylum, in the hope of stopping the growth of consensus from which the opposition is benefiting. In addition to the launch of a "security package" which in many ways recalls the Maroni one of a few years earlier, the Minister rides the campaign already launched on several fronts against the NGOs involved in SAR missions<sup>133</sup>.

The illusion held by some national organizations of being able to reorient the government goals through advocacy initiatives is unfortunately doomed to failure. Nor, on the other hand, are public mobilizations able to involve much more than "insiders": in the face of the communication machine that the opposition leader has meanwhile set up, especially online, even attempts to network and join forces to raise public awareness have had little success.

The only exception was the demonstration promoted in Milan on May 20, 2017, with the support of the municipal administration, a few weeks after the conversion into law of the two Minniti-Orlando decrees: thousands of people took part by adhering to a manifesto that took a generic stand against racism and for the welcoming of migrants that would bring together the most critical voices of the new course and the party to which the Minister of the Interior belongs under the slogan "Together without walls"<sup>134</sup>.

The only battle that could be won, as it was shared by a large part of public opinion, was the one of the reform of the law on citizenship: many initiatives in support of the reform were held throughout 2017, also thanks to the obstinacy of the young *Italiani*

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<sup>133</sup> The main objective, in a Europe more divided than ever before precisely on migration policies, is to stop the arrival of migrants by sea, a priority that has been made explicit since the adoption of the European Immigration Agenda adopted in September 2015.

<sup>134</sup> A new edition of the event is held on March 2, 2019 and sees the gathering of about 200 thousand people.



*senza cittadinanza*, and managed to involve schools, media and culture across the board. Unfortunately, in vain.

It is in this unfavourable context that the *Io ero straniero* (I was a foreigner) campaign handed over to Parliament, on 27 October 2017, a bill that represents one of the few examples of proactivity of the anti-racist movement in recent years on crucial aspects, including those of migration policies. The discussion of the bill would start April 2019 at the Constitutional Affairs Commission, the hope is that it will not be locked in a drawer like the reform on citizenship.

The lower point of this path is 2018, one of the black years of Italian racism. Its beginning can be symbolically identified in the racist raid carried out by Luca Traini on 3 February in Macerata<sup>135</sup>, in the middle of the election campaign. The reaction that followed highlights the weakness of the democratic and anti-racist world in the face of the unstoppable advance of the right. The organization of a national demonstration on February 10 by the Sisma social centre is in fact boycotted by the Mayor and the Minister of the Interior and risks being banned. Only thanks to the protests of Fiom and some left-wing personalities, the demonstration takes place and about 10 thousand people take part. Some large national organizations withdraw their support. This is one of the crucial passages of recent years, because it sanctions the substantial subordination of some areas of civil society, in particular the more organized ones, to the agenda dictated by politics and the total subordination of the political forces that define themselves as left-wing to the agenda of the right.

The entry into office of the Conte I Government with Salvini as Minister of the Interior, in June 2018, kicks off a phase in which the only possible objective becomes that of resisting. The series of measures adopted by the Minister only goes in one direction: to stop even more than his predecessor did, the arrival of migrants by sea,

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<sup>135</sup> See Grazia Naletto in this report, section 2.3.1.



to limit as much as possible the rights of foreign people who are already in Italy and, in this way, to reduce the demand for reception<sup>136</sup>.

The whole summer of 2018 is marked by a head-on collision between the minister, the NGOs and that part of society that does not subscribe to the policies of rejection. Dozens of initiatives are promoted throughout Italy to demand from time to time that migrants be allowed to land<sup>137</sup>. This in a context in which the aggressive rhetoric disseminated on the web is flanked by the violence of real life. The killing in San Ferdinando of trade unionist and laborer Soumaila Sacko on 2 June marks the beginning of a summer marked by individual and group violence that targets immigrants, particularly those of African origin<sup>138</sup>.

Attempts to organize a coordinated protest against racism unfortunately fails, but civil society did not give up. Various initiatives of explicit condemnation of institutional and popular racism are taking place across the country in many ways. Starting from the Sabir Festival, organized by Arci, the proposal of a mobilization

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<sup>136</sup> D.L. October 4, 2018, n. 113 *“Disposizioni urgenti in materia di protezione internazionale e immigrazione, sicurezza pubblica, nonché misure per la funzionalità del Ministero dell’Interno e l’organizzazione e il funzionamento dell’Agenzia nazionale per l’amministrazione e la destinazione dei beni sequestrati e confiscati alla criminalità organizzata”*, turned into law L. December 1, 2018, n. 132 and the so called Security decree bis, il D.L. June 14, 2019, n. 53 *“Disposizioni urgenti in materia di ordine e sicurezza pubblica”*, turned into law L. August 8, n. 77.

<sup>137</sup> We remember a few. Already in April, Father Zanotelli launched a hunger strike against the institutional racism of the government. The case of the ship *Acquarius*, which was prevented from docking in an Italian port, opened a spontaneous mobilization on June 11 under the slogan #Apriteiporti. On 7 July Libera, together with ARCI, Legambiente, ANPI invite to wear a red T-shirt to ask for a welcome that combines security and solidarity. On the 11th of July, members of the *“Rete rimaniamo umani”* chain themselves in front of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport. On July 18, the movement of the red hands begins to demonstrate weekly in Montecitorio. On August 3, some local administrators launch the manifesto *“Inclusion for an open society”*. On 9 August, the FCEI spreads a Manifesto for the reception. On August 19, an appeal on the Diciotti case is addressed to President Mattarella.

<sup>138</sup> See: Lunaria (Ed.), *Il ritorno della razza*, giugno 2018, and Lunaria (Ed.), *Un’estate all’insegna del razzismo*, ottobre 2018: [https://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Focus-N4\\_ilritornodellarazza.pdf](https://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Focus-N4_ilritornodellarazza.pdf) and here: <https://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/FOCUS62018unestateallinsegna delrazzismo.pdf>.



"With migrants, against barbarism" in different Italian cities for October 27th. On November 10 the national demonstration "Unity and solidarity against the government, racism and the Salvini decree" brings about 40 thousand people to the streets of Rome.

And it's not just the protest. Solidarity from below manages to organize itself by concretely ensuring that reception and inclusion that have been removed from the institutional agenda. Solidarity with Mimmo Lucano, the campaign to support the children of Lodi<sup>139</sup>, unjustly excluded from access to the school canteen and school bus service, the support of some mayors and the many legal actions promoted by Asgi to ensure the registration of asylum seekers, the resistance actions carried out by the occupations of the fighting movements for the home (many of which have been evicted<sup>140</sup>) and also a growing online activism in terms of communication try to react to the strategy of exclusion. Precisely in 2018, the network begins to convey many examples of viral antiracism, mostly acted by those who suffer racist discrimination and violence directly on their skin, with public complaints, ironic messages or video complaints. Spontaneous individual activism, mostly triggered by young people, seems to have a greater capacity to create empathy and to penetrate the meshes of hostility and indifference than the organized one<sup>141</sup>.

In some cases, these initiatives manage to break through the wall of hostility and resentment even online, as in the case of the Sea Watch captain Carola Rackete<sup>142</sup> who, in June 2019, conquered a large part of public opinion with her act of resistance and a clear, human and politically solid language. Carola Rackete marks perhaps the

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<sup>139</sup> For further details see Martino Mazzonis in this report.

<sup>140</sup> Among the most violent evictions, we remember those that took place in Rome in Piazza Indipendenza on August 24, 2017 and in Primavalle on July 15, 2019. Two different governments and two different Interior Ministers, united by their strategy of striking by force at the many housing occupations in the city which are largely inhabited by migrants and refugees.

<sup>141</sup> For further details see Lunaria, (Ed.), *Il ritorno della razza*, mentioned above.

<sup>142</sup> For further details see Paola Andrisani in this report.



first impasse in the xenophobic propaganda of the Interior Minister from the Lega and restores strength to all those groups such as Mediterranea, that, despite everything continued to operate at sea.

On 13 June 2019, the *Io accolgo* campaign, with its flashmob in the Spanish Steps, relaunched a message of welcoming and peace. The intention was to limit as much as possible the effects of the Salvini laws, encouraging widespread solidarity.

Unexpectedly, on August 20, the Lega/Movimento 5 Stelle government fell. A new turning point arouses expectations and hopes in at least part of the anti-racist movement. A political appeal of the campaign addressed to the new Government to demand the immediate withdrawal of the Salvini package is struggling to gather support<sup>143</sup>. The "Salvini laws" are still there. The Memorandum with Libya was extended on February 2, 2020.

The decade opened with the global economic crisis and ended with another extraordinary event, the proclamation of the state of emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic under which Italian ports are declared "unsafe". A very difficult moment for migrants and the anti-racist world called to reinvent, once again, solidarity from below, proximity services and its advocacy strategies. It is difficult to predict the outcome of these months of unprecedented "social distancing" in our country. The social and economic effects of the emergency will surely require a new extraordinary effort to prevent those who are always ready to breathe new life into the fire of racism from drawing from them.

A systemic vision of public policies, which stops relegating migration and immigration policies to the corner of "special policies", the further development of

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<sup>143</sup> The "friendly" government leads to a more prudent and diplomatic approach that does not seem to have helped so far. The appeal basically calls for the abolition of the "Salvini laws", the cancellation of the Memorandum with Libya, the reintroduction of the permit for humanitarian reasons, the reopening of the Siproimi (ex Sprar) to asylum seekers, the reopening of Italian ports to ships providing aid at sea and a stop to rejections in Libya. It can be consulted here: <http://ioaccolgo.it/firma-lappello>



experiences of self-organized migrants' movement, a greater transversality of the actors involved and a political and cultural agenda more independent from the one dictated by politics, could perhaps facilitate this task, which, of course, is not going to be easy.





## **PART 2.**

# **10 years and more of Chronicles of Ordinary Racism**



## Racism in Italy. Official Data

### *Lunaria*

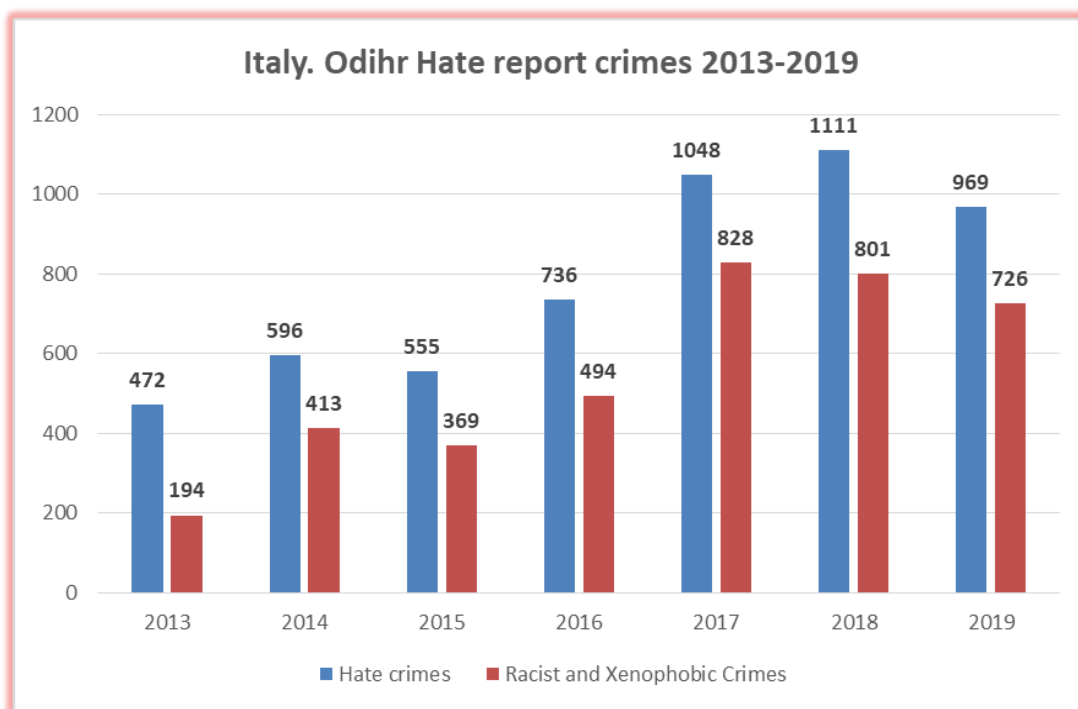
The most reliable official source of reference is the one offered by the ODIHR/OSCE Observatory which publishes every year an international report on hate crimes, fed by official data provided by the Police and OSCAD (Observatory for Security against Discriminatory Acts)<sup>144</sup> and supplemented by information provided by civil society organizations. The latest published data available refer to 2018, but OSCAD has anticipated in Italy the data provided to ODIHR for 2019, although not consolidated: the number of reported hate crimes has shown an increasing trend from 472 crimes reported in 2013, to 1,111 in 2018. The non-consolidated figure for 2019 reports 969 discriminatory crimes, recording a slight reversal of the trend.

The data provided are disaggregated on the basis of three motives (or rather categories of motives): xenophobia/racism<sup>145</sup>, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability. This breakdown shows a clear prevalence of racist and xenophobic crimes, from 194 reported in 2013, equal to 41.1% of the total, to 726 recorded in 2019, 74.9% of the total.

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<sup>144</sup> The data are provided by combining data from the "Investigation System - SDI" (extracted from the CED interforces) that relate to crimes with discriminatory purposes that have "regulatory coverage" (i.e. relating to "race", ethnicity, nationality, religion and membership of national linguistic minorities), with OSCAD reports that concern discriminatory areas without specific regulatory coverage (relating to sexual orientation and gender identity). For disability, are combined the SDI data relating to the dispute of the aggravating circumstance referred to in Article. 36 Law 104/1992 with the OSCAD reports concerning the specific area of discrimination.

<sup>145</sup> This category includes crimes recorded in the SDI (Sistema di Indagine Interforze) database with a motive denoting prejudice against "race"/skin color, ethnicity Rome and Sinti, nationality, language and religion.



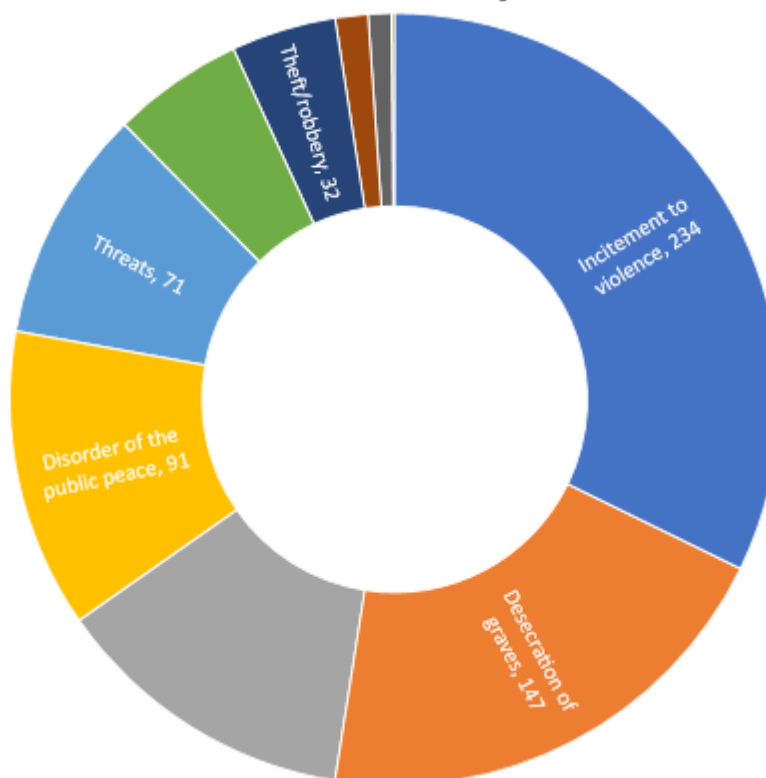
Source: Lunaria on Osdad/Odihr data, <https://hatecrime.osce.org/italy>

Note: data of 2019 are not consolidated

In the note with which OSCAD has disseminated its latest data, it is specified that "for the ethnic/racial/religious it was possible to provide an overall figure since the legislation in force on the subject does not distinguish the specific discriminatory purposes).

The available data are also divided according to the type of crime. The graph below shows that among the reported crimes of xenophobic and racist matrix in 2019 in Italy, the cases of incitement to violence, desecration of graves, physical violence and disturbance of public peace were the most numerous.

## 2019. ITALY. Hate crimes motivated by racism and xenophobia



Source: OSCAD/ODIHR, <https://hatecrime.osce.org/italy>

Note: provisional data

Unfortunately, recent data are not publicly available regarding the legal proceedings initiated and the convictions adopted to prosecute this type of crime.

The other official source of reference is UNAR (National Office for Racial Discrimination). The office, established in 2003 and located at the Department of Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council, has the task of ensuring the right to equal treatment and to combat discrimination by collecting reports, providing assistance to victims, carrying out research and analysis, promoting awareness raising activities, reporting to Government and Parliament. The scope of the office is different



from that of OSCAD: UNAR deals with cases of discrimination that have no criminal relevance.

The last published data refer to 2018<sup>146</sup>. Out of 2,473 reports received during the year through the call center, associations that are part of the Unar network, web monitoring, press monitoring and other residual sources, 2,331 were deemed relevant, i.e. actual cases of discrimination.

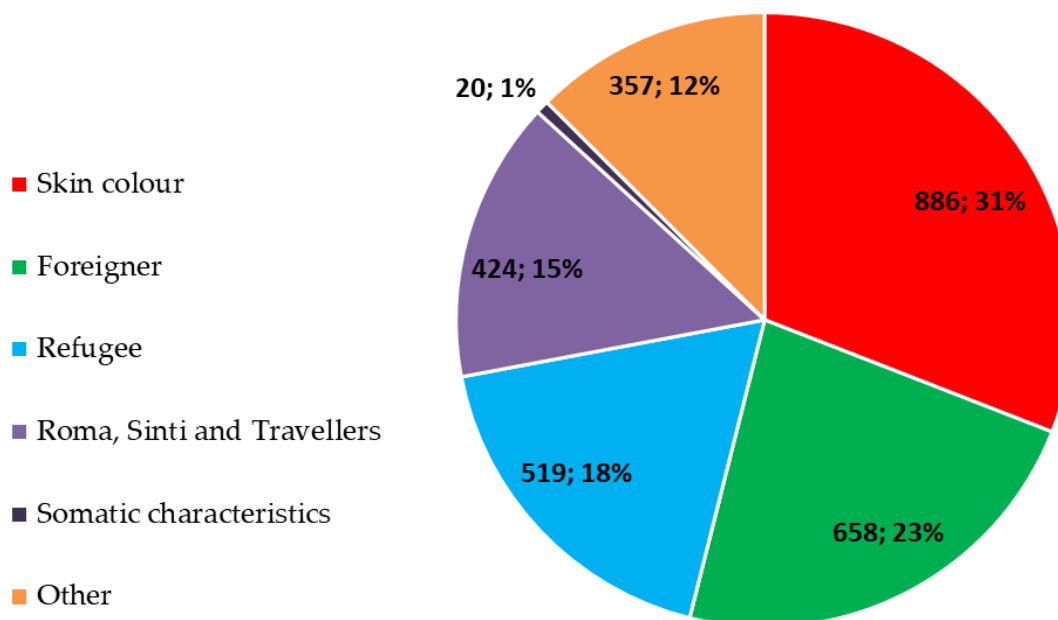
The cases handled by the office during the year, however, also include reports received in 2017 for a total of 4,068 cases. It is on these cases that the office offers some information on the discriminatory motive. And also in this case, as in previous years, the "ethnic-racial" motive is the most recurrent (70.4%), followed by religious (10.1%) and sexual orientation (7%). Discrimination based on prejudice related to disability (5.4%), age (4.1%) and multiple prejudices (3%) are less recurrent.

In the 2018 report, details are provided on the specific motives that fall within the context of "ethnic-racial" and religious prejudice that allow to identify the groups most affected by discrimination reported to UNAR.

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<sup>146</sup> See: UNAR, Report to the President of the Council of Ministers on the activity carried out and to the Parliament on the effective application of the principle of equal treatment and the effectiveness of protection mechanisms, 2018, available here: <http://www.unar.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Relazione-al-Parlamento-e-al-Presidente-del-Consiglio-2018.pdf>.

### Racist discrimination treated by UNAR. Year 2018.



Source: Lunaria on Unar data

The colour of the skin is the motive in 886 cases of discrimination treated, about one third of the discrimination of "ethnic-racial" nature that the office dealt with in 2018. A fact that seems to confirm what Lunaria has long denounced, the strong return of ancient forms of biological racism that, in 2018 in particular, have returned to affect "black" people.

The above data are of an administrative nature, i.e. produced by the authorities responsible for combating discrimination and racism with monitoring and assistance to victims, complaint collection and investigation activities. Although they constitute a fundamental basis of information for the knowledge and analysis of the evolution of



racism in our country, they represent only that part of discrimination and racist violence that are the subject of complaint and reporting.

As noted by ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance) in its latest Report dedicated to Italy, the main limitation that characterizes our country from the point of view of data collection is the persistent lack of a coordinated, systematic and transparent national system of data collection on discrimination and racist violence (ECRI, 2016) <sup>147</sup>. The data collected by UNAR (National Office against "racial" discrimination), OSCAD (Observatory for Security against discriminatory acts), in the database of the Investigation System of the Judicial Police (SDI), the Ministry of Justice and ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics), differ in fact for the purposes and methods of detection, for the time of publication, for the classification systems adopted and for the heterogeneity of the field of observation.

The official data must therefore be read taking into account the limits that characterize them. In any case, it should be noted that, in particular in the last three years, institutional commitments have multiplied to initiate greater collaboration between the various competent authorities. <sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> The report is available here: <https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Italy/ITA-CbC-V-2016-019-ITA.pdf>.

<sup>148</sup> Oscan organized between 2018 and 2019 two seminars in which it brought together Unar, the Ministry of Justice, Istat and some associations in order to exchange views and good practices on data collection methodologies. Unar has recently started the establishment of a hate speech table composed of representatives of the ministries most involved, Oscan, Istat and some national associations.



## **Data of Cronache di ordinario razzismo**

### *Lunaria*

The following tables and graphs give an overview of verbal and physical violence, property damage and xenophobic or racist discrimination documented by Lunaria thanks to reports received from victims, witnesses, other associations or press reports.

These are the cases that are summarized in our online database freely accessible here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/il-razzismo-quotidiano/>

Between 1 January 2008 and 31 March 2020 there were 7,426 documented cases (7.267 until 31 December 2019).

For the most part, there were 5,340 verbal violence, followed by 1,008 cases of discrimination, 901 physical violence against the person and 177 damage to property.

Discriminatory propaganda is the majority (3,725 cases) of verbal violence. The tools used are different: from network channels (sites, blogs, social networks) to verbal statements, from banners to posters; some cases of incorrect, violent and explicitly discriminatory information are also documented.

These are accompanied by 1,181 cases of offenses, threats or verbal harassment pronounced by individuals, while there are 434 different forms of public demonstrations (marches, garrisons, collections of signatures) that have chosen migrants, asylum seekers and refugees as targets.

The most worrying data concern the 901 physical violence against people and 177 damage to property or property related (or traced) to the presence of foreign citizens. Although the data documented by Lunaria do not have any statistical representativeness, we think that we have to look very carefully at the anomalous recurrence of physical assaults, carried out individually or in groups, that we have documented in the two-year period 2018-2019. The years 2009 and 2018 are the worst in





the period considered, at least through the lens of our observatory. And perhaps it is not irrelevant to remember the analogy between the tones, themes and “arguments” that have crossed the public debate on migration in both years.

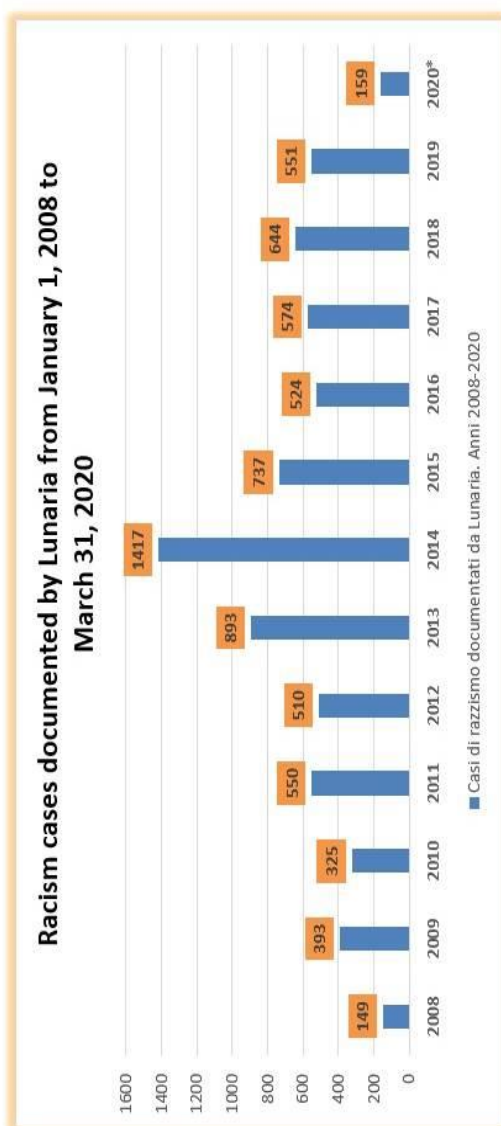
Among the 1,008 discriminations found, in 663 cases, those responsible are institutional (political or administrative) actors. This is also a number that should not be underestimated: it shows us how much still needs to be done to prevent xenophobia and racism even in those places that should be at the forefront in preventing and fighting them. The documented discriminations committed by private citizens are 345.



Racism in Italy. Verbal violence, physical violence, damage against property and discrimination documented by Lunaria.														
Years 2008-2020														
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	Totale
A TO VERBAL VIOLENCE	28	135	139	309	362	735	1286	612	419	423	405	378	109	5340
B PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	71	132	64	87	73	75	47	43	28	48	132	83	18	901
C DAMAGE AGAINST PROPERTY OR THINGS	11	19	6	14	9	4	10	18	15	25	29	9	8	177
D DISCRIMINATION	39	107	116	140	66	79	74	64	62	78	78	81	24	1008
	149	393	325	550	510	893	1417	737	524	574	644	551	159	7426

Source: Lunaria, [www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org)

\* at 31 March 2020



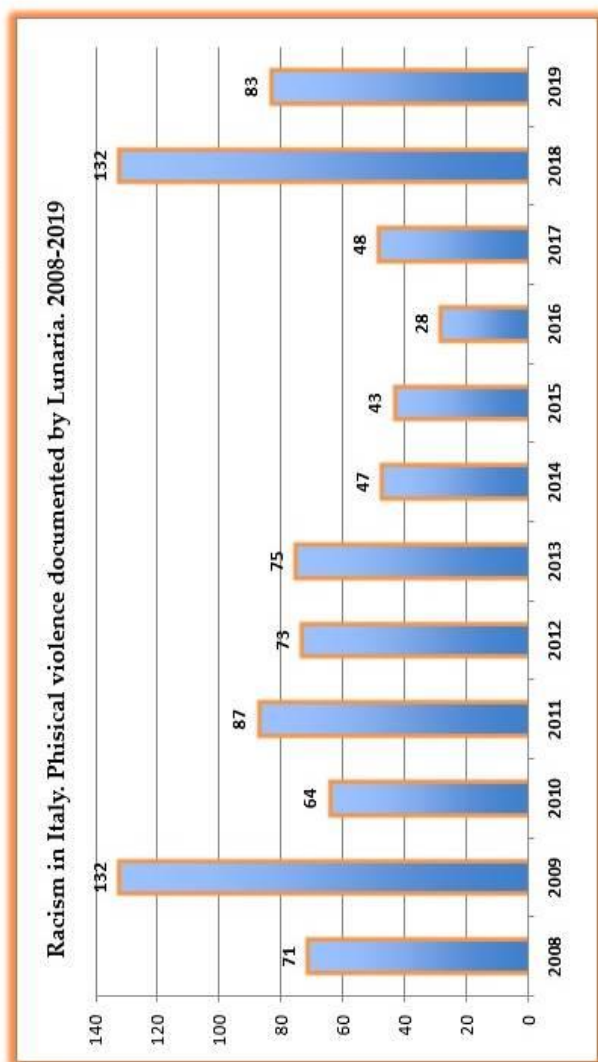


Source: Lunaria, [www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org)

Racism in Italy. Areas of verbal violence, physical violence, damage against property and discrimination documented by Lunaria. Years 2008-2019													
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
<b>Areas</b>													
D1 ROMA CAMPS	11	15	18	23	24	50	38	14	6	7	5	3	214
D2 HOUSE	6	7	12	10	4	6	7	3	5	16	17	24	117
D3 DENTENTION CENTERS	3	11	2	19	2	8	4	0	0	4	1	0	54
D4 INFORMATION	0	12	15	35	93	276	498	172	44	74	84	80	1.383
D5 WORK	12	18	20	25	20	19	5	5	2	9	15	7	157
D6 PUBLIC EXERCISES	7	30	31	27	18	12	11	10	13	9	12	19	199
D7 SCHOOL	9	22	17	23	11	22	23	15	14	9	15	17	197
D8 HEALTH	0	7	3	11	4	5	33	3	10	4	9	4	93
D9 PUBLIC SERVICES	12	14	21	18	12	11	9	6	9	9	11	24	156
D10 RELATIONS WITH INSTITUTIONS	20	64	59	87	68	80	183	127	75	43	45	45	896
D11 SOCIAL RELATIONS	32	52	38	57	67	72	68	60	51	66	163	137	863
D12 PUBLIC LIFE	24	123	64	148	127	246	461	282	250	94	130	63	2.012
D13 SPORT	4	18	25	66	59	86	77	40	45	57	59	121	657
D14 OTHER	9	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
D15 RECEPTION	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	173	78	7	258
<b>TOTALE</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>1.417</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>574</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>7.267</b>

Source: Lunaria, [www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org)





Racism in Italy. Motive of the cases documented by Lunaria. Years 2008-2020														
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	Total
MOTIVE														
A1 National or ethnic origins	104	245	210	352	342	575	1.111	533	397	408	384	258	61	4.980
A2 Somatic traits	30	79	66	92	88	186	130	82	92	135	224	258	76	1.538
A3 Religious affiliation	12	53	42	83	76	112	172	117	34	31	35	35	22	824
A 4 Cultural practices	3	16	7	16	4	20	3	5	1	0	1	0	0	76
Not detected	0	0	0	7	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
	149	393	325	550	510	893	1.417	737	524	574	644	551	159	7.426

Source: Lunaria, [www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org)

\* at 31 March 2020

Racism in Italy. Authors from the cases documented by Lunaria. Years 2008-2020														
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*	
Authors	Totale													Totale
P1 Individuals	43	116	129	155	146	217	180	157	138	137	259	213	56	1946
P2 Groups	64	134	39	115	84	146	215	117	172	181	97	54	19	1437
P3 Institutional Actors	38	125	131	212	159	308	727	393	166	143	153	101	22	2678
P4 Sports characters/typhoseries	4	17	22	62	60	82	75	39	47	54	55	123	29	669
P5 Media operators	0	1	3	6	60	140	220	31	1	10	4	8	2	486
P6 Unknown	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	49	76	52	31	210
TOTAL	149	393	325	550	510	893	1417	737	524	574	644	551	159	7426
Source: Lunaria, <a href="http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org">www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org</a>														
* at 31 March 2020														

Racism in Italy. Number of cases made in group by type of group. Years 2008-2019													
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
<b>Groups</b>	<b>Total</b>												
Unknown groups	24	42	1	29	13	111	4	0	0	6	0	0	230
Non-partisan groups	31	57	19	25	19	8	24	17	40	70	36	37	383
Far right groups	8	22	11	43	45	3	143	67	114	86	55	17	614
Leghisti groups	1	13	8	18	7	24	44	33	18	19	6	0	191
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>1.418</b>

Source: Lunaria, [www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org)

Racism in Italy. Age of the victim of the cases documented by Lunaria. Years 2008-2020													
Years	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020*
<b>Age of the victim</b>	<b>Totale</b>												
Minors	18	32	24	35	16	42	25	27	19	36	46	55	9
Young people	29	70	71	95	72	90	85	53	35	113	214	230	51
Adults	42	97	59	90	91	120	72	28	24	46	76	88	29
Senior	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	4	4
Not detected	60	193	170	330	330	640	1.234	629	446	378	306	174	66
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>1.417</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>574</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>159</b>

Source: Lunaria, [www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org)

\* at 31 March 2020



## 2008-2019: eleven years of ordinary racism in Italy

*Grazia Naletto*

7,426 are the cases of discrimination and racism that we documented between January 1, 2008 and March 31, 2020. Among them, 901 are the stories of people who have been offended, insulted, threatened, beaten or even killed for belonging to a stigmatized, despised, dehumanized minority.

Among them are Abdul Salam Guibre, killed in Milan on September 14, 2008, officially for a biscuit theft; Kwame Antwi Julius Francis (31), Affun Yeboa Eric (25), Christopher Adams (28), El Hadji Ababa, Samuel Kwako (26), Jeemes Alex, 28 and Joseph Ayimbora, victims of the racist mafia laughter in Castel Volturno on September 18, 2008; Emmanuel Bonsu, beaten to death "by mistake" by a group of traffic policemen in Parma on 28 September 2008; Alina Bonar Diaciuk, left to die in a police station at Villa Opicina on 16 April 2012; Muhammad Shahzad Khan, beaten to death in Rome on September 18, 2014 because he had disturbed the quiet of the neighborhood with his prayers; Emmanuel Chidi Namdi, killed on the streets of Fermo on July 5, 2016, because he dared to react to an insult addressed to his partner; Wilson Kofi, 20 years old, Omar Fadera, 23 years old, Gideon Azeke, 25 years old, Jennifer Otiotio, 25 years old, Mahmadou Touré, 28 years old, Festus Omagbon, 32 years old, all wounded during the racist raid carried out by the "avenger" Luca Traini in Macerata on 3 February 2018; Soumaila Sacko, shot dead in San Calogero on 8 June 2018.

7,426. That's a high number. And yet, we know it is approximate by default. Xenophobia, racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and ziganophobia are difficult to quantify, given that a majority of injustices, discrimination and racist violence remain confined to the invisibility of the silence of those who suffer them and to the silence of the many who watch passively and, therefore, also accomplices.





The number, however, is one we must underscore in order to fulfill the commitment we made when, in 2009, we published our first white paper and, again, when, in 2011, we began to make available online the information collected, on the website [cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://cronachediordinariorazzismo.org): to tell the daily racism, case by case, day by day, trying to restore humanity and memory to women and men who suffer it on their own skin, often reduced to a name and a surname mentioned in a brief local news report, with no mention of the discriminatory nature of the violations suffered.

We have been doing this for twelve years with the aim of breaking down the wall of denial, omission and removal<sup>149</sup>, which for too long has inhibited the Italian public debate on discrimination and xenophobic and racist violence, treated punctually and systematically as acts of isolated individuals (maybe with mental problems).

The number 7,426 serves us, therefore, first and foremost to remind us that xenophobia and racism, far from being extraordinary and impromptu phenomena attributable to lone wolves, have been rooted in our country for a long time and are part of a context, i.e. they are social, structured, ordinary and systemic phenomena, in which collective actors play a central role: institutions, parties and media operators, first and foremost. Institutional racism has always attracted our attention, in the belief that forms of media and popular racism largely stem from it<sup>150</sup>.

### *A methodological premise*

In order to organize our work, we have first of all shared a definition of racism, indicating with this term "any theory, ideology, idea, attitude, statement, act and behaviour that aims to legitimize, incite, instigate or commit discrimination, abuse,

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149 These are real communicative strategies that structure and sediment the words of racism as G. Faso well explains, "La lingua del razzismo: alcune parole chiave", in G. Naletto (ed.), *Rapporto sul razzismo in Italia*, Manifestolibri, Rome 2009, pp. 29-36.

150 On the systemic nature of racism Annamaria Rivera: *Regole e roghi*, Dedalo, Bari 2009, *Razzismo. Gli atti, le parole, la propaganda*, Dedalo, Bari, 2020.



harassment, threats, verbal or physical violence against individuals or groups under the pretext of their national or ethnic origin, religious beliefs and practices or gender, age, somatic traits, sexual orientation, state of ability, real or alleged cultural difference". We have, therefore, narrowed our scope of observation to the racism that affects citizens of foreign origin on an individual or group level because of their nationality or national or ethnic origin, their religious beliefs and practices, their somatic traits, customs, cultural practices, value systems and beliefs, other than majority or presumed majority ones.

Using this definition, we have designed and structured the online database separating discrimination, verbal and physical violence and harm that has a xenophobic and racist matrix, to offer a brief description of what happened and some basic information (the date and place of the event, the source of the information). Much more information could be collected, but we are not able to detect it in all cases: the motive and scope of the discrimination, the profiles of the victims and aggressors (age, nationality), the individual or collective character of the act/ behaviour; the possible political affiliation of the aggressors.

The gathering of data is carried out through daily monitoring of the press and reports received online by victims, witnesses, NGOs and civil rights groups. In recent years, an additional source of information, used with due caution, is offered by the various social networks.

Although based on a well established system of sources, the monitoring work is influenced by internal and external factors. The greater attention paid to specific forms of racism in different phases<sup>151</sup>, media trends which alternates periods of over-representation and moments of total removal of discrimination and racist violence, the

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<sup>151</sup> We have dedicated specific papers to the analysis of racist propaganda in 2014, protests against reception in 2017, institutional discrimination in 2018, political hate speech in 2019.



limitation of access to the archives of some newspapers, especially local ones, are all factors that impact the results of our work.

For all these reasons our database is conceived as a memory repository of discrimination and racist violence. It is not a database from which data can be extrapolated to produce statistically representative elaborations.

It would be easy to make a quantitative interpretation, as many do on the basis of much less information than the one we gather, but it would not be correct from a deontological point of view. What we can propose more modestly is a reasoned account of that part of everyday racism that we are able to document.

We do so, in the second part of this report, starting with a brief reconstruction of political and institutional racism and twenty-two examples of ordinary racism that we chose following two main threads.

First, some of the most serious racist incidents have had a judicial follow-up, this marks a difference with eleven years ago, when we published our first White Paper. It seemed useful to reconstruct the motivations that led some judges to recognise the discriminatory, xenophobic or racist nature of the violations committed.

We highlight other cases with the aim to exemplify the complexity and plurality of the interactions that can develop between physical and verbal violence, political and virtual debate and concrete social behaviours, institutional statements and mainstream media information, editorial choices and public opinion orientation. The tendency to focus, sometimes rhetorically, on the racist discourse much more than on physical violence, leads us to stress the complementarity between words and deeds that characterizes much racism in Italy during the last decade.

*2008-2011: the normative legitimacy of xenophobia and racism*



The first phase coincides with the entry into office of the Berlusconi IV<sup>152</sup> Government which, introducing a *security bill* drafted by the then Minister of Interior Maroni, inaugurates to all intents and purposes what we in 2009 called a *process of institutional and normative legitimation* of discrimination and racism. The "Maroni package" takes up the project started in 2002 with the approval of Law No. 189, better known as the "Bossi-Fini Law", introducing the crime of illegal entry and stay and the one providing for an aggravating penalty for crimes committed by foreign citizens without documents, the choice to treat the legal condition of the foreigner with a "special jurisprudence" that has public security at its core<sup>153</sup>.

The security package, apart from intervening in many aspects of foreign citizens' life, is a set of "manifest" regulations which have the principal purpose of transmitting a precise political and cultural message to the public opinion: that of the will to restrict, compress, sacrifice the rights of foreign citizens in order to favour, no matter what, their rejection, expulsion, exclusion. The message is that of "zero tolerance" towards "irregular" immigration, but also of the institutional rejection of foreigners as such, explicit and programmed at all levels. Having given mayors special powers in matters of urban security, as Law No. 94/2009 does, declines the policies of rejection also at the local level<sup>154</sup>.

Between August 9, 2008 and March 9, 2009, ANCI (the Municipalities Association) surveyed more than 600 local ordinances in this realm. This is, in many cases, what Bontempelli called the "grotesque side of racism"<sup>155</sup>, which unfortunately

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<sup>152</sup> Berlusconi IV: May 8, 2008/November 16, 2011.

<sup>153</sup> A. Caputo, "Immigrazione e politiche del diritto: dal testo unico del 1998 ai recenti interventi sulla sicurezza", in G. Naletto, cit., pp. 97-104.

<sup>154</sup> It is precisely the decision to increase the powers of mayors in the field of urban security that links this and the subsequent security packages adopted at the initiative of the former Interior Ministers Minniti (2017) and Salvini (2018-2019).

<sup>155</sup> S. Bontempelli, "Ordinanza pazza. I Sindaci e il versante grottesco del razzismo", in G. Naletto, cit., pp. 113-122.



soon takes on a less bizarre face, limiting the access of foreign citizens to many welfare benefits or clearing dozens of Roma camps, without providing alternative housing solutions. Few examples: the municipalities of Brescia, Palazzago, Adro, Latisana, Tradate and the Lombardy Region have restricted the access of foreign citizens to new born services; the municipality of Villa D'Ogna restricted the access to unemployment benefits; the municipality of Milan excluded foreigners from economic contributions for low-income families; the municipalities of Adro, Ciampino, Montecchio Maggiore and Goito restricted excluded foreign children from childcare; the municipalities of Alzano Lombardo, Adro, Majano, and the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region did not give foreigners any rent support contribution<sup>156</sup>.

A series of incidents such as those is in this context of political and institutional legitimization of racism, combined with a media discourse that too often associates immigration and criminality<sup>157</sup>, that the Ponticelli pogrom, for example, and the murder of Abdul Guibre in Milan<sup>158</sup> are placed, the mafia massacre of Castel Volturno, the institutional beating of Emmanuel Bonsu<sup>159</sup>, the media havoc about the "monsters" of the Caffarella, two innocent men who were exposed as rapists<sup>160</sup>, the shots against the

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<sup>156</sup> I. Traina, "Discriminazioni e accesso al welfare: la giurisprudenza di merito", in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Secondo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Edizioni dell'Asino, Roma 2011, pp. 82-91. A. Guariso, "Stranieri e accesso alle prestazioni sociali. Normativa europea e nazionale. Schede pratiche", Asgi, 2008: <https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Stranieri-e-accesso-alle-prestazioni-sociali.pdf>.

<sup>157</sup> See Paola Barretta essay in Part 1

<sup>158</sup> Abdul Guibre, 19 years old, was shot dead by the owners of a bar, father and son, in via Zuretti on September 14, 2008 in Milan. The boy allegedly entered the bar with two friends and stole a pack of cookies. The managers of the bar chase him in the street and hit him repeatedly on the head. They were convicted for aggravated voluntary manslaughter, but the racist aggravating circumstance was ruled out immediately by the investigators, despite some witnesses spoke of racist insults directed at the boy during the assault. See: G. Faso, "The Killing of Abdul Guibre", in G. Naletto, cit., pp. 72-74, and an update published on our website: "No futile cookies", available here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/non-futuli-biscotti/>.

<sup>159</sup> See later in this section the files dedicated to the reconstruction of the first sentence for racist mafia massacre and the long judicial process that followed the attack to Emmanuel Bonsu.

<sup>160</sup> See G. Naletto, "La violenza della Caffarella", in G. Naletto, cit., pp. 83-87.



farm workers of Rosarno<sup>161</sup>, the incendiary attack on Navtej Singh<sup>162</sup>, the suicide of Nourredine Adnane in Palermo<sup>163</sup> and the murder of Imad El Kaalouli<sup>164</sup>.

### *Monti's government diplomatic racism*<sup>165</sup>

The establishment of the Monti government opens phase that we might call "diplomatic" institutional racism. Italy was at the height of the economic and social effects of the 2008 global crisis, the structural limits of the Belpaese development model and the austerity recipes imposed by the European Union bring the priority of containing debt and public deficit at the centre of the political agenda. The sudden growth in the arrivals of migrants by sea recorded in 2011 stops temporarily (in 2012, only a little more than 13,000 migrants arrived on Italian coasts) and resumes especially from autumn 2013<sup>166</sup>.

These circumstances push migrations and security to the margins of public debate while racism is played out as a marginal phenomenon, at least until the birth of Letta Government, which takes office in April 2013. The technical government marks a

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161 See later in this report, the Veronica Iesué case.

162 Navtej Singh, a 35-year-old Indian citizen, was first insulted, then beaten, then set on fire in Nettuno on the night between January 31 and February 1, 2009, while lying on a bench at the train station. The authors are three young people aged 16, 19 and 29. See: P. Andrisani, "The violence suffered by Navtej Singh", in Naletto G., cit., pp. 79-82.

163 Nourredine Adnane, a 27-year-old street vendor, set himself on fire in Palermo on February 16, 2011 after yet another request to move made by a fireman. The sales license in his possession did not entitle him to sell where he was, but according to some witnesses, he was literally persecuted by the firefighters. See: "The suicide of Nourredine Adnane", in Lunaria (ed.), *Chronicles of ordinary racism*. Second White Paper on Racism in Italy, Edizioni dell'Asino, Rome 2011, pp. 156-157.

164 Imad El Kaalouli, was killed on 28 June 2011 in Desenzano del Garda by shots fired by his former employer, the owner of a restaurant. Imad had travelled there with a labour consultant to claim his entitlements. See: "The murder of Imad El Kaalouli", in Lunaria (edited by), *Chronicles of ordinary racism*. Second white paper on racism in Italy, Edizioni dell'Asino, Rome 2011, pp. 169-170.

165 November 16, 2011/April 20, 2013

166 Data on arrivals of migrants by sea are published by the Ministry of the Interior in the Daily Statistics Dashboard. Only the most recent years are available online <http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/cruscotto-statistico-giornaliero>.



break with its predecessor, in terms of public rhetoric, less aggressive and fairer when dealing with foreign citizens and minorities. But formal correctness is not accompanied by significant initiatives at the regulatory level, with the exception of the umpteenth regularization measure adopted in 2012, whose selective nature confirms the ideas behind previous migration policies.

The Monti government was the first to dismiss the proposed reform of the citizenship law delivered to the House of Representatives in March 2012. It was the Prime Minister himself who put it in a drawer saying that putting it to a floor vote would pose risks to the stability of the majority, leaving the public debate on the subject of *ius soli* to the sole propaganda of the Northern League and the media or the far right. The government also appealed against the decision of the Milanese judges who agreed with Asgi (the Association for giuridical studies on immigration) and “Avvocati per niente” (a group of *pro bono* lawyers) that young foreigners could not be excluded from participating to the National Civil Service program<sup>167</sup>. Violations by law enforcement agencies also happened under the watch of the technical government. Among the most serious, we recall what Francesco Sperandeo reported on April 17, 2012 when two migrants destined for repatriation were immobilized, patched and disguised on a regular flight<sup>168</sup>, the particularly violent arrest carried out against a Somali refugee in Rome<sup>169</sup> and, above all, the suicide of Alina Bonar Diachuk at only 32 years of age<sup>170</sup>.

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167 S. Chiodo, “Servizio (in)civile”, in Lunaria (ed.), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Terzo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Lunaria, 2014, pp.195-199.

168 On April 17, 2012, Francesco Sperandeo, a young film-maker, boards the Alitalia Rome-Tunisi flight at 9.20 am. On the plane he notices the presence of two Algerian citizens, accompanied by police officers in plain clothes. The two migrants are seated separately, at the back of the plane, immobilized hands and feet, gagged with brown parcel tape over their mouths, covered by a sanitary mask. When asked for information, both flight attendants and State Police officers respond by ordering Sperandeo to sit down, reassuring him of the “normality” of the operation in progress. The young man manages, however, to secretly take a photograph and publishes it on Facebook.

169 On July 10, 2012 in Rome, in the San Lorenzo district, four plainclothes carabinieri stopped a 22-year-old Somali political refugee in Rome, asking for his identity without showing any identification card. When he refused, the military tried to handcuff him to take him to the police post, then they block him





### *Racist slur, the righwing winning weapon*

Racist propaganda returns to the forefront after the 2013 general election and the inauguration of the Letta<sup>171</sup> government. It is no accident that it chose two women to exercise all its virulence. Cecile Kyenge, the first black minister of the Republic, and Laura Boldrini, Speaker of the House, are the targets: the first for her foreign origin and skin colour, the second for her past role as Unhcr spokesperson for Southern Europe. The continuous verbal attacks against them opened the way to the uninhibited propagation of violent, sexist, xenophobic and racist rhetoric that in the following years seemed to find no boundaries.

In the year in which the arrivals of migrants by sea are growing again and the massacres are multiplying, Pope Francis' visit to Lampedusa on July 9<sup>th</sup>, shakes up the world of the media and only temporarily restores a little bit of fairness and humanity to a public discourse on migration once again flattened on the cynical count of arrivals<sup>172</sup>. The Pope's message echo did not last long. On October the 3<sup>rd</sup> when 366 migrants died in the shipwreck of a fishing boat south of the Bay of Rabbits in Lampedusa, symbolically represents the beginning of a European political crisis that began on migration and asylum policies reached its climax in the following years<sup>173</sup>.

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against a shutter, while his screams attracting the attention of passers-by who ask to let him go. The young man, lying on the ground, has an epileptic attack. An ambulance transports him to the hospital. According to the medical report, he had suffered a head injury and a contusion on his chest and left elbow. The fact is documented by a video recorded by a witness and published on the *Corriere della Sera* website.

170 On April 16, 2012, Alina, a 32-year-old Ukrainian citizen, committed suicide in the police station of Villa Opicina, a small village close to Trieste, by tying a rope to the radiator of the cell where she had been locked up two days earlier. See Paola Andrisani's chapter dedicated to the reconstruction of this case.

171 April 28, 2013/February 22, 2014.

172 D. Zola, "Il papa va a Lampedusa", in Lunaria (Ed.), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Terzo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Lunaria, 2014, pp.140-143.

173 G. Caldiron, "Non solo euroscettici. Nell'Europa della crisi, la xenofobia mette radici nelle urne", in Lunaria (Ed.), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Terzo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Lunaria, 2014, pp. 23-31.





The inauguration of the search and rescue mission Mare Nostrum carried out by Italian authorities alone, is the only active policy that tries to stop these tragedies. It did last one year, then it was closed in October 2014 by the new Renzi government<sup>174</sup>. In the meantime, two and a half months after that unspeakable tragedy, a video shot from a mobile phone showed migrants standing naked in the open air in the middle of winter, exposed to the jet of a pump for what will be presented as an "anti-scabies treatment"<sup>175</sup>.

The increase in the number of people rescued was met by the total unpreparedness

and highlighted a few critical points. This was especially true during the 2014 European elections campaign during which migrations were the main topic discussed and, of course, the main issue against which the rightwing parties used their xenophobic propaganda. Invasion, health hazard, Islamophobia and the unsustainability of the costs of migration were all issues at the centre of the election campaign of Lega and Fratelli d'Italia. The election result was less favourable to the right than feared, but Euroscepticism, xenophobia and racism would dominate the public debate in the years to come.

Precisely by leveraging the dysfunctions and cases of mismanagement in the reception system, the Northern League had the opportunity to come out of its temporary isolation due to the scandals that caused the resignation of its previous leadership, and to gradually gain media and political space and visibility.

The whole of 2014 was marked by an obsessive and hammering campaign against the reception system with coordinated press statements of national leaders and demonstrations organised by Casa Pound and Forza Nuova. On July 12, the leader of the Northern League made a spectacular visit to the Cara di Mineo to ask for its

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<sup>174</sup> February 22, 2014/December 12, 2016.

<sup>175</sup> The video was broadcast by Valerio Cataldi on December 16, 2013 on TG2; they were shot by the brother of a migrant hosted in the center, who went to the island to search for him. The video can still be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caoJKYWnQQM>.



closure<sup>176</sup>; in December, Forza Nuova displayed banners and posters against the “reception business” in Palermo, Udine and Gorizia and encouraged protests such as the one against a reception centre for minors in Tor Sapienza in November 2014;

CasaPound puts up posters of the same tone in Bari. The press reported on the “Mafia Capitale” investigation, released in December 2014, offer a further opportunity to attack the public reception system<sup>177</sup>. It is thanks to these months of new visibility (and legitimacy) regained that, on February 15, 2015, Matteo Salvini can make official the goal of transforming the Northern League into a national party, thanks to the alliance with the extreme right movements in Central and Southern Italy, first and foremost CasaPound and Forza Nuova.

From this moment on, the media visibility of the Lega Nord representatives is on the rise. That “Roma are the scum of society” repeated several times amid public applause by an MEP from the Lega Nord, during a major television broadcast on 2 March 2015, is just one perfect example on how racist discourse can easily be flaunted and publicly claimed<sup>178</sup>. Ostentation of such ideas will become the attitude of right wing

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176 Salvini will return to Mineo on March 16, 2015 and then as minister on July 9, 2019 to flaunt the goal achieved. The Mineo affair is unique: its closure has been requested by the anti-racist movement ever since it was opened by another Minister from the Lega, Maroni, in 2011. For eight years, the request remained unheeded by all governments, despite the fact that the management of the centre had been the subject of several investigations. Until Salvini decided to make it the symbol of his propaganda against immigrants.

177 See: Lunaria, *Il mondo di dentro. Il sistema per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati* a Roma, 2016, disponi: [http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Il\\_mondo\\_di\\_dentro.pdf](http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Il_mondo_di_dentro.pdf)

178 The MEP is the late Gianluca Buonanno, hosted in the studio during an episode of “Piazza Pulita”. The quoted sentence is pronounced several times during the conversation with Dijana Pavlovic, Serbian actress and Roma activist. Following an anti-discrimination appeal brought by Naga and Asgi, Buonanno was convicted of harassment by the Court of Milan in April 2016. The judge acknowledged that associating the term “scum” with the Roma ethnic group “is not only highly offensive and detrimental to the dignity of the addressees, but also has an undoubted discriminatory value”. For a detailed reconstruction of what happened, see: G. Naletto, “Piazza Pulita: the search for an audience opens a door to racism”, in Lunaria (ed.), *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo. Fourth white paper on racism in Italy*, 2017, pp. 86-91.



elected officials in the following years. Same for media and ordinary citizens, with the increasingly decisive role played by the Web<sup>179</sup>.

The inability to reach an agreement of migration issues inside the European Union, and a media system that offered a platform to the public discourse against migrants, helped create a favourable ground for the involution and polarization of public debate and the popular rooting of intolerance and racism. This climate was softened for a few weeks by the image of the body of little Aylan, found on the beach of Bodrum on September 3, 2015. The Welcome slogan that did spread in Italy and Europe, while thousands of people travelled along the Balkan Route, soon found its Italian counterpart in the "Refugees not welcome" slogan on banners displayed by Forza Nuova in various cities in 2016<sup>180</sup>, and by CasaPound in 2017<sup>181</sup>.

Their demonstrations are generally not much participated, but they are loud and visible but they contribute to generate intolerance in public opinion: we counted more than 210 more or less spontaneous local protests against reception projects in 2016 alone<sup>182</sup>.

Meanwhile, the European Migration Agenda does not solve the existing conflicts between the countries of Southern, Eastern and Northern Europe. The solution that was chosen is once again the securitarian one, sanctioned on March 18, 2016, with the shameful cooperation agreement with Turkey which, in line with the European strategy

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<sup>179</sup> Some newspapers not only showcase the most stigmatising political statements, but also act as a driving force behind disinformation and the spread of intolerance. Two examples: *Libero* headlines ("Islamic Butchers" and "Islamic Bastards" in January 2015) or *il Giornale* ("Let's drive Islam out of our home" of March 2016) and an example of incitement to violence ("React with violence" *Libero*, April 2017).

<sup>180</sup> In Genoa on 4 February 2016, in Verona on 29 August 2016, in Monza on 6 September 2016, in Atesa (CH) on 19 February 2016.

<sup>181</sup> In Barletta on July 19, 2017 and in Vercelli on July 28, 2017.

<sup>182</sup> The rejection is expressed in different ways: with simple verbal statements, with posters, banners, flyers up to the organization of public initiatives (petitions, open letters, demonstrations). See: Lunaria (edited by), *Accoglienza. La propaganda e le proteste del rifiuto. Le scelte istituzionali sbagliate*, 2017, disponibile qui: [http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/0FOCUS1\\_DEFINITIVO\\_13](http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/0FOCUS1_DEFINITIVO_13)



of outsourcing the right of asylum, blocks a large number of Syrian asylum seekers outside the European borders and succeeds in curbing the Balkan Route, but not the South-Western Mediterranean. It is in this deeply polarized atmosphere, we witness the murder of Emmanuel Chidi Namdi, a 39-year-old Nigerian asylum seeker, killed in Fermo on July 5, 2016 by Amedeo Mancini, another extreme right devotee<sup>183</sup>.

*From the criminalization of solidarity to open institutional racism*

"I've had this idea for a long time: to dispel the taboo that security policies are "par excellence" from the right. It is true that often a securitarian impulse in society and public opinion produces a shift of the electorate to the right, but I have always been convinced that security is bread and butter for the left. Modern security policies are integrated: not only repression, as the right conceives it, not only interventions of social recovery, as a part of the Left believed. And only a reformist left-wing political culture which does not simplify the answers can put into play the attempt of an integrated solution to the demand for security". This is an excerpt from an interview given to the *Espresso* by the new Interior Minister Marco Minniti on January 9, 2017.

It is important to recall it because with a highly visible media operation, the Minister announced a new squeeze on migration policies. He did so with a strongly symbolic choice: dwelling on the idea of social security, the historical heritage of the left, to declare its failure. And this while admitting that security policies bring a "shift to the right of the electorate". This umpteenth ideal surrender to the right wing Sicuritarianism will favour, instead of holding it back, the return of the right to the Government and the coming to what we could define the "open institutional racism" of its successor.

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183 See: S. Chiodo, "L'omicidio di Fermo", in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo. Quarto libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, 2017, pp. 175-180.



The link is given by the claimed choice of assertively associating the migration phenomenon with security policies. The neo-minister used an apparently "responsible" and balanced rhetoric, and therefore, reassuring, thanks to the promise of combining "severity" and "reception".

Reality would be different

In February 2017, the Minister issued two administrative orders reforming the international protection procedure, abolishing the second level of appeal, restricting the judicial protection of asylum seekers and introducing "voluntary" work for guests of reception centres; proposing the extension of the system of Identification and Expulsion Centres (CIEs); allocating new resources for repatriation operations and increasing the powers of mayors on urban security matters<sup>184</sup>.

International cooperation is bent to blocking migratory flows. Two new agreements with the Interior Ministers of Chad and Libya, an agreement with the Fezzan Tribes of Southern Libya and a Memorandum of Understanding with the Fayeza Mustafa Serraj's Libyan Government of National Reconciliation aspire to greater cooperation in controlling migration flows in the country. Four patrol boats were sent to the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy ships in Libyan waters to support the surveillance at sea and on borders. A meeting with 13 Libyan mayors aimed to fortify the borders of the South of the country in exchange for resources in addition to those promised to Niger for the same purpose<sup>185</sup>.

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184 The two decrees were converted into law in April 2017. They are the Law April 13 , 2017, no. 46, converting, with amendments, the Law Decree of February 17, 2017, no. 13, on "Urgent provisions for the acceleration of proceedings in the field of international protection, as well as for the fight against illegal immigration" and the Law April 18, 2017, no. 48, converting, with amendments, the Law Decree of February 20, 2017, no. 14 on "Urgent provisions on city security".

185 See: M. Ludovico, "Minniti rilancia sulla Libia con una dote di 200 milioni", *Ristretti orizzonti*, available here: <http://www.ristretti.org/Le-Notizie-di-Ristretti/migranti-minniti-rilancia-sulla-libia-con-una-dote-di-200-milioni>.



Not a word of condemnation comes from the Minister when, on February 23, 2017, two Roma women are locked up in a cage in Follonica, mocked and filmed, and the video made waves on the Net with hundreds of shares and racist comments<sup>186</sup>.

On the other hand, NGOs providing aid at sea are being blackmailed by imposing a Code of Conduct<sup>187</sup>, thus legitimising the campaign of criminalisation that stigmatises the search&rescue operations as "water taxis", accusing them of facilitating the arrival of migrants and, therefore, of carrying out "illegal" activities. All this is supported by an aggressive communication campaign that succeeds in further polarising the public debate on the solidarity work in the Mediterranean.

It is also the Gentiloni government who has permanently wiped out the reform of the citizenship law.

At the end of 2017, the number of arrivals of migrants from the South Mediterranean will be halved: 23,526 people arrived in June, only 2,268 those arrived in December.

Not even the raid carried out by Luca Traini in Macerata<sup>188</sup> (six black people injured), on February 3 2018, induces the Minister of the Interior to leave behind the rethoric about security. On the contrary, the episode is defined as an individual initiative, certainly to be condemned, without, however, connecting it to the problem of the growing spread of xenophobia and racism, nor to the renewed protagonism relaunch of extreme right.

As we have already mentioned, an attempt was being made to stop the organisation of a national antiracist demonstration in the city. The result is once again to delegitimise the anti-racist movement and solidarity initiatives.

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186 See: A. Dotti, "Follonica: la gabbia del disprezzo", in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo. Quarto libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, 2017, pp. 190-193, and the pages on this report by Roberta Salzano.

187 See: G. Naletto, "ONG: il buio in fondo al tunnel", in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo, Quarto libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, 2017, pp. 119-132.

188 See the pages by Grazia Naletto on this report.



The elections of March 4, 2018 sanctioned the success of the Northern League and the 5 Star Movement, which led to the troubled launch of the Conte I <sup>189</sup> government; Matteo Salvini will become Minister of the Interior.

The new Minister wastes no time and activates his communication machine in support of various administrative and regulatory measures that, in the course of a few months, deeply limit the rights of asylum seekers and refugees. The year in which the new Minister took office stands out as one with an abnormal recurrence of racist attacks towards black people.

Following on his predecessor footsteps, the Minister closed Italian ports to the NGOs ships engaged in Search and Rescue missions; he called on the police authorities, the National Commission for the Right of Asylum and the chairmen of the Territorial Commissions to "reduce the number of cases of recognition of humanitarian protection"<sup>190</sup>. Salvini also reorganised the reception system with the aim of "rationalising" it and "reducing its costs" and approved a new set of rules for the management of the centres<sup>191</sup>. The local and widespread reception network managed by the municipalities (ex SPRAR) is weakened.

Yet another "security" package is launched with two measures.

Decree Law no. 113/2018 was converted into Law no. 132 on December 3, 2018. The most significant changes introduced by the decree are known: abrogation of the humanitarian reasons protection visa; provision of "special" permits for medical treatment (of 6 months), for natural disasters and for acts of particular civil value (of 1 year), not convertible into a residence permit for work; extension of the hypothesis of detention of asylum seekers for the verification of identity and citizenship and doubling

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<sup>189</sup> June 1<sup>st</sup> 2018/September 5,, 2019.

<sup>190</sup> See the ministerial memo from July 4, 2018.

<sup>191</sup> Ministerial decree, november 20, 2018, "*Schema di capitolato di gara di appalto riguardante la fornitura di beni e servizi per la gestione e il funzionamento dei centri di prima accoglienza*": <http://www.interno.gov.it/it/amministrazione-trasparente/bandi-gara-e-contratti/schema-capitolato-gara-appalto-fornitura-beni-e-servizi-relativo-alla-gestione-e-funzionamento-dei-centri-prima-accoglienza>.





the period of detention in the CPR from 90 to 180 days; weakening of the ordinary reception system SPRAR (which can only host refugees and unaccompanied foreign minors) and election of the government reception system managed by the Prefectures as the only system to host asylum seekers; extension of the application of the “Urban Daspo” (prohibition to visit a certain city) to areas where there are also fairs, markets and hospitals and worsening of the penalties provided for blocking free movement.

Law No. 132 also amends Law No. 91/1992 on citizenship, doubling from two to four years the maximum waiting time from the submission of the application, increasing the contribution to be paid to the State to start the procedure (from 200 to 250 euros) and providing for the possibility of revoking citizenship following a final conviction for certain crimes, including political ones.

Decree-Law no. 57/2019, which came into force on 15 June 2019, was converted into law on 6 August 2019: it was specifically designed to definitively stop the work of NGOs that provide search and rescue at sea. The law gives the Minister of the Interior the power to restrict or prohibit the entry, transit or stopping of ships in the territorial sea for security reasons or when the crime of "aiding and abetting illegal immigration" is committed; it provides for a sanction for the captain of the ship ranging from a minimum of 150 thousand euros to a maximum of one million euros, the seizure of the ship and an increase in funds allocated to repatriation programs.

The unexpected and sudden government crisis in August 2019 put an early end to the work of the Minister of Propaganda. It was impossible to take stock, even partially, of the Conte 2 government, which took office only on 5 September 2019 and was also forced to deal with the health emergency of Covid-19. The entry into office of a new Minister (Lamorgese), less inclined to media visibility than her predecessor, contributes to freeing the institutional public debate from the most aggressive discriminatory tones. The organization of a National Conference on Hate Crimes, on 21st January 2020, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the birth of OSCAD





(Observatory for Security against Acts of Discrimination), certainly represents an important first time in Italian history, both on a symbolic and institutional level. The new Minister also brings back transparency on the data on the people housed in the reception centres.

However, the "Salvini" Laws still remain in force. The launch of a new measure for the emergence of undocumented work included in the "Relaunch" decree is conceived in the context of the health emergency and has great limitations. The Memorandum signed with Libya in 2017 has been extended and nothing points to the launch of a meaningful reform in the field of immigration and asylum.

And as the summer approaches, the announcements of thousands of people waiting to leave Libya<sup>192</sup> and the disturbing information on the human rights violations on migrants along the Balkan Route are back.

*Ten years and more, back to square one?*

So, has nothing changed since 2009? Not exactly.

One of the main signs of change seems to us to be the slow but progressive sedimentation of an anti-discriminatory jurisprudence, more consolidated in the civil field, but significant also in the criminal domain. Even in the awareness that the legal space cannot constitute the only axis of an effective institutional strategy to fight racism, it is undoubted that the consolidation of a culture of equal opportunities and of the right to non-discrimination also passes through the civil and criminal sanction of discrimination and racist violence. A decisive step would also be that of shutting down those right-wing organisations that explicitly refer to fascism, theorise and practice xenophobia and racism – both things are illegal in Italy.

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192 On June 9, 2020, the announcement by the secret services of 20,000 people ready to leave Libya found great visibility in the media.



In 2009, there was no official source to account for the racist violence perpetrated in our country. Today, with the limitations of an inadequate classification system and the persistent lack of institutional coordination between the main authorities, the data transmitted by OSCAD (Security Observatory against Discriminatory Acts) to ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OECD) make it possible to have a yearly picture of complaints about "hate crimes" and to disaggregate those of a xenophobic and racist nature. For the first time this data was communicated to the media.

The most serious racist violence has received more attention in recent years than in the past from the media, what is still lacking, though, is the willingness to focus on the systemic character of racism, its institutional dimension, and its close connection with the ideas that inform migration and asylum policies.

Reacting to the push from institutions and users, even the main social media companies have intervened several times to limit the spread of racist and xenophobic messages through their channels. The results are mixed, but it seems that the network can no longer be considered a free space for insults, threats and incitements to racist violence.

Unfortunately, the crucial change that is missing is in the political sphere, which to date has been unable to develop a project for an alternative to a model based on the primacy of economic interests, individualism, competition and the widening of inequalities.

Yet even the health emergency of 2020 helps us remember that equality, solidarity and social justice are "necessary utopias"<sup>193</sup>, without which it is difficult to really respond to the most pressing social needs and, also in this way, to eradicate the deep roots of xenophobia and racism.

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193 Stefano Rodotà uses this beautiful definition in his book *Solidarity. Utopia necessaria*, Laterza, Bari 2014.



## **2.1 Justice and racism: 11 exemplary cases**



## Guilty for per 24 hours. The media lynching of Azouz Marzouk

*Paola Andrisani*

It was on the evening of December 11, 2006, when the killing in Erba was consumed. Four bodies were torn to pieces: Raffaella Castagna, her two-year-old son Youssef, Paola Galli, Raffaella's mother, and Valeria Cherubini, a neighbour in the village<sup>194</sup>.

Only Mario Frigerio escaped the fury of the murderers by a miracle: he will point out the perpetrators of the massacre in Olindo Romano and Rosa Bazzi, residents on the ground floor of the building.

In 2011, a Court (Corte di Cassazione, Section I, 3.5.2011 dep. 5.9.2011, no. 33070, Pres. Chieffi, East. Caprioglio, ric. Romano)<sup>195</sup> rejected the appeals lodged by the defences of Olindo Romano and Rosa Angela Bazzi, already sentenced in the first instance by the Como Court and in the second instance by the Milan Court of Appeal to two life imprisonment, with daytime isolation for three years, for the offences of aggravated multiple homicide, fire (Article 423 of the Criminal Code), home invasion and the offence of carrying a weapon outside the home, as well as for murder and attempted murder. This ruling was final.

The so-called "Erba massacre" is probably one of the "most heinous crimes in the history of our country", as Massimo Astori, the prosecutor who first investigated the facts, declared. A crime that has marked the conscience of public opinion in the years following the day of the massacre, and which has continued, and continues to do so today, to animate the media debate regarding the events of the trial, and not only.

This story has rapidly transformed, through the words and images of the media, into a sort of "criminality show", whose main actors lose their authenticity to play the role of

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<sup>194</sup> See: Andrisani P., *La strage di Erba*, in *Rapporto sul razzismo in Italia* (a cura di G. Naletto), Manifestolibri Roma, 2009, pp. 56-58.

<sup>195</sup>The ruling can be found here: <https://www.penalecontemporaneo.it/upload/cassazione%20erba.pdf>.



media characters, to raise the audience of networks. And it is in this way that the Erba massacre enters fully into what is defined as the “geography of the spectacularization of crime”<sup>196</sup>.

But let's take a step back to the day of that terrible crime.

Immediately, without any objective evidence, a few hours after the crime there is already a “designated” murderer: Abdel Fami Azouz Marzouk<sup>197</sup>, husband and father of two of the victims, but above all “the foreigner”, “the Muslim” and “the felon”. For the media there is no need to wait for confirmation or verification: the nature of the murder requires a culprit, as quickly as possible. And from the search for a scapegoat to the media process, the step is very short.

No one suspects the “nice citizens”, Olindo and Rosa, and the initial accusations against Azouz Marzouk spread thanks to the choral work of the media. Azouz is, in fact, wanted by the police, but is not yet found guilty by any official source. Yet, in the very first few hours, investigators and the media point to only one lead. A quick phone check and a little caution would have been enough to dispel all the accusations.<sup>198</sup>

The statements of the Chief Prosecutor of Como, Alessandro Maria Lodolini, who, instead of adopting formulas of circumstance, feeds the media with certainty: “We suspect that the author of the crimes is her husband. We have a good chance of catching him”, do not suggest caution.

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<sup>196</sup> See: Polesana M. A., “Criminality show. Il caso di Erba, Azouz Marzouk e la costruzione mediatica del colpevole”, Carocci, Roma, 2010.

<sup>197</sup> Azouz Marzouk, tunisian, had regularly arrived in Italy in 2001. He had met his wife and got married in 2003, in 2004 they have a baby Youssef. In 2005 he was arrested for drug dealing and condemned to three years. After his release he kept his “life style”, that put it at odds with his wife. The two never got a divorce or split.

<sup>198</sup> In a similar case in Novi Ligure something very similar had happened. A young woman had killed mother and small brother and blamed a “gang of albanians”. What is disturbing, in cases like this, is precisely the automatism and the consequent emphasis on the “perception” of danger and social alarm caused by the “fear of the foreigner”, which in turn amplifies the demand for security. See Corrias P., *Vicini da morire. La strage di Erba e il Nord Italia divorato dalla paura*, Mondadori, Milano, 2007.



From 11 p.m. onwards of that tragic night, it is a succession of headlines and news with a strong vein of racism. The nightly editions of the news are no less than that<sup>199</sup>.

The Erba story is an exemplary case because this time it's not the killers who misdirect the investigation, but the investigators themselves who make a resounding blunder.

A blunder enough to ensure that, a few hours after the tragedy, the news is no longer that of the massacre, but the problem of the immigrant presence in Italy. From being a crime news item, the fact shifts to the political editorial offices of newspapers and the news, and the topic of discussion and confrontation becomes even the pardon approved by Parliament a few months earlier (31 July 2006, ed.)

Soon, however (even though it was already too late with respect to the reactions triggered by the imprudent statements of the chief prosecutor), the Carabinieri ascertained, thanks to phone records, that Azouz was not on the run: he had been in Tunisia for a week, in Zaghouan with his parents. The first to support him is Carlo Castagna, Azouz's father-in-law, father, husband and grandfather of three of the victims. He is the first to try to put a stop to racist hatred towards him.

The media, incapable of finding a new scapegoat, begin to gossip ("The Tunisian was cheating on his wife - Raffaella's letters", *Il Giornale*, December 13; "An ex-boyfriend killed Raffaella", *La Stampa*, January 5 2007) to fill the void in the chronicle of the massacre.

Days pass. Olindo and Rosa are arrested around one o'clock on January 8 2007. They are let out, with a stratagem, from the back of their house, because photographers and journalists have now invaded the interior of the court in Via Diaz. It is legitimate to wonder whether they would have used the same caution and caution if Azouz had been there instead of them. Probably not: perhaps, in this case, it would have been more

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<sup>199</sup> See: Andrisani P., *ibid.*



"useful" to immediately put the monster on the front page, as it has already happened too often.

Azouz goes from "guilty" to "victim". And then from "victim", he becomes a media product built to mirror and embroider the tragedy.

And the journalist-show business takes advantage of it, cancelling with a skilful blow all the racist hatred vomited for days. Azouz Marzouk soon becomes a real "showman", passing through TV national programmes such as Piazza Italia and Porta a Porta. There is no television program that does not invite him to tell the story of which he has become the "victim". Azouz "divo" is even recruited by the duo Fabrizio Corona and Lele Mora (VIP photographer the former, and agent of the stars the latter), who become his agents.

The "media consecration" reaches its climax with a special episode of Matrix (the TV talk on Channel 5, conducted by Enrico Mentana) on July 2007, seven months after the massacre. An episode that is defined as "experimental" - with a red dot to indicate that it is intended for adults only. And after the consecration, the spectacularization continues when the name of Azouz circulates about the possible participants of a reality show.

The Erba massacre, one of the most controversial crime stories of recent times, is a valid field of analysis and study, not so much for its brutality or the alternation of investigative operations<sup>200</sup>, but for the incredible story of the attribution of blame to the young Azouz.

In this regard, it should be remembered that it was precisely the massacre of Erba and the easy racist accusations against Azouz Marzouk that reopened the debate on migrants' rights when they become protagonists of news events. Azouz's media lynching did not go unnoticed: the first body to urge newspaper editors and journalists' representatives to develop a reflection was the United Nations High Commissioner for

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<sup>200</sup> E. Montolli, *L'enigma di Erba*, Rcs Periodici, 2010 e E. Montolli, F. Manti, *Il grande abbaglio. Due innocenti verso l'ergastolo? Controinchiesta sulla strage di Erba*, Aliberti, 2008.



Refugees (UNHCR). But the newspapers slipped on this warning. The process through which Azouz's "media character" took shape and consistency must be placed within a "guilt" that did not fail even after the embarrassing ritual of partial corrections by the media. In Azouz's case (as Marco Opiari also notes in his book<sup>201</sup>), the only newspapers that escaped lynching were "the manifesto" and "Liberation". And among the media that accused him, very few apologized ("Il Corriere della sera", among the big ones) and very few did not ("La Repubblica", is the most important example).

The National Press Federation (FNSI) and the Journalists Guild, on the other hand, accepted the invitation to the debate and began work on a text<sup>202</sup> ("Deontological Protocol on Asylum Seekers, Refugees, Victims of Trafficking and Migrants") which saw the light and was approved by the National Council of the Guild between April and June 2008.<sup>203</sup>

This media coverage of Azouz was the resounding effect of a xenophobic prejudice that had actually begun to manifest itself in the 1980s. The effects were so devastating that some journalists were brought to reflect on the important weight that language and rhetoric used in news story can become a misleading and discriminatory.

The judicial acquittal of Azouz, after the long series of sentences, is beyond any doubt. And yet, media insisted focusing on his past of drug dealings as it had any relevance in the homicides. It is difficult to understand what minor crime or tabloid gossip has to

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<sup>201</sup> Opiari M., *Il mostro quotidiano. Il «caso» Azouz Marzouk e la costruzione della notizia*, Città aperta editrice, 2008.

<sup>202</sup> See: Mastantuono P. "La Carta di Roma: non un giornalismo buono, ma un buon giornalismo per raccontare l'immigrazione", here: <http://www.libertacivili.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Primo-Piano-Mastantuono-Carta-di-Roma.pdf>

<sup>203</sup> The Association [Carta di Roma](#), instead, was founded in December 2011 to implement the deontological protocol for a correct information on immigration issues. It was founded by the National Council of the Order of Journalists and the National Federation of Italian Press and brings together, to date, about twenty associations of organized civil society. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the National Office for Racial Antidiscrimination are permanently invited.





do with the four bodies that were tortured on the evening of December 11 2006, if it were not for the media construction connected to him.

At the end of September 2019, the Erba massacre was once again in the news. A court accepted the request of Olindo Romano and Rosa Bazzi's lawyers to transmit to the Court of appeal of Como the request for new investigations on some findings at the scene of the crime. It is him who gave the news: the "non-protagonist not guilty", Azouz Marzouk, who announces that he has set up a team of experts and consultants to try to shed new light on the so-called Erba massacre. After 13 years, Azouz returns, despite himself, to make people talk about him again.



## **The brutality of institutional racism suffered by Emmanuel Foster Bonsu**

*Grazia Naletto*

The story of Emmanuel Foster Bonsu, 22 years old, of Ghanaian origin, stopped, beaten to a pulp, denigrated and offended by a group of ten municipality policemen in Parma on September 29, 2008, is one of the most difficult and painful to remember.

Nevertheless, it must be done. For many reasons.

The first is that this violence represents one of the most serious cases of institutional racism in our country. The second is the initial attempt (but also continued during the judicial process) to deny the seriousness and responsibility of the incident on the part of both the police and the institution they represented, relying, evidently, on a shameless presumption of impunity<sup>204</sup>.

The resignation of the Security Councillor took place only three months later. Excuses (and not from everyone) had to wait many years. Third. Today, Emmanuel Bonsu no longer lives in Italy, he moved to London in 2014. Maybe he would have done it anyway, like many other young people of his age. But we have to wonder if the psychological pressure suffered for the endless length of the judicial process that led only in 2018 (ten years later) to a final condemnation of the main perpetrator of the racist violence suffered by him has not contributed to this choice.

But let us briefly recall the facts.

On that day in September, around 6:15 p.m., an anti-drug operation is underway in Falcone and Borsellino Park. Emmanuel is waiting to enter class (he attends a night

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<sup>204</sup> As one of Emmanuel's lawyers, Lorenzo Trucco, will observe during the first degree trial: "It is with bitterness mixed with sadness that we speak of this affair. This is the case of a person who, under the protection of the State, is mistreated with brutality, especially psychological. What is disturbing is the presumption of impunity of all the defendants involved". See: "The boy's lawyers ask for a provisional 500 thousand euros", *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 27 September 2011.



school at the Itis, nearby), when he is grabbed by the hands of two men in plain clothes who do not qualify. Emmanuel does not know who they are and runs away. He is caught and thrown to the ground, with a gun pointed at his face. He is then punched with a fist before being dragged into the car, beaten again with plastic bottles full of water and insulted during the trip, taken to the command of the policemen, stripped completely and searched. Several times they call him "nigger". The policemen try to make the boy confess to being the "pole" of support for the pusher, arrested during the anti-drug operation in the park. But Emmanuel has nothing to do with it and does not confess.

During the interrogation, one of the police officers takes a picture of him with Emmanuel in his arms with a swollen eye, held by his hair and displayed as a trophy. It will be found after a few days by the investigators in the computer of one of the police officers, although it has been deleted.

Once his extraneousness to drug trafficking becomes evident, in an attempt to cover up the mistake and the illegal arrest in some way, the policemen force Emmanuel to sign a report in which they accuse him of resistance to public official. Then, after about four hours, they let him go, handing him an envelope with his personal belongings. The envelope is addressed to "Emanuel Negro" and bears the header of the municipal administration<sup>205</sup>.

The emergency department issues a report attesting to a head and chest trauma.

The next day, the young man, upset, makes a complaint to the Carabinieri. The local newspapers report the news, accompanying it with statements in support of the police. But the diffusion of a photo of Emmanuel with the swollen eye by the website of the newspaper *la Repubblica* brings the case to the national press and goes around the

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<sup>205</sup> At first the police, including the commander, try to make believe that the word "nigger" was added by Emmanuel. A handwriting report will confirm instead that it is the work of one of the policemen.



world. Burying the case becomes impossible, even if, at least in the first few days, both the police and the security councillor try to deny what happened.

It reconstructs well the details of what happened and the context in which Giuseppe Faso is placed in our first white paper, to which we refer<sup>206</sup>.

In the following we focus instead on the judicial process and the elements of investigation that have supported the recognition of the racist aggravating circumstance for the sentence imposed on two of the police officers involved.

Emmanuel's statements, the collection of testimony and some incontestable evidence lead, after about forty days, to the issuance of a notice of guarantee against ten police officers, including a chief inspector and a commissioner. The charges are very serious: aggravated beatings, slander, insult, racist insults and threats, arbitrary search, abuse of office, false ideological and material, kidnapping. Four of them were placed under house arrest in October 2008.

In the meantime, Emmanuel is traumatized: he confesses to the newspaper *la Repubblica* that "he does not leave home, he does not go to school, he postponed his service as a volunteer in the drug addiction community in Bethany. He says that he has received threats again, that he feels under fire and repeats that he is afraid"<sup>207</sup>.

The request for indictment comes in May 2009. Two of the police officers (Marcello Frattini and Ferdinando Villani) opt for the abbreviated ritual. The first is sentenced to three years and four months. For the second, the plea bargain is refused at two years and a new hearing is scheduled. In January 2011 he is sentenced to two years and ten months and to the payment of a provision of 5 thousand euros to the City of Parma.

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<sup>206</sup> G. Faso, "La violenza subita da Emmanuel Bonsu", in G. Naletto (a cura di), *Rapporto sul razzismo in Italia*, Manifestolibri, Roma 2009, available here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/rapportosulrazzismo.pdf>.

<sup>207</sup> See: "Emmanuel, indagati 10 vigili e c'è l'accusa di sequestro", *RepubblicaParma.it*, 11 novembre 2008, here: <https://parma.repubblica.it/dettaglio/emmanuel-indagati-10-vigili-e-ce-laccusa-di-sequestro/1544181/1>.



## The first degree trial

The other defendants (Giorgio Albertini, Graziano Cicinato, Mirko Cremonini, Marco De Blasi, Pasquale Fratantuono, Simona Fabbri, Andrea Sinisi and Stefania Spotti) continue with the ordinary rite. The first degree trial begins on September 23, 2010, and the decision is issued on October 3, 2011.

The eight-hour-long indictment of the Pm is very harsh and focuses on the racist connotation of the violence suffered by Emmanuel: “Emmanuel Bonsu is the 'nigger' who becomes at some point in this story the stake of a drug dealer just because he is a 'nigger'. The racist aggravating circumstance distinguishes this story”.<sup>208</sup>

The prosecutor asks for sentences ranging from a minimum of six years and nine months to a maximum of nine years and three months’ imprisonment and disqualification from public office: in perpetuity for four defendants, for five years for the others. Emmanuel's lawyers, Maria Rosaria Nicoletti and Lorenzo Trucco, ask for a provisional sentence of 500 thousand euros.

The first-degree sentence accepts, in substance, the requests of the prosecutor and recognizes the aggravating circumstance of “racial” discrimination, while imposing penalties slightly lower than those requested, for an overall total of 39 years of imprisonment. The most serious sentence is for Pasquale Fratantuono, author of both the trophy photo and the racist writing on the envelope given to Emmanuel on his release.

For Simona Fabbri, Stefania Spotti and Pasquale Fratantuono the perpetual interruption from public offices is also ordered, for the others only for five years except for Cicinato, who is charged only with the crime of kidnapping (with suspended sentence). The Court also orders the compensation for moral and material damages of Emmanuel and

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<sup>208</sup> See: “Processo per il pestaggio di Bonsu: il pm chiede per i vigili fino a 9 anni di carcere”, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 27 settembre 2011, here: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/09/27/processo-per-il-pestaggio-di-bonsu-il-pm-chiede-per-i-vigili-fino-a-9-anni-di-carcere/160147/>.



the immediate liquidation of 135 thousand euros. However, the civil responsibility of the Municipality is not recognized: the Municipality policemen will have to pay.

### **The second degree trial**

On January 31, 2014, the appeal process at the first criminal section of the Court of Appeal of Bologna is concluded. The motivations of the decision, filed in May, dwell on the unjustified brutality of the tackle made by Fratantuono and Cremonini on Emmanuel (when he had already been rendered harmless) precisely because he was "a foreigner from outside the EU and black"<sup>209</sup>.

Another disturbing fact also emerges. The anti-drug operation of September 29, 2008 would have been useful to Simona Fabbri, who had taken the trouble to announce it to a representative of the local press: a few days later, he would have been appointed the new Deputy Commander of the Vigili, a position to which "he could have aspired". It was therefore very important that the operation went well, that's why the mistake made by mistaking Emmanuel for the "pole" of the pusher arrested that day, could not be admitted. The sentence of the second instance confirms the conviction of all eight police officers, reduces the sentences to six of the accused, while aggravating two. The highest penalty remains for Fratantuono (5 years and six months) to which is applied, as well as in Cremonini, the aggravating circumstance of racism, for the crime of private violence aggravated by "racial" discrimination. The Court of Appeals also denies the civil liability of the Municipality of Parma and confirms the provision of 135 thousand euros to be paid only by the police.

### **The appeal to High Court**

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<sup>209</sup> "But since he was a black man and therefore a different one was not believed; and therefore it is to be considered instead credible what he declared in the trial that Fratantuono in the face of his claim to have left the documents at school showed with sarcasm all his disbelief in this regard saying: 'Yes, yes. You are a student!'; he was a non-EU foreigner, a black man, how was it possible that he was a student?". These are the words that can be read in the motivations of the sentence, as reported by D. Marceddu, "Bonsu case: "beating with racial aggravation. A policemen was looking for promotion", on Il Fatto Quotidiano, May 13, 2014.



The Court of Cassation ruled, in April 2015, on the eight municipality policemen who followed the ordinary rite, and in July 2015, on appeal by Frattini and Villani, annulled the second instance decision on one charge, ordering a trial of appeal bis with consequent redetermination of the sentence. According to the Court, in fact, there are no extremes of a crime of "kidnapping", but only of an "illegal arrest", punished with a much lighter penalty, which involves the statute of limitations.

The sentence of the Court is issued on November 24, 2016 for Frattini and Villani, and on January 10, 2017 for the other defendants. The result is a reduction of the prosecution for all the defendants and the recognition of the "general extenuating circumstances" for all except Fratantuono who, according to the Court of Appeal, "behaved in a particularly 'hateful' manner, with particular regard to the gratuitous and disproportionate violence against a defenceless boy, the racist phrases pronounced against the Bonsu, the writing on the envelope 'Emanuel negro', the picture taken by a colleague". Fratantuono, moreover, would never have recognized his responsibilities or apologized. For all the other defendants the penalty is reduced also in consideration of the level of their "repentance" (our quotation), in most cases only after years.

Moreover, the Court overturns the previous decisions recognizing the civil liability of the Municipality of Parma, condemning it to compensation for damages jointly and severally with the defendants.

On March 6, 2018, the Supreme Court rejected the appeal of the City of Parma and confirmed the civil liability recognized in the appeal bis process, ordering to pay Emmanuel 135 thousand euros (80 thousand as compensation, 48 to reimburse legal costs).

Fratantuono's sentence to four and a half years' imprisonment is definitively confirmed, while Cicinato is cleared of all charges.

Thus ends, after ten long years, the tortuous judicial process of this sad and sordid affair. The result is a substantial halving of the sentences compared to what was decided in the first instance sentence.



The apologies of the Mayor of Parma at the time, to Emmanuel and his family, never arrived.





## **Castel Volturno: massacre of camorra, racist massacre**

*Grazia Naletto*

Castel Volturno, 18 September 2008. Around 21, a Fiat Punto grigio car arrives near the Ob ob ob exotic fashion tailor's shop, which is located along the Domiziana state road, in Ischitella. A group of men armed with two Kalashnikovs, a machine gun and four 9 caliber rifles descend from it. They wear the Carabinieri bib and simulate a document check; therefore, the immigrants present in the area are not alarmed. Immediately afterwards, shots are fired in and out of the store and insults against the "dirty black bastards".

It is a massacre. About 130 shots hit seven young immigrants. The Ghanaians Kwame Antwi Julius Francis (31 years old), Affun Yeboa Eric (25 years old), Christopher Adams (28 years old), the Togolese El Hadji Ababa and Samuel Kwako (26 years old), Jeemes Alex, 28 years old from Liberia are shot to death. Joseph Ayimbora, Ghanaian, shot in the legs and abdomen, pretends to be dead and manages to save himself. None of them will be involved in illegal activities. None of them are Nigerian<sup>210</sup>. And yet, some press articles immediately advance the hypothesis of a "settling of scores" between rival mafias involved in the drug trade, referring precisely to the Nigerian mafia<sup>211</sup>.

The next day, about two hundred immigrants organize a parade in solidarity with their companions and block the Domitian road for three hours. They are angry (how can we not be angry in front of a massacre like this one?), they overturn some

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<sup>210</sup> Who are really the young people who have met such an absurd and violent death? The Ex Canapificio Social Center tells it very well in a report published on the MeltingPot website and available here: <https://www.meltingpot.org/Chi-sono-le-vittime-della-strage-di-Castel-Volturno.html#.XsWZbpMzaML>.

<sup>211</sup> See "Far West tra Napoli e Caserta, sette morti", *Corriere.it*, 18 Settembre 2008, and B. Coscia, "La vendetta dei casalesi. Strage di extracomunitari", *Corriere della Sera*, 19 Settembre 2008.



dumpsters and damage the windows of some stores. To be identified with the local crime do not fit. Most of them work in the fields, 25 euros a day for 12 hours of work, black of course, and live, if it goes well, in overcrowded houses, if it goes badly, in crumbling shacks along the state highway.

The State “responds” to the protest with the sending of 400 soldiers, Carabinieri and police officers, and with the announcement of measures to facilitate the rapid expulsion of immigrants. Mimma D'Amico, of the former social center Canapificio di Caserta, remembers eleven years later, that in the days following that September 18 “A sort of apartheid had been created. Black people were afraid of white people after that massacre. There was a climate of fear and terror”<sup>212</sup>.

A few kilometers from Castel Volturno, in Villa Literno, 19 years earlier, on August 24, 1989, Jerry Masslo, a South African refugee, never recognized as such by the Italian State, was killed. He was guilty of rebelling against the theft attempt made by a local gang in the shack where he lived with some comrades. Masslo played an active role in the organization of the first protests of laborers against the conditions of exploitation experienced in the countryside.

The massacre of Castel Volturno follows another murder committed on the same day a few kilometers away, in Baia Verde, twenty minutes before. The victim is Antonio Cilento, 53 years old, a suspected affiliate of the Camorra clan of Schiavone. And another raid follows, the one that struck a month earlier, on August 18, at his home, Egonmwan Nogienmwun, known as Teddy, president of the Association of Nigerians of Campania and committed against the exploitation of prostitution. At the time of the ambush, there were at least 14 people in the house, including 4 children. The massacre

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<sup>212</sup> See, “Undici anni fa a Castel Volturno la strage dei ghanesi”, *la Repubblica*, 18 settembre 2019, here: <https://napoli.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/09/18/foto/undici-anni-fa-a-castel-voltuno-la-strage-dei-ghanesi-236338447/1/#1>.



remained “unfinished” because the weapons jammed; five people were “only” wounded: Egonwman himself, his companion and three friends<sup>213</sup>.

Immediately the ballistic findings connect the three raids, the Camorra matrix appears more than evident: we are in the land of Camorra where the dreaded Casalesi clan reigns.

### *The investigation*

The cameras installed near Egonwman's house and the tailor's shop in Via Domiziana, together with Joseph Ayimbora's statements, lead the investigators to focus their attention on a faction of the Casalesi clan headed by Giuseppe Setola.

On September 30, 2008 Oreste Spagnuolo (who will become a collaborator of justice), Giovanni Letizia and Alessandro Cirillo are arrested. On November 7th it is the turn of Davide Granato and Antonio Alluce. Finally, on January 14, 2009 Giuseppe Setola is arrested. The charges are of massacre for terrorist purposes aggravated “by racial hatred”, murder and attempted murder. According to the magistrates, the objective of the massacre was to “ensnare an entire community and affirm by force the mafia dominance over the area with acts of terrorism such as to subject and terrorize the entire community, with specific reference to that of color”<sup>214</sup>.

No victims are involved in illegal activities, they are of different nationalities, the only thing that unites the seven young people affected in Castel Volturno is that they are immigrants and blacks.

No “settling of scores”, therefore, but a “massacre of workers” as Enrico Pugliese defines it on the daily newspaper *the manifesto*<sup>215</sup>. A show of strength by a clan that “shoots in the pile” to send a message to that part of the Nigerian community involved in drug trafficking and prostitution, but according to some, it is also interested in

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<sup>213</sup> To note that before the massacre of Castel Volturno, the news about this first ambush remains relegated to the local chronicles.

<sup>214</sup> See: C. Sannino The killers said, “The killers said: jammuncenne I save because I faked dead”, *La Repubblica*, 24 settembre 2008.

<sup>215</sup> See: E. Pugliese, “Una strage di lavoratori”, *il manifesto*, 21 settembre 2008.



making profitable new investments in the area where many foreign immigrants work, and for this reason it wants to kick them out.

### *The trial*

The trial for the massacre of Castel Volturno begins on November 12, 2009 at the Court of Santa Maria Capua Vetere and sees six defendants: Giuseppe Setola, Davide Granato, Antonio Alluce, Alessandro Cirillo, Giovanni Letizia e Oreste Spagnuolo<sup>216</sup>.

The judgment of first instance is issued on April 14, 2011. Sentence to life imprisonment (with daytime isolation for 18 months) Giuseppe Setola, Davide Granato, Giovanni Letizia and Alessandro Cirillo and to 23 years in prison Antonio Alluce. The men are recognized as responsible (with the exception of Cyril) also for the attempted massacre operated on August 18 at the home of Teddy Egonwman. The judges award compensation to the civil parties: in addition to the only surviving witness, the relatives of the victims and the former Capanificio di Caserta social center.

The sentence of appeal is issued by the Court of Appeal of Naples on May 21, 2013 and confirms that of first instance, except for Antonio Alluce, for which he raises the penalty of imprisonment from 23 to 28 years and 6 months. The Court confirms the aggravating circumstance of "racial hatred", but excludes that of terrorist purposes.

The sentence of the Supreme Court is issued on January 30, 2014: it declares inadmissible the appeals presented by Alluce, Granato and Letizia, while it rejects those presented by Setola and Cirillo. The Court recognizes the aggravating circumstance of racism, while it excludes that of terrorism.<sup>217</sup> It is a historical sentence: for the first time, in our country, a final sentence for a massacre of Camorra is reached, recognizing the aggravating circumstance of racism. It is therefore useful to examine the motivations

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<sup>216</sup> The statements of Spagnuolo, who became a collaborator of justice, judged separately for the same facts, offer an essential contribution to the reconstruction of what happened.

<sup>217</sup> See: Court of Cassation, Section I, Decision n. 20445, 30 January 2014.



with which the judges of the Supreme Court have rejected the appeals of Setola and Cyril on this point.

### *A racist massacre*

The aggravating circumstance for reasons of racism was introduced into our system by Article 3 of Law no. 205/93, known as the Mancino Law, and has recently been implemented in our Penal Code.

According to art. 604 ter of the Penal Code, the penalty for crimes not punishable by life imprisonment committed for “purposes of discrimination or ethnic, national, racial or religious hatred, or in order to facilitate the activities of organizations, associations, movements or groups that have among their purposes the same purposes” can be increased by up to half.

According to what reported in the Judgment of the Court of Cassation, Setola tries to argue in his appeal that “the Court of Appeal did not explain the emulative potential of the conduct carried out by the appellant and made use of expressions also reported by witnesses who were not considered reliable”<sup>218</sup>.

Cyril argues, instead, that the configurability of the aggravating circumstance has been traced only to expressions used by Bristle in his conversations with Garnet, while “it is necessary that racial hatred is the purpose of the action, and not a simple motive of the same”. The objective is to demonstrate that the raid of 18 September had the sole purpose of “imposing a bribe on drug dealers and that the expressions used to indicate the objectives of the action are justified by the fact that 90% of black people in the area were involved in the drug trade and do not reveal any feeling of racial hatred”<sup>219</sup>.

In order to motivate the rejection of the remarks made by the plaintiffs, the judges of the Supreme Court recall first of all that according to the judges of merit

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<sup>218</sup> *Ibidem*, pag. 2.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibidem*. It is interesting to note how in an appeal to the Supreme Court of Cassation you dare to propose such a significant “estimate” on the involvement of “black people” in illegal activities.



“from the manner of the action and the circumstances of fact ascertained emerges a clear aversion and contempt towards black people”. The “pizzini” of Setola, seized in the course of the investigation, also contain explicit expressions such as “money” to be given “by force” by the “dirty niggers”; “are they all dead? yes they are all dead nigger bastards shit”.

According to the Court, “the aggravating circumstance in question requires that the action, due to its intrinsic characteristics and the context in which it takes place, should present itself as direct and at least potentially suitable to make the above mentioned feeling of hatred perceptible to the outside world and to arouse in others or, in any case, to give rise to the concrete danger of discriminatory behaviour; such, however, must also be considered the conduct that engenders, even if only potentially, the aggressive effect of the protected good, i.e. the equal human and social dignity of the offended person”.

In essence, the Court of Cassation emphasizes that to configure the aggravating circumstance it is not necessary that there are concrete emulative effects on third parties, but it is sufficient that the behaviour adopted is discriminatory on a symbolic level. And indeed it continues: “What becomes relevant is not so much the effect that a conduct can produce on third parties, but the cultural value that it expresses and that determines in the agent aggressive behaviour of others 'diversity', which discriminates and denies human dignity on the basis of a supposed inferiority for its belonging to a different race”.

The motivations with which the Court rejects the objections to the crime of massacre made by Setola deserve attention because, in our opinion, they contribute to strengthen the recognition of the racist motive of the raid of August 18 and the massacre of September 18. The judges of the Supreme Court recall that the Court of First Instance “has shown that it was ascertained, in fact, the manifest intention to hit anyone who happened to shoot, without sparing even women and children and,



however, unarmed and unsuspecting people who were numerous at the home of Teddy (which was also home to an association of Nigerians), as well as in the second episode the intent of the group of fire was to kill all those who had been present in the tailoring avoiding that there were survivors. That all, referring to the events of August 18 and September 18, 2008 and the places where they took place, can in fact be legitimately understood as “all the blacks present”.

And to think that, on the day of the second anniversary of the massacre, the Mayor of Castel Volturno refused to install a simple memorial plaque commemorating the six young immigrants killed in such a brutal way. According to the Mayor, this gesture was in danger of “celebrating a gang of criminals”.



## The “Bravi Ragazzi” of Continassa convicted for racism

*Paola Andrisani*

Vallette neighbourhood, outskirts of Turin, 7 December 2011,<sup>220</sup> a sixteen-year-old girl is returning home in broad daylight when two young foreigners approached her and extort her cell phone.

According to the girl, the two of them then took her up a hill in a park and raped her. "They were foreigners - tells the young girl - they stank; one of them had a scar on his face. I was a virgin. It was terrible". It is her brother who find the girl ("still without clothes," reports the press), and then calls the Carabinieri - the Italian police force, who take her to the hospital ("We are sure it was two *Romanian gypsies* living nearby. I saw them fleeing and tried to chase them, but without success," says the girl's brother<sup>221</sup>.)

Finally, they report the sexual assault. The news spreads in the neighborhood and residents organize of a torchlight procession that takes place on December 10 in solidarity with the victim and to protest against an "unsustainable" situation and ask to "clean up the Continassa and get rid of some certain scoundrels who ruin the life of an innocent girl<sup>222</sup>.

About 400-500 people participate in the torchlight procession. A group of them - some armed with sticks - break away from the rest at Via delle Pervinche aiming towards Cascina Continassa - home of about 50 Roma - spreading panic among them, who flee while the groups of attackers smash all they find. After forcing the inhabitants of the settlement to flee and destroying their few belongings, the group of attackers - amid the

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<sup>220</sup> Please see: P. Andrisani, “Continassa: la violenza simulata e la violenza subita”, in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Terzo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, 2014, pag. 123-127.

<sup>221</sup> Please see: “Vallette: ragazza di 16 anni violentata, si cercano gli aggressori” del 10 December 2011, <http://www.torinotoday.it/cronaca/violentata-ragazza-16-anni-vallette-torino.html>.

<sup>222</sup> Please see

[https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/12/13/foto/il\\_volantino\\_infilato\\_nelle\\_buche\\_dei\\_residenti\\_delle\\_vallette-26516661/1/](https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/12/13/foto/il_volantino_infilato_nelle_buche_dei_residenti_delle_vallette-26516661/1/).





applause of the literally "demonized"<sup>223</sup> crowd - set fire to a building and a couple of shacks (with the same torches used for the procession that was supposed to be peaceful). Fortunately, the episode did not cause victims or wounded.

It is the brother of the "raped" girl who, accompanied by the Carabinieri, tries to stop the blind fury approaching the attackers, when the camp is already burning. He convinces them to desist. Only then fire trucks can enter the camp -of which will then remain only the carcasses – and start putting out the flames.

Two people - a 20-year-old and a 59-year-old men - are identified and arrested for aggravated damage and the then mayor of Turin, Piero Fassino, firmly condemns the violence<sup>224</sup> in the Roma camp.

Meanwhile, the truth comes out. There was no rape and no violence from foreign citizens. The girl had made it all up, just to cover up and justify a sexual intercourse with her boyfriend. But it was too late to stop the violence the alleged episode had unleashed against the Roma.

Doctors of the Sant'Anna hospital had confirmed the sexual intercourse, without however expressing themselves about the violence, of which, instead, the girl's brother and family were absolutely convinced, to the point of organizing the torchlight procession, which from a peaceful demonstration has turned into a real pogrom.

### **The investigations, the arrests and finally convictions for racism**

And while the press is constructing a "textbook" media case, the investigators focus their investigations on a group of Ultras of the football team Juventus<sup>225</sup>, since they had

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<sup>223</sup> This is how one of the eight defendants, Davide Moscatiello, defined it in the courtroom at the hearing in June 2015: "There were young people, but also elderly people and families who screamed shitty gypsies, you have to burn".

<sup>224</sup> "It is absolutely unacceptable - he says bluntly - lynching people for "the sole reason that they are foreign citizens", Please see "Dal falso stupro all'incendio del campo Rom" dell'11 December 2011, <http://www.rai.it/dl/grr/notizie/ContentItem-9d94253c-c5b0-4701-b6bf-b536720e6933.html>.

<sup>225</sup> According to the prosecutor's office, the defendant Moscatiello, who at that time was the contact person of the Juventus ultras group 'Bravi Ragazzi', would have at least initially incited the crowd. Moscatiello in the courtroom claimed to have learned of the lie from a phone call of a Digos agent (whom



been seen at the torchlight procession, and two of them had been stopped by Carabinieri while fleeing from the camp set on the fire. The investigations conducted by the Prosecutor Paola Longo later confirmed the responsibilities of some members of the most lunatic fringe of the Juventus fans<sup>226</sup>.

The first hearing of the trial take place on July 15, 2014 (in this hearing, p.p. no. 15679/12 will be joined to p.p. no. 15679/12. 29654/11). Seven people are accused of "incitement to racial hatred" (for shouting phrases like "let's burn them all" and incited to assault the Cascina Continassa), arson attack with aggravating of racial hatred, private violence (in connection with the assault of a journalist and a photographer) and for preventing the rescue.

On July 14, 2015, the Ordinary Court of Turin, Criminal Section V, sentenced six people and acquitted the seventh, recognizing that the crimes committed should be qualified as crimes based on "racial hatred", with application of the aggravating circumstance under Article 3 L. 205/1993, as assumed by the Prosecutor.

Così scrive il giudice nelle motivazioni della sentenza di primo grado:

So writes the judge in the verdict:

"The atavistic and never dormant ethnic hatred towards the "gypsies", brought to the extreme levels, has caused normal citizens to carry out acts of inhuman violence towards the Roma camped within the area of Continassa, burning down their shacks, praising their death, delaying the rescue by blocking the vehicles of the firefighters rushed to extinguish the devastating fire started with flashlights and lighters. An unworthy episode that not even the photographs can show in all its brutality.<sup>227</sup>

The judge observes that "part of the troublemakers" who took part in the event "belong to the group of 'Bravi ragazzi', Juventus fans": this "had the effect of overheating the

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he knew for his activities at the stadium), while the parade was leaving and to have tried to calm down without succeeding.

<sup>226</sup> Among them, there are also the Drughi, the extreme right biggest fan group. "The Drughi – as per verdict - have taken the military initiative, sending away women and children, throwing paper bombs and setting the Continassa on fire.

<sup>227</sup> Please see Verdict of Tribunale Ordinario di Torino, Sezione V Penale del 14 luglio 2015, depositata in ottobre 2015, p.p. 24691/11 (+ 29654/11) nr e p.p. 3690/14 (+5630/12) Trib., pag 4.



minds" even if - the judge points out - "we cannot isolate this violent group from the context and consider it solely responsible for what happened". In any case, "this intrusion unleashed the anger, frustrated rationality, cancelled the sense of humanity, gave life to an animalistic fury"<sup>228</sup>.

According to the judge "the aggravating circumstance of racial hatred" is also evident in the "leaflet that indicated the parade and the tenor of the incitements and insults shouted by the demonstrators. The real objective of the action were not the unknown perpetrators of the alleged sexual violence, but "the gypsies" in their totality, as belonging to an inferior and despised ethnic group". "The tenor of that flyer - continues the judge - is the demonstration of how the legitimate indignation for a violence that at that time no one suspected was a slanderous invention, had immediately turned into a campaign of racial hatred against the Roma stationed at Continassa".

The same aggravating circumstance of having acted with the "aim of discrimination or ethnic, national, racial or religious hatred"<sup>229</sup> also emerged, according to the judge of first instance, from slogans such as "let's burn them all", "let's kill them all" and "let them burn", "a clear demonstration of indiscriminate hatred towards the entire Roma population".

In the judgement, the Municipality of Turin, together with ASGI, Idea Rom Onlus and ERRRC<sup>230</sup>, were constituted as civil parties. The Court awarded each of the injured parties (4) the sum of €15,000 as compensation for the damage suffered and €3,000 to each of the associations formed. The money will be used to continue the associations' actions to protect the fundamental rights of the Roma. Despite the significant delay in the investigation and the beginning of the proceedings, after four years, the Tribunal has

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid, pag. 7.

<sup>229</sup> The verdict also quotes the New York Convention (March 7 1966), turned into law by L. 654/75 (v. Cass. Sez. V, sent. 11590/10).

<sup>230</sup> Please see here the press release of the associations:

<http://www.asgi.it/notizia/significativa-condanna-penale-per-un-violento-assalto-a-uncampo-rom-in-italia/>.



succeeded in securing justice for the victims of this brutal racist attack<sup>231</sup>. But the proceedings would continue in the Court of Appeal.

On 13 July 2018, then, three years later, comes the second degree judgement. Four sentences and one acquittal. The judges of the Court of Appeal of Turin confirmed for four defendants the charges of first instance, including “aggravating racial and ethnic hatred”. This is the first conviction for an offence committed with “the aggravating circumstance of racial hatred”, emitted after a directive issued by the Turin Public Prosecutor's Office itself<sup>232</sup>.

On appeal, the defendants were sentenced to sentences of between 2 and 4 years, reduced compared to the first degree, when there were seven defendants and the sentences were between 6 years and six months and one year and three months.

Despite the severity of the exemplary sentence, outside the courtroom, someone had the courage to shout that it was “a masquerade”.

And despite the fact that it was a sentence destined to be remembered, it would be worth asking why the young sixteen years old girl from Turin, as well as Erika a few years earlier, and many other young women in minor cases, thought of inventing a story of violence using foreign citizens as scapegoats. And it would be worth deeply questioning why, in Italy, from Opera to Ponticelli, from Rosarno to Turin, it has become more and more normal to carry out racist and squadrist raids, as well as why in few cases they are recognized as such and adequately punished.

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<sup>231</sup> “The repression of crimes committed with the aim of racial hatred is particularly rare in Italy because the law on the issue is not entirely adequate. After the sentence of July 14th, we hope that the Italian authorities will take new steps to strengthen the persecution of such crimes. At the same time, civil society must support victims and vulnerable communities also through concrete actions to support the authorities in this repressive action”, commented Mr. Lorenzo Trucco, ASGI President.

<sup>232</sup> The document is available here: [https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/direttiva-hate-crime-proc-to\\_10072018\\_133848.pdf](https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/direttiva-hate-crime-proc-to_10072018_133848.pdf).



## Zingaropoli: racism is banned also for political parties

*Grazia Naletto*

*The facts: Roma and Muslims, a "danger" for Milan*

May 2011. We are in the midst of the campaign for the local elections. Milan is among the cities where citizens will vote. The two candidates for mayor that attract the attention are the outgoing Letizia Moratti (supported by the center-right coalition) and Giuliano Pisapia (supported by the center-left coalition).

2011, we must recall, is the year of the so-called "North Africa Emergency", declared by the then Prime Minister Berlusconi, following the resumption of the arrivals of migrants first from Tunisia and Egypt, then from Libya. The instrumental use of migration and the presence of Roma communities in our country has been going through the national public debate for months. The election campaign for the renewal of local governments is no exception.

The elections held on May 15 and 16, 2011 gave Giuliano Pisapia (48%) the lead while Moratti got 41.6% of the vote. In the two weeks preceding the runoff, the leaders of the center-right would visit the city to try to fill the gap between their coalition and the centre left. On May 21, Umberto Bossi, then secretary of the Northern League, declared: "I will commit myself against Pisapia because he risks transforming Milan into a gipsypolis (zingaropoli)"<sup>233</sup>. Similar tones also characterize a statement reported by the newspaper La Repubblica: "Pisapia risks transforming Milan into a gipsypolis. He wants to increase the Roma camps and build the largest center for the Muslim religion in Europe. The league cannot afford to let Milan go unscathed"<sup>234</sup>.

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<sup>233</sup> See: Ansa, May 21, 2011, "Bossi, mi impegno contro Pisapia. Farò almeno un comizio. Tremonti premier? Non accetterebbe",

[http://www.ansa.it/web/notizie/rubriche/topnews/2011/05/21/visualizza\\_new.html 847027856.html](http://www.ansa.it/web/notizie/rubriche/topnews/2011/05/21/visualizza_new.html 847027856.html)

<sup>234</sup> See: "Bossi: "Il mio impegno contro Giuliano Pisapia", La Repubblica, May 21, 2011, [https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/05/21/news/bossi\\_mi\\_impegnare\\_contro\\_giuliano\\_pisapia-16563791/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/05/21/news/bossi_mi_impegnare_contro_giuliano_pisapia-16563791/)



On the same day La Repubblica also published the photo of electoral bills in the streets of Milan by Lega Nord. The text has the same tenor as the statements we mentioned: “MILAN ZINGAROPOLI WITH PISAPIA + CAMPI NOMADI THE BIGGEST MOSQUE IN EUROPE. VOTE LETIZIA MORATTI. LIVE MILAN”<sup>235</sup>.

Two days later, Prime Minister Berlusconi, in his "Appeal for Milan", published on the Website of the newspaper *Il Giornale* and then, also in video format, on that of his party, declared: “Milan cannot, on the eve of Expo 2015, become an Islamic city, a gypsy city full of Roma camps and besieged by foreigners to whom the left also gives the right to vote”.<sup>236</sup>

Roberto Natale, then president of the Italian National Press Federation (FNSI), reacted denouncing the discriminatory nature of these messages: “No to the word Zingaropoli, it is full of contempt. Political controversy is the business of candidates and coalitions. But the poisoning of language is a problem that concerns everyone, including us journalists who handle words for work. (...) Abroad such a blunt use of political language would be branded as "hate speech". Italian public discourse should find the sense of the limit”<sup>237</sup>. A warning which unfortunately remained unheard.

The language used in the election posters led even Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, on a mission to Italy on the same days: “I was shocked by the use made during the election campaign in Milan of xenophobic messages against the Roma, but also against Muslims. Certain posters that I saw posted while I was in Milan certainly do not represent the best face of Italy. The impression is that they are not just words. (...) I think that once the elections are over, we have to think carefully about how certain parties have conducted their campaign”.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> The images are still available on the Web and can be found googling “zingaropoli”.

<sup>236</sup> The text is still here: <https://tv.liberoquotidiano.it/video/libero-tv-copertina/1545945/milano-zingaropoli-no-grazie.html>

<sup>237</sup> The text is here: <https://www.fnsi.it/roberto-natale-sulle-esternazioni-del-leader-della-lega-no-alla-parola-zingaropoli-e-carica-di-disprezzo>

<sup>238</sup> Source: [sucardrom.blogspot.com](http://sucardrom.blogspot.com)



### *The anti-discrimination complaint: no to racist political slogans*

On 23 May, the Naga, a historic Milanese anti-racist association that is very active in the area, filed an anti-discrimination appeal pursuant to the combined provisions of Articles 1, 2 and 3 of LD 215/03 and Article 43 of LD 286/1998.<sup>239</sup>

In the appeal, Naga calls for the discriminatory nature of the above statements to be ascertained, believing that “it is neither possible nor legitimate for a political party to use slogans and statements that are manifestly discriminatory against certain communities and social groups - specifically, against a minority protected ex lege (the Roma) - using the very existence of these groups and communities as a factor of social fear, as well as using openly disparaging and derogatory terms such as “gypsypolis”.

In the text of the appeal, the association highlights its legitimacy to take legal action on the basis of Article 5 of Legislative Decree 215/2003 which, in the event of collective and/or widespread discrimination, recognises this right to bodies registered in the Register of Associations and bodies carrying out activities in the field of anti-discrimination held by Unar.<sup>240</sup>

As for the conduct that is the subject of the complaint, Naga considers that it constitutes harassment within the meaning of s.3 of s. 2 of LD 215/2003 that condemn behaviour “having the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive climate”. The profiles of harassment are specifically identified in the use of the word “gypsy metropolis”, in the idea that “an agglomeration, a group of Roma and Sinti constitutes a dangerous and negative fact for the city” and in the idea that a large mosque, “the largest mosque in Europe”, constitutes a negative and dangerous fact in itself for the city. According to the association, this is harassment “both in a subjective sense because it is intended to violate the dignity of members of the Roma and Sinti minority as well as Muslim citizens, and from the social climate point of view “because it is intended and at least in

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<sup>239</sup> The text can be found here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/Ricorso-Zingaropoli.pdf>

<sup>240</sup> Unar is the National Anti-Racial Discrimination Office.





part also has the effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive climate towards the social groups themselves”.

As for the possibility of taking legal action against two members of Parliament, whose opinions are protected by Articles 21 and 68 of the Constitution, Naga points out that the Secretary of the Northern League and the Prime Minister are sued not as parliamentarians, but as private citizens representing a political party.<sup>241</sup>

The association's requests to the judge are four: to order the immediate removal of the posters, to ascertain and declare the discriminatory nature of the reported behaviour, to order the cancellation of the "appeal for Milan" from the Websites and to order the publication of the judge's decision on the websites of the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of the Interior for at least one consecutive month and, for at least one week, on the newspapers *Il Giornale*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica* and *La Stampa*.

*The sentence: “Zingaropoli” offensive and humiliating expression*

The sentence from May 28, 2012 will partially accept the appeal.<sup>242</sup> First of all, the judge rejects the exception of Naga's lack of legitimacy to act presented by the resistance, recognising this legitimacy as referring to a collective discrimination “not being a subject of discrimination but having to take into account the collectively understood Roma, Xinti and Islamic ethnic groups”.

The arguments in the appeal are only accepted as they relate to the conduct of the two political parties, so the statements of the two parliamentarians are not considered. According to the judge, the statements made by Mr Bossi and Mr Berlusconi are not

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<sup>241</sup> It is important to remember that, according to art. 68 Cost. c.1, “Members of Parliament cannot be called to account for opinions expressed and votes given in the performance of their duties”. The protection extends only as long as the statements of a member of Parliament are expressed “within the scope of his or her functions”. Where, on the other hand, it is possible to demonstrate that the statements and opinions expressed cannot be traced back to the exercise of the parliamentary function, the protection of Art. 68 is not applicable.

<sup>242</sup> The sentence can be found here: [http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/SentenzaNAGA\\_PdL+LN.pdf](http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/SentenzaNAGA_PdL+LN.pdf)





liable to be condemned as such, but it is the use made of them by the parties to which they belong that has been censured. This is on the basis of Article 68 of the Constitution, according to which: “Members of Parliament may not be called to account for opinions expressed or votes cast in the performance of their duties” and therefore the statements made by Members of Parliament are unquestionable.

For this reason, Mr. Bossi's verbal statements are not examined as they were not taken up, published or circulated by his party; on the contrary, the so-called "appeal for Milan" circulated by Mr. Berlusconi is examined as it was published on the website of the Freedom Party. The text of the election posters circulated by the Lega Nord is also examined.

The discriminatory nature of the expressions "MILAN ZINGAROPOLI", contained in the electoral posters of the Northern League, and "Milan cannot, on the eve of Expo 2015, become (...) a gypsy city full of Roma camps", contained in the "Appeal for Milan" published on the website of the People of Freedom, is ascertained and declared.

According to the judge, in fact, “the neologism “gypsypolis”, adopted as a slogan during the election campaign of the two parties, has a clearly derogatory value, since the gypsy ethnic groups (Roma and Sinti) are used as an emblem of negativity and danger to be shunned”. The expression "zingaropoli" thus regains the more detestable and derogatory meaning of the term “gypsy” and refers to it indifferently to the two Roma and Sinti ethnic groups, conveying the negative idea that Roma and Sinti communities constitute a threat as such”. The offensive and humiliating value of this expression, which has the effect of violating the dignity of the Roma and fostering an intimidating climate towards them, is thus recognised.

Moreover, the relevance of Article 21 of the Constitution is excluded with reference to the conduct of the two parties, where the principle of freedom of expression must be balanced by the principle of equality and equal dignity of persons.

On the contrary, the judge did not consider statements and expressions referring to the Muslim community to be offensive, but simply an expression of freedom of opinion.



The publication within 30 days in the daily newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* of the header and operative part of the sentence by and at the expense of the Lega Nord and the PDL, as well as the payment of court costs by the two parties, were therefore ordered.

As the President of the Naga stated at the time, “For the first time in Italy, a court order condemning political parties for discrimination has been filed”. In 2012, the Naga hoped that it would no longer have to intervene in cases like these. Unfortunately, eight years later, we are forced to acknowledge that the political propaganda of the following years has left wide room for the ostentatious spread of offensive, hostile and violent rhetoric.<sup>243</sup>

A much larger space than we could have imagined then.

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<sup>243</sup> For an analysis of hate speech in the public debate see: *Words are stones. Hate speech analysis in public discourse in six European countries*, 2019: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/international-report/?preview=true>



## **Villa Opicina. Alina, free “against herself”. Nevertheless, “the fact doesn’t exist”**

***Paola Andrisani***

It is April 16, 2012, when Alina Bonar Diachuk, a 32-year-old Ukrainian citizen, commits suicide in the police station of Villa Opicina, a small hamlet near Trieste.<sup>244</sup> She did it by tying a rope to the radiator in the cell where she had been locked up two days earlier. The news did not arouse much clamour, on the contrary it is hastily robbed of a "banal" made of crime news. As the days go by, information begins to filter and bring back to the surface the horror of what was consumed in that cell.

Alina had just finished serving a 10-month prison sentence for “conspiracy to commit and aiding and abetting illegal immigration”, as the local news reports say, focusing more on criminal details than on the death itself. She was released from prison on Saturday, April 14, 2012 with an expulsion decree still pending, linked to prison detention, but not yet ordered by the Prefect.

Alina is therefore formally a free woman. Yet waiting for her when she gets out of prison, she finds a police car that takes her to another police station, waiting for the formalisation of the expulsion decree. She has kept two days at Villa Opicina before deciding to take off the rope from the hood of her sweatshirt and hang herself from the bars of the window of a security camera guarded by a CCTV camera.

A cloudy story with unclear contours. The Prosecutor's Office opens an investigation.

### ***The investigation***

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<sup>244</sup> Please see also P. Andrisani, “Alina e il mistero del Commissariato degli orrori”, in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Terzo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, 2014, pag. 200-202.



Alina was not supposed to be there. The girl's family's defence lawyer does not use blunt terms and speaks explicitly of "kidnapping". The expulsion decree had yet to be issued, so there were no valid reasons to detain her at police headquarters.

Alina should not have been in those rooms, also and above all because of her psychological fragility<sup>245</sup>, and she should have been checked on sight (and it would have been possible since she was in a supervised video room). But this was not the case and she died hanging after 40 long minutes of agony, 40 minutes during which no one (specifically those on guard at the time) saw or heard anything.

On the register of suspects gets Carlo Baffi<sup>246</sup>, head of the Immigration Office, who is charged with kidnapping and manslaughter. For the Prosecutor's Office, the woman was in fact "illegally" detained at the offices of the Commissariat because she had finished serving her sentence and was in fact "free".

However, during the course of the investigation, there are some details that only few witnesses highlight or deliberately tend to be hidden.<sup>247</sup> For example, the (absolutely not negligible) fact that, within the Commissariat in question, a sign would have been found with the words "Purge Office" (instead of "immigration office") and a photo of Mussolini on it, while other material related to the neo-fascist fringe was also found at Baffi's house (a paperweight with the fascist motto "Hangman who gives up", books such as Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf", "The defence of the race" by Julius Evola or "How

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<sup>245</sup> Alina was afraid of being forcibly repatriated: when she felt that there was no alternative way to her endless escape, she tried to kill herself. The attempt made in the Coroneo prison, was unsuccessful. She was rescued and saved. But, within the Commissariat of Opicina, where she had been locked up after the release decided by the judiciary, her desperation got the better of the control systems and the eyes of the police officers who were supposed to watch over her to prevent other desperate gestures.

<sup>246</sup> The Uil Police Union defends the work of the Police Headquarters. "The case of Alina Bonar, who committed suicide at the police station of Opicina, had to be a moment of reflection and correction of the practices of treatment of foreigners awaiting expulsion", writes the provincial secretary Uil Police, Paolo Di Gregorio. "On the contrary, we have seen spectacularization and superficiality, which destroy the lives and stories of some policemen. Emblematic is the story of Carlo Baffi", an official of the Police Headquarters under investigation, "where a story of professional commitment is publicly demolished despite not delivering any repressive excess or ideologically inspired smudging, but an approach based on precise directives".

<sup>247</sup> Among them, the journalist Cinzia Gubbini on the manifesto, in an article of 17 May 2012, "In Trieste the Commissariat of horrors, kidnappings and violence on 50 immigrants", available here: [http://www.reti-invisibili.net/morticarceri/articles/art\\_15497.html](http://www.reti-invisibili.net/morticarceri/articles/art_15497.html)



to recognise and explain the Jew" by George Montandon, a bust and various posters of Mussolini and other unequivocal materials).

Alina's case, confirms the chief prosecutor, may not be an isolated case. In that police station, of course, Alina had had the worst of it, losing her life, but she was not the only one to suffer abuse and violence: many other foreign citizens, EU and non-EU, awaiting deportation were illegally detained in Opicina cells. In fact, investigations have shown that 174 cases were found (from August 2011 to April 2012). To detain without any restrictive measure of the Judicial Authority many foreign citizens, considered (sometimes erroneously) "irregular" was an habit that lasted years and emerged with the tragic end of the woman.

The investigation was closed in January 2015: the Trieste Public Prosecutor's Office served notice of the conclusion of the investigation on the then manager of the Immigration Office, accused of aggravated kidnapping, and on three officers of the Commissariat, accused instead of "violated surrender" and "death as a result of another offence". A "heavy" file of more than 10,000 pages, plus 246 personal files of as many foreign citizens. These acts also contain the dramatic video recording the stages of Alina's suicide. The lawyer of Alina's family asks the Ministry of the Interior for compensation of 500,000 euros.<sup>248</sup>

In 2016, among the thousands of papers in the proceedings, an old report from 2006 comes out: a document relating to the meeting between the heads of the Prefecture and the Public Prosecutor's Office itself, which, together with the subsequent circulars of the Police Headquarters, would unequivocally demonstrate that the Immigration Office's agents carried out the indications that emerged from that meeting for six years (from 2006 to 2012) And this means that the Public Prosecutor's Office itself was aware of the "procedure" that after 2012, with Alina's death, was correctly "outlawed".

## The trial

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<sup>248</sup> The compensation is then "settled" at the sum of 150 thousand euros, then granted in 2016.



In February 2018, the trial with an abbreviated rite begins, calling for the imprisonment of seven of the nine policemen of the Immigration Office investigated (including executives), two of whom are called to answer for manslaughter for the death of the young Alina Bonar Diachuk. Together with Alina's file, there are 174 more in this case, concerning as many foreign citizens. Public prosecutor Massimo De Bortoli believes that it was “kidnapping of a person who has been aggravated by abuse of power and public officials”: the migrants should not have been detained in that damn barracks. In his indictment before Judge Giorgio Nicoli, the accused and their lawyers, the magistrate asked for 20 years and 9 months of detention in total for the officers and officials with responsibility in the Immigration Office involved in the investigation.

Also the judges of the Review Court, in confirming the legitimacy of the searches ordered by the Pm, when the judicial case broke out, have reiterated the same thesis of the prosecution.

On 4 June 2018, the judge for preliminary investigations, Giorgio Nicoli, issued an acquittal sentence for the former head of the Immigration Office of the Police Headquarters, Carlo Baffi, his deputy Vincenzo Panasiti, and then Alberto Strambaci, Cristiano Resmini, Alessandro De Antoni and Fabrizio Maniago, as well as for the chosen agent Ivan Tikulin.

The ruling, 154 pages, accused the prosecution of being biased and wasting time and money and justified the behaviour of the Immigration office officers who were carrying out their duty of taking into custody foreigners bound to be deported from the country. “The deportation of a foreign citizen cannot be carried out without taking him or her into custody” ruled the judge. The judge even went so far as to state in that the investigation would “create panic in the Trieste Police Headquarters and, perhaps, in other police headquarters. So much so that it would have induced at least Trieste and Gorizia (as peremptorily stated by the prosecutor in his reply, as a result of his investigation) to no longer dare to detain the foreigners to be expelled, at most inviting them with a 'ticket' - if they so wish - to voluntarily undergo the procedures aimed at removing them from the national territory”.



## The epilogue?

In September 2018, Alina's case lands in the Court of Appeal, with an equally substantial 113-page dossier.

Massimo De Bortoli, the public prosecutor, did not give up and appealed against the sentence in which judge Giorgio Nicoli acquitted all nine police officers.<sup>249</sup> The investigation had already created tensions, given that officials and agents have always maintained that they had done nothing more than implement the directives issued by the top bodies of the Police Headquarters and shared at the highest institutional levels. In the appeal, the Public Prosecutor went through the entire accusatory system sustained so far: the deprivation of personal freedom to which foreigners who were in the police station would have been subjected would not have been legitimate, even in view of the sole purpose of removal with repatriation.

Nicoli has always maintained that “the police has the duty to detain the foreigner, even if he has not committed a crime, for the sole reason that it has been ascertained that he is circulating in the State without having the title and, therefore, is violating the law”.

The judicial battle is still open and all to be played out. On appeal, the outcome of the first instance could also be overturned.

But the question that now arises is: can only a mere compensation in money restore dignity and serenity to these people who have been violated and abused illegally in the cell of a police station? Much will depend on the of the next sentence. Certainly, no amount, however large, will ever be able to restore Alina's life, who died, according to the first judge, “as a result of the action taken by the victim and, therefore, no other factor contributed”.

Alina is dead, but for the Law, it did not happen.

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<sup>249</sup> Please see: Court of Trieste, Sentence no. 346/18 of 4 June 2018, filed in July 2018.



## **Stormfront. The success of the biggest racist hate speech site in the world**

*Paola Andrisani*

Stormfront was born in the United States in 1990 as the online noticeboard for the nationalist campaign of David Duke, the Louisiana Senate candidate.<sup>250</sup> The name "*Stormfront*" is chosen for its connotations of "political or military front" (like the German Nazi *stormtroopers*) and in analogy with the meteorological fronts that invoke the idea of a tumultuous storm that ends with "*cleanliness*". *Stormfront.org* (which calls itself "The white nationalism community") was later officially founded in 1995 and put online on a Texas provider by Don Black, known for being the leader of the Ku Kux Klan and a member of the National Socialist White People's Party. In 2002, there were 5.000 registered users of the site, rising to 52.000 in June 2005; in December 2008, as a result of reactions to the election of Barack Obama, the first African American president, users reached 133.000. Ten years later, on 31st December 2018, the registered users are 338.000<sup>251</sup>, with the power to reach even more people in the United States. And that's not all. *Stormfront.org* also lands in Italy with a forum section in Italian. In August 2017, the site was blacked out by its own provider, Network Solutions<sup>252</sup>, due to a legal action brought by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law<sup>253</sup>. Earlier that month,

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<sup>250</sup> See also: Andrisani P., "The perverse intermingling of virtual and "viral" hatred", in Lunaria (edited by), *Chronicles of Ordinary Racism. Third White Paper on Racism in Italy*, 2014, pp. 97-102.

<sup>251</sup> According to a study conducted in 2014 by the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) Intelligence Report, many registered *Stormfront* users have been responsible for some of the most horrific hate crimes and mass murder since the site opened. In the five years leading up to 2014, members of *Stormfront* have killed around 100 people. Of these, 77 were massacred by *Stormfront* user Anders Behring Breivik, a Norwegian terrorist notorious for the 2011 massacre in Norway. In this regard see: <https://www.splcenter.org/20140331/white-homicide-worldwide>.

<sup>252</sup> See: <https://eu.knoxnews.com/story/news/2017/08/26/white-supremacist-forum-site-stormfront-seized-domain-hosts/604902001/>.

<sup>253</sup> See: <https://lawyerscommittee.org/lawyers-committee-civil-rights-law-takes-action-leading-shut-stormfront-com/>.





the same fate befalls the other white supremacists' site, *The Daily Stormer*<sup>254</sup>. But *Stormfront.org* is back online on 29 September 2017. As well as the other site.

In April 2018, the founder of *Stormfront* announced that the forum is temporarily restricting access to "supporter members" (users who donate at least five dollars per month, ed) and that will archive and close the main server due to a "financial crisis". But, despite this, with various tricks, the site is still visible and frequented (there are some very current threads, ed) to this day, both in the USA and in Italy<sup>255</sup>.

### **The start of investigations in Italy**

In October 2011, the Rome Police Headquarters, in collaboration with Digos and the Postal and Communications Police Service, launched an investigation into the Italian section of the site ("Italian Patriots and Nationalists", a group of young supporters of ideologies that can be traced back to the National Socialist extreme right). The investigation leads, after about a year, in November 2012, to the arrest of the administrator, ideologist and promoter of the Italian section of the site, two forum moderators and a forum user. One of the arrested would have had relations with Forza Nuova (an Italian far-right political party).<sup>256</sup>

The investigation, the Rome Police Headquarters said in a note, has made it possible to *"acquire concrete evidence against 21 Italian citizens, subject to investigation in order to the crimes provided for by Law no. 654 of 13 October 1975, for having associated themselves, united by an ideological vocation of the extreme National Socialist Right, with the aim of committing more crimes of diffusion on line and through leafleting of ideologies based on superiority of the white race, on racial and ethnic hatred, and incitement to commit acts of discrimination and*

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<sup>254</sup> See: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/charlottesville-neo-nazi-websites-shut-down-daily-stormer-online-hosting-white-supremacist-godaddy-a7893796.html>.

<sup>255</sup> These sites have the ability to change providers very quickly: to the point of using the so-called "dark web" or "deep web", that portion of the Internet that can only be accessed using TOR, The Onion Router, a network that allows navigation on this particular area of the web. The main function of TOR is, in fact, to allow users access to pages with ".onion" domain, keeping their privacy intact: the navigation is in fact completely encrypted. Read about it here: [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/gydmdj/neo-nazi-site-the-daily-stormer-moves-to-the-darkweb-but-promises-a-comeback](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/gydmdj/neo-nazi-site-the-daily-stormer-moves-to-the-darkweb-but-promises-a-comeback).

<sup>256</sup> He is Mirko Viola, 42 years old from Cantù, belonging to the Forza Nuova Lario movement. Read here: <http://www.quicomo.it/cronaca/comasco-arrestati-stormfront.html>.



violence on racial and ethnic grounds".<sup>257</sup> According to the Chief of Police of Rome, those arrested *"were at a planning stage and were likely to attack Gypsy camps or other targets of interest to people with this ideology or mentality"*. A heavy and at the same time disturbing statement.

The forum was already well known to investigators, both in relation to the many reports received from associations, institutions and private citizens, and for specific complaints made by citizens affected by personal attacks, especially people from the world of culture, politics, information and television. During the preliminary investigation, the judge prohibits the possibility for Italian users to view the hate content posted on the web by issuing a preventive seizure decree<sup>258</sup> concerning the Italian section of the *Stormfront* forum in its entirety. This type of measure is justified by the need to avoid that, pending the procedure, the site continues to be accessible by users. This is because the concrete possibility for such users to view the incriminated hate content *"would, in fact, lead to the prolongation of the criminally relevant racist propaganda activity, and xenophobia and incitement to hatred and violence"*<sup>259</sup>. Furthermore, *following the request for indictment, the defendants were "subject to the precautionary measure of custody in prison, pursuant to Article 285 of the Italian Criminal Code, due to the criminally relevant content fed into the network (the so-called fumus commissi delicti<sup>260</sup>) and of the concrete danger that in the absence of the adoption of such a measure, the criminal activity continues to be carried out (the so-called periculum in mora)"*<sup>261</sup>.

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<sup>257</sup> See: [http://www1.adnkronos.com/IGN/News/Cronaca/Razzismo-incitamento-a-violenza-sul-web-arresti-e-perquisizioni-in-tutta-Italia\\_313899478429.html](http://www1.adnkronos.com/IGN/News/Cronaca/Razzismo-incitamento-a-violenza-sul-web-arresti-e-perquisizioni-in-tutta-Italia_313899478429.html).

<sup>258</sup> Pursuant to art. 321, Criminal Procedure Code, Book IV - Precautionary Measures, paragraph 1.

<sup>259</sup> As stated in the "Provision for preventive seizure and injunction against Access Providers" issued by the GIP, Dr. Aprile, on 13 November 2012, in case no. 1373/12 RG. All the documents can be found in: Stormfront Process. Acts of the process published by MDA.

<sup>260</sup> That is, the "appearance of the commission of a crime", which indicates the existence of indications of guilt on a specific person. The *fumus commissi delicti* is one of the necessary prerequisites for the application of personal precautionary measures.

<sup>261</sup> Also, in the "Preventive seizure measure and inhibitory seizure of Access Providers" issued by GIP, Dr Aprile, cit.



In the trial, the journalists Marco Pasqua and Roberto Saviano, the then Director of UNAR, Massimiliano Monnanni, the President of the Jewish Community of Rome, Riccardo Pacifici, three judges from a panel of the Court of Palermo, the Ministry of the Interior and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, joined the proceedings as plaintiffs.

### **The first judgement**

The Court of Rome, in its ruling no. 884/2013<sup>262</sup>, recognises *Stormfront* as a sort of criminal association set up through the web. The verdict is interesting because it focuses on the way in which the defendants have gone from carrying out a simple propaganda activity, to the more serious one of instigation to commit a crime, up to laying the structural foundations of a real criminal association.

In fact, behind the use of pseudonyms aimed at concealing their true identity, they have placed messages, flyers, images and audiovisual recordings "related to identity issues" on the website. In addition to this form of propaganda entrusted to the network, there has also been the promotion of racist and xenophobic content outside the virtual space, using the most classic techniques of leafleting. These activities have certainly taken on criminal relevance, since they are in contrast with letter a) of art. 1 of the so-called Mancino Law, aimed at sanctioning the propaganda of discriminatory ideas in any way implemented.

This discriminatory activity, carried out by the defendants, was even more threatening when a sort of "proscription list", called "*List of Italian criminals*" (in which the names of people who worked to help migrants, whether by profession or not, were listed) and a document, of the same kind, entitled "*List of Jewish Communities in Italy, Shops,*

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<sup>262</sup> Sentence no. 884/2013 (art. 438 c.p.p.) of 8 April 2013 and filed on 5 June 2013. As many as 61 pages recognising for the first time the conspiracy to commit crimes against a group acting online. A sentence that shows that incitement to racist hatred is also punishable when hiding behind a nickname, and that the right to express one's thoughts should not be confused with the right to incite hatred. The full sentence is available here: [http://www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Sentenza-884.13-dell8.04.2013-1\\_stormfront.pdf](http://www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Sentenza-884.13-dell8.04.2013-1_stormfront.pdf)



*Restaurants, Schools*", in which there was a detailed list of the meeting places of this community, were drawn up.<sup>263</sup>

The Court points out that, while *"a mere list does not constitute explicit expression of an idea based on racial hatred"*, it is, however, intuitable *"the risk that such information, moreover provided on a website with a clear National Socialist imprint, could also be aimed, instead, at facilitating the commissioning of demonstrative actions or of real punitive expeditions, as could be inferred from the invitations addressed to site visitors to act according to racial conscience"*.

The willingness to move from words to deeds so as not to be labelled as *"keyboard militants"* is made even more evident by the publication on the website of the novel entitled *Turner's Diaries*, considered one of the fundamental texts of white supremacists, in which, alongside the completely imaginative narration of terrorist and racist attacks, information on how to make an explosive device is provided. The risk of emulation that is hidden in the pages of this story is very clear on the part of the defendants, who make it the subject of disclosure<sup>264</sup> not only because of the sharing of ideas that the text carries, but also in the hope of provoking violent reactions in the readers.<sup>265</sup>

We are therefore witnessing the *"transformation of the group originally operating only on Stormfront.org into another group, more articulated from the point of view of objectives (which) increases its concrete dangerousness because it tends to create an operative structure aimed, not*

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<sup>263</sup> For further information read: <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/11/16/odio-razziale-e-antisemitismo-4-arresti-stormfront-org>.

<sup>264</sup> The potential dangerousness of the disclosure of instructions for the preparation of an explosive device is highlighted by the Court of Rome, which does not fail to recall how this same text was found in the possession of the author of the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and cost the lives of dozens of innocent people.

<sup>265</sup> One of the defendants, it is stated in the judgment, states that once the translation work has been completed *"there will be people who will surely read them (Turner's diaries, ed.) as an impact novel and there will be others who will read it in a superficial and dangerous way"*, and therefore could be pushed to emulate the actions described in the text. The same judgment highlights the full awareness of the conduct criminally relevant in case of propaganda of such contents (as well demonstrated by the attempt to use computer programs that do not allow to trace the identity of the sender of the materials put on the web in reference to the pages of the novel).



*only the propaganda of discriminatory ideas based on racial hatred through the internet, but also directed outwards for much more concrete purposes".<sup>266</sup>*

### **The continuation of the judicial process. From incitement to hatred to de facto criminal association**

It was naively thought that the blackout<sup>267</sup> and the arrest of four people would be the last acts of this story. However, it has been underestimated how easy it is to get around the blocks online, using anonymous proxies located in a third country where *Stormfront Italy* is not blocked. The forum is back online again soon, working and used. The forum users themselves explain it, making fun of the investigation and the law.

This triggers a new investigation (operation *Stormfront II*<sup>268</sup>) that leads, in November 2013, to the search of thirty-five other people and their homes, to identify the authors of the messages conveying "racial" and ethnic hatred, which appeared online at the time when the site should have been inactive according to the order of obscuration. The preliminary hearing judge of Rome adjudicates twenty-five people, believed to be close to the far right *Stormfront* movement. They are all accused of "*racial hatred, threats, violation of the Mancino law*". The trial begins again, which goes as far as the Supreme Court, passing through the Court of Appeal.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> On 24 April 2013, the Supreme Court, Criminal Section III, sentence no. 33179, also ruled on an appeal against the pre-trial detention order no. 3593/2012 of the Rome Court of Liberties of 5 December 2012, issued against one of the defendants, confirming substantially all the reasons expressed by the Court of Rome.

<sup>267</sup> The investigators claimed that, since a letter rogatory was not enough (since the central server of the organization is in the United States, where the legislation on this point is different from the Italian one), they would have notified the main Italian providers to make access to the site impossible. However, using some computer tricks, users continued to upload videos, cartoons and posts with anti-Semitic, xenophobic and even homophobic content. We talked about it here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/stormfront-ancora-attivo-dopo-loscuramento-e-la-condanna/>.

<sup>268</sup> See here a note: <https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/30866>.

<sup>269</sup> For more information, read also: Salvi G. (Attorney General of the Republic at the Court of Appeal of Rome), "Appunti per una relazione sul terrorismo di destra", *Questione Giustizia*, April 27, 2018, available here: <http://www.questionegiustizia.it/stampa.php?id=1628>.



The Supreme Court, in February 2016<sup>270</sup>, decided to confirm the verdict issued by the Court of Appeal of Rome on February 13, 2014<sup>271</sup>, which had reduced the penalties with respect to the judgment of first instance: convictions to two years and six months imprisonment for Daniele Scarpino, considered the ideologist of the group, and two years and two months for Diego Masi, Luca Ciampaglia and Mirko Viola.

As the Supreme Court has had the opportunity to clarify on the point<sup>272</sup>, "*constitutes conspiracy to incite violence for reasons of race, ethnicity and religion, also a structure that makes use of the new communication tools made possible thanks to the internet, both for the dissemination of content extolling racism, as well as to maintain contacts between affiliates and to carry out proselytizing activities*".

The virtual space was therefore "manipulated" by the defendants for the realization of criminal conduct that took place actively on the national territory, and that did not end in the mere activity of incitement to hatred online, but that extended to the conclusion of "*agreements relating to activities not strictly related to the Stormfront site, such as physical meetings (and therefore not only virtual) between the defendants, leafleting activities aimed at propaganda of discriminatory ideas to be carried out in Italy in public places, fundraising to be allocated to the activities of the group.*"

The exemplariness of the *Stormfront* case, therefore, lies precisely in its ability to have passed easily from propaganda of racist ideas on the web to incitement to crime, right down to concrete action. While the importance of this judgement consists in the affirmation of the legal principle that the web can no longer be considered a "free zone" where people can freely incite, spread, apologise for racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic ideologies.

However, the story never seems to end. In fact, still in June 2019 (after about 7 years, ed.), Roberto Saviano has to appear before the judges of the I Criminal Section of Rome in another (yet another) trial of a group of defendants accused of having written anti-

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<sup>270</sup> Supreme Court (Criminal), section I, judgement no. 34713 of February 16, 2016.

<sup>271</sup> Court of Appeal of Rome, Judgment n. 01288/2014 of 13 February 2014

<sup>272</sup> Supreme Court (Criminal), section I, judgement no. 34713 of February 16, 2016.



Semitic phrases on the Italian forum of *Stormfront* and spread "ideas based on racial hatred", inciting to commit acts of violence. This trial is an unfinished segment of the investigation of Prosecutor Luca Tescaroli (the same that has already led to four convictions, confirmed by the Supreme Court).

In February 2020<sup>273</sup>, the same prosecutor asked for almost 50 years' imprisonment for a total of 23 other people who were users of the platform (and for three others, there was the prescription). The accusations are, depending on the positions, always the same, i.e. threats and defamation "aimed at incitement to discrimination and violence on racial, ethnic and religious grounds, by spreading ideas based on the superiority of the white race"<sup>274</sup>. If the judge were to agree with the accusation once again, this would be yet another heavy sentence against the managers/collaborators of this platform, who, despite the blackouts, resist undaunted, inside and outside the web.

In fact, despite the sentences already issued and the arrests, racist discourse continues to be conveyed in the most varied and even more subtle forms, and also through other groups, channels and platforms. And the thing that worries the most is the absolute unawareness and unconsciousness of the majority of people, with respect to the dangers that lie beyond the keyboard and the screen: i.e. when hate slips from virtual to real.

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<sup>273</sup> See here: [https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2020/02/03/stormfront-chieste-condanne\\_lGbp5qTUBaNBzQa7LuYEJ.html](https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2020/02/03/stormfront-chieste-condanne_lGbp5qTUBaNBzQa7LuYEJ.html).

<sup>274</sup> The Prosecutor has declared that "reprehensible, criminally relevant conduct has surfaced, which is part of the criminal phenomenon of "hate speech" with the concrete prospect of implementing hate behaviour, and of incitement to violence by means of leafleting, translation of texts advocating a the fight without quarter against "niggers", "Jews", "Hispanics" and "gypsies" and containing practical information on how to make ordnance, up to the formulation of a project for the realization of an operational structure for the realization of their aims in a concrete way".





## Construction and deconstruction of a prejudice around the murder of

**Muhammad Shahzad Khan**

*Roberta Salzano*

Rome, Torpignattara area.

It is the night between 18 and 19 September 2014 when in Via Lodovico Pavoni, Daniel, a boy who is not even of age, beats Muhammad Shahzad Khan, a Pakistani citizen, to death, incited by his father who encourages him from the window to destroy him. The guilt? That of disturbing the residents with the out loud recitation of some sure of the Koran.

The murder takes place in a few minutes under the eyes of some neighbours who will call the police. When the police arrive, Daniel admits that he hit the man in the face with a fist, “he spat at me and I reacted”, he says. The boy is arrested on charges of involuntary manslaughter and transferred to juvenile detention. Carabinieri rule out racist motive.

These are days of tension in the neighbourhood which, following some brawls that had taken place the month before, recently hosted a protest rally of about a hundred people against the situation of neglect and the “growth of crime”.<sup>275</sup>

Thus, two different and contrasting versions of the facts around the killing, supported by the media and public opinion, spread. There are those who believe that the two were involved in mutual provocation and aggression, or that the man had previously been the victim of other annoyed passers-by. Others argue without delay the thesis of the furious beating.

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<sup>275</sup> See: Piccirilli A., “Torpignattara non ci sta: cittadini in rivolta occupano via Casilina”, *RomaToday*, September 2 2014, <http://pigneto.romatoday.it/torpignattara/manifestazione-2-settembre-blocco-traffico-casilina.html?fbclid=IwAR30N8jHyOuAtwj1Bu2kDQbNdM6zJOp7YKxiTYLcL-x5lVOcCfqHlgs0Pb4>.





It is the first reconstruction to make headlines in local and national newspapers, attracted by the drama of the event. Examples of media language that do not hide any prejudice.

The victim of the Marranella murder, as it is known by those who live in the area, is “an homeless”, “a Pakistani”, at first without any dignity of name, “but regularly on Italian territory”.<sup>276</sup> The aggressor is instead “a boy”, or “a minor” living in the same neighbourhood, who reacted, with violence, to the provocation of the man who, prey to an ethylic delirium, went around singing strange dirges, annoying passers-by and spitting in his face. On the contrary, it was the foreigner who was hit by the young man. In dealing with the case, journalists prefer the passive form aimed at highlighting the guilt of those who suffered the action rather than the responsibility of those who made that violent gesture. The journalistic emphasis is heavily placed on the pure fatality of what happened. The man was killed with a single blow, given to defend himself. An unpredictable consequence, a dramatic accident.

The medical-legal investigation of the corpse and the subsequent investigations will shed more light on the story. From the autopsy it emerges that at the basis of the man's death there is a “repeated contusive trauma of the head with right temporal fracture and widespread subarachnoid haemorrhage”. That is to say, the blows to the head were multiple. Toxicological tests exclude the victim's state of drunkenness and the presence of other substances in the blood.

Meanwhile, reconstructions obtained with the help of some family members reveal that Muhammad Shahzad was 28 years old and belonged to a peasant family from Pakistani Kashmir from which he had left seven years earlier to join some relatives living in Italy, taking advantage of the 2007 flows decree.

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<sup>276</sup> See: “Torpignattara, arrestato il padre del ragazzo che uccise a pugni un pakistano: «Lo incitava dalla finestra»”, *Il Messaggero*, October 14 2014, [https://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/cronaca/pakistano\\_ucciso\\_torpignattara\\_padre\\_ragazzo\\_pugni-641191.html](https://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/cronaca/pakistano_ucciso_torpignattara_padre_ragazzo_pugni-641191.html)



At first he worked as a domestic employee and as a cook in his uncle's restaurant. Once his uncle moved to London and closed the family business, Muhammad Shahzad was forced to reinvent himself as a street vendor in order to send money to his wife, who was married the year before the murder during a brief leave of absence, and his three-month-old son, who he did not even meet in time. Once he had lost enough income to provide him with housing and the support of relatives he had been able to rely on until then, he found himself forced to turn to the Municipality of Rome, which assigned him a bed in a city reception centre. As if that were not enough, two days before he was killed, he had learned of the death of an aunt in Pakistan.

Ejaz Ahmad, cultural mediator and journalist for *Azad*, a Urdu-language monthly magazine aimed at the Pakistani community in Italy, is one of the first to ask aloud for the truth about the case. In an interview with Social Editor<sup>277</sup> states that Muhammad Shahzad was well known in the neighbourhood. Many people knew that he was disturbed, but they say that he never bothered anyone. The recent mourning, loneliness, daily difficulties and the growing frustration of recent times, linked to the risk of losing his residence permit, and therefore not being able to support the family left in his home country, had deeply disturbed him and had evidently accentuated previous problems. For this reason he had taken refuge in the religious dimension, wandering around the neighbourhood, dressed in traditional clothes, singing out loud the sure of the Koran. This is what that litany was that was bothering the tenants of Via Pavoni.

The neighbourhood's reactions to the news are rather ambiguous. In the same week Torpignattara is a succession of sit-ins and marches alternately of condolences for Muhammad Shahzad, aimed at "giving visibility to those who want the neighborhood to be livable."<sup>278</sup>, or in solidarity with Daniel<sup>279</sup>. In both cases, the demonstrators are

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<sup>277</sup> See: "Pakistano ucciso a Roma, comitati di zona e società civile in piazza contro la violenza", *Redattore Sociale*, September 23 2019, <https://www.redattoresociale.it/article/ed20f84c-41c9-456c-8ca0-bb42d23d03a2/7c15524f-269d-484c-97b7-5d3aeb3ce939>.

<sup>278</sup> Please see: "Torpignattara, centinaia al sit-in per il pachistano ucciso da un 17enne", *La Repubblica*, 28 settembre 2014, [https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/09/28/news/torpignattara\\_centinaia\\_al\\_sit-in\\_per\\_il\\_pachistano\\_ucciso\\_da\\_un\\_17enne-96869817/#gallery-slider=96869797](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/09/28/news/torpignattara_centinaia_al_sit-in_per_il_pachistano_ucciso_da_un_17enne-96869817/#gallery-slider=96869797).



pressed by the microphones and cameras of those journalists who, for a few days, will have the task of lifting the veil over the contradictions and everyday life of 'Torpigna', the suburbs in the centre of Rome, to anyone who does not live there, only to forget about it, except to return to the next, tempting, news story. On some of the banners that for days remain posted on gates and balconies we read: "No racism. No diversity. A misfortune will not deprive you of your freedom", "You are not alone we are all with you!" Daniel's friends and supporters are convinced, they are convinced and try to convince that it is not racism or cohabitation at the risk of having to talk, but an act of defence that has ended in tragedy. And perhaps it is no coincidence that all this happened right there, where many feel victims of a fragile and fragmented social context. "Forgotten before you are born, kidnapped and abandoned to themselves after being born! These are the *adolescents* born at Marranella". This is the phrase with which some young people sum up their awareness.

The same defensive strategy is used by Daniel, during his own deposition before the judge of the Juvenile Court of Rome. The boy tells that that night he was in the company of a friend, going home when he met Muhammad Shahzad who came staggering near him, kicked the bicycle and spit on him. The man, clearly drunk, had his face covered with blood, a sign of a previous beating. That's why as soon as Daniel hits him the man falls to the ground hitting his head. The intention was to hurt him, obviously, but not to kill him. The boy claims not even to have realised the consequences of his actions. Proof of this is the fact that he did not even try to escape and that, when the Carabinieri arrived on the scene, he immediately admitted that it was he who hit the man, albeit with a single punch. The defence also excludes the racist motive. Daniel is not a racist, he cannot be, precisely because he was born and raised in

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<sup>279</sup> Bernardi F., "Ucciso a botte a Torpignattara, spontaneo manifesti di solidarietà per il minorenne omicida", *Il Messaggero*, September 21, 2014, [https://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/cronaca/torpignattara\\_ucciso\\_botte\\_striscione-600853.html](https://www.ilmessaggero.it/roma/cronaca/torpignattara_ucciso_botte_striscione-600853.html).



Torpignattara, together with foreign neighbours and friends and children of immigrants.<sup>280</sup>

### *The judicial process*

In October 2014, the Public Prosecutor's Office of Rome rejected the petition for release filed by Daniel's defendants and entered his father in the register of suspects, only to arrest him on charges of conspiracy to commit voluntary manslaughter, aggravated by having induced his minor son to commit the crime. According to the results of the investigation, it was Massimiliano who instigated his son to massacre Muhammad Shahzad.

From this moment on, two trials are being conducted: one against the material author, Daniel, and the other against his father, who, according to the prosecution, colluded with his son.

That evening, according to the reconstruction of the Public Prosecutor's Office, built on the basis of the testimonies acquired, Massimiliano, annoyed by Muhammad Shahzad's songs, looked out from his house in Via Pavoni, began to rage against the boy and threw a bottle full of water at him, touching him. At that point, seeing his son coming, he urges him to hit the heckler. Daniel, the judges say, acts "with unprecedented violence". The boy responds to the fatherly authority with rapid obedience "so as not to disappoint him".<sup>281</sup> The key witnesses of the investigation, the couple who witnessed the murder from the nearby balcony, recall the images of that savage murder that took place in a few minutes. They tell of punches and kicks given by Daniel, even when Muhammad Shahzad, stunned, layed lifeless on the ground. After the beating, Maximilian takes to the street and, instead of being satisfied with the condition of the

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<sup>280</sup> See: Sansonetti A., "Pigneto-Torpignattara: chi era Muhammad Shahzad Khan ucciso in via Pavoni. Sulla sua morte due versioni", *Blitz Quotidiano*, September 27 2014, <https://www.blitzquotidiano.it/foto-notizie/pigneto-torpignattara-muhammad-shahzad-khan-ucciso-in-via-pavoni-aggiornamenti-1981003/>.

<sup>281</sup> See: Angeli F, Salvatore F., "Pakistano ucciso a Torpignattara. I giudici: "Daniel lo ha massacrato per non deludere suo padre"", *La Repubblica*, November 15 2014, <https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/11/15/news/pakistano-ucciso-a-torpignattara-i-giudici-daniel-lo-ha-massacrato-per-non-deludere-suo-padre-100591098/>



man attacked by his son, tried to break down the door of the neighbours, guilty of having tried to take the heckler's defence and of having alerted the police.

Massimiliano's defence is firm: "He spat in his face. The blood spat on him. Spitting is an ugly gesture. It bothers me when so many Bangladeshis pass by in the morning and while people have breakfast they spit. It is ugly. Imagine if they spit in your face", he says a few hours after the arrest.<sup>282</sup> He defends his son by claiming that Muhammad Shahzad had already been the victim of a previous beating. "He was beaten an hour earlier by four people. Because he was annoying them. Daniel, says the father, "stood under the house, argued, gave him a push, two kicks. I went down immediately, on the fly. This one was on the ground. I didn't even notice it, I was arguing with the one who overlooked. People were busting my son's balls, saying "you piece of shit, how dare you"". Talking about the eyewitnesses and the accusation of incitement to his son for the sentences shouted from the balcony ("kill him, beat him") he almost mocked them. "When they were questioned they said that they do not remember, in the confusion, whether I said this". Some say that these contradictions come from fear. "Fear of me?" answers Massimiliano. The fact is that the couple have in the meantime left Torpignattara.

In June 2015 the judges of the Juvenile Court of Rome recognised the danger of the boy, revealed by the brutality of the beating, and therefore his guilt, proved by the autopsy and the reconstructions made by the witnesses.<sup>283</sup> Daniel is sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment, but a few months later the sentence is remodelled: 2 years' probation in a recovery community, with the possibility of extinction of the sentence if it is successfully completed.

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<sup>282</sup> Except from the interview given by Massimiliano Balducci to Servizio Pubblico, October 14 2014. The video is here: <https://www.michelesantoro.it/2014/10/il-padre-incita-il-figlio-ammazzalo-menagligonfialo/>.

<sup>283</sup> See: "Tor Pignattara, uccise di botte un pakistano: la Cassazione conferma l'arresto per il minorenne accusato dell'omicidio", *Il nuovo corriere di Roma e del Lazio*, april 2 2015 <http://www.corrierediroma-news.it/2015/04/02/tor-pignattara-uccise-botte-pakistano-cassazione-conferma-larresto-per-minorenne-accusato-dellomicidio/>.



In the meantime, the trial of the father continues. In December 2015, the third Court of Assizes granted the request of the Prosecutor, sentencing Maximilian to 21 years' imprisonment for conspiracy to commit voluntary manslaughter aggravated by futile motives and instigation of a minor to commit a crime. In 2017 the Court of Appeal reduced the sentence to 10 years, recognising the lack of the element of intentional intent and reclassifying the offence from conspiracy to voluntary manslaughter to conspiracy to commit pretrial homicide. "By inciting him to strike, it is as if the defendant had armed his still-youngest son", says the Prosecutor.<sup>284</sup> Massimiliano is also found guilty of threatening witnesses and attempting to contaminate the evidence, forcing his son, before the Carabinieri arrived at the crime scene, to change his shirt and replace his sneakers with a pair of flip-flops, with which he could hardly have given a kick.

The sentence also includes compensation for damages to the parents, wife and son of Muhammad Shahzad, who joined the trial as plaintiffs seeking damages, represented by the lawyers of Progetto Diritti, Mario Angelelli and Arturo Salerni.

### *The sentence of the High Court*

In May 2018, almost four years after Muhammad Shahzad's murder, the final sentence was pronounced.<sup>285</sup>, the Fifth Criminal Section of the Court of Cassation rejects the appeal filed by Massimiliano's lawyers and confirms the sentence imposed in the Appeal.

The points raised by the defendants in the appeal sentence, are three:

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<sup>284</sup> See: Gaita L., "Roma. Incitò il figlio a uccidere pakistano, romano condannato a 21 anni: concorso in omicidio. "Come se lo avesse armato"", *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, December 7 2015, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/12/07/roma-incito-il-figlio-a-uccidere-pakistano-romano-condannato-a-21-anni-concorso-in-omicidio-come-se-lo-avesse-armato/2285740/>.

<sup>285</sup> See: Cassazione Penale n. 27164 del 05/08/2018: <https://sentenze.laleggepertutti.it/sentenza/cassazione-penale-n-27164-del-08-05-2018>.



- the interpretation of the words pronounced by Maximilian, aimed at inciting his son to attack Muhammad Shahzad, reported inconstantly by the witnesses, in the various depositions;
- the “automatic relationship between command and blind obedience”, i.e. between incitement and action of the son, who, according to the lawyers, had not even heard or understood what the father was shouting from his home;
- the exclusion of the depositions of two eyewitnesses (exactly coinciding with the statement made by Daniel) who claimed to have seen Muhammad Shahzad spitting in the boy's direction, and the recognition of this act as a real motive triggering the boy's reaction, and therefore the exclusion of “futile motives” as aggravating circumstances of the crime, and indeed the application of general mitigating factors to the crime.

The grounds for the ruling, which rejected one by one the objections raised, focus mainly on the identification of a causal link between the event (the beating) and the damage (the death caused) and between incitement to violence by the father and murder by the son.

According to the Court, the connection, in both cases, is unquestionable, considering not only that the assault by Daniel began immediately after the pronouncement of the father's sentence, whatever it was, but that it was Massimiliano himself, after exhorting his son beat those who were disturbing him with his songs, who rushed into the street “proclaiming himself responsible for his son's action and saying to take it out on him and not on his son, since it was he who had told him to attack Khan”.

As for the question of spit, and therefore the trigger for Daniel's immediate action/reaction, the judges maintain that even if this “had been preceded by a double stimulus, on the one hand the incitement of his father to attack the Pakistani, on the other the spit that he would have addressed to him in response to the first verbal contact”. The key to understanding the aggression against Muhammad Shahzad should, however, mainly be found in the incitement by the parent towards a minor “to demonstrate with a violent act his virility and ability to impose himself, among other





things in the exercise of a sort of defence of the community against a foreign harasser who annoyed the neighbourhood with his incessant litanies". Acknowledged as "inadequate and disproportionate the motive represented by the mere nuisance caused to the neighbourhood by the victim's insistent litany complaints", the judges note Massimiliano's clear intentions, as sustained since the first conviction, Aware of the reaction that his exhortation would have had on Daniel, he used his son's "inclination to brute violence [...] to teach poor Khan a "lesson"," and to carry out the aggression he had started by throwing the bottle from his home. For these reasons, the judges conclude, it is undeniable that Masimiliano's attitude "has not only significantly strengthened his son's aggressive intention [...] but has even given rise to it".

#### *Where are the institutions?*

At each of the stages of the trial on the murder of Muhammad Shahzad, the institutions are called into question, accused by a part of the citizens of Torpignattara of excessive absconding, lack of political will and perhaps inability to take on the problems and difficulties that cross the neighborhood and fuel the resentment that is increasingly finding in the 'neighbours' the designated scapegoat.

This is combined with the media's relentless pursuit of blaming the victim of a brutal murder for his irregular condition, drunkenness, harassment and dangerous behaviour. The emphasizing of these elements contributes to support the stigmatization of migrants, the criminalization of foreigners, the ethnicization of social unease, the rhetoric of fear and at the same time contributes to draw a distorted and mystifying picture of the neighbourhood. So good are those protests, often exploited for political purposes, which accuse institutions of letting violence, intolerance and xenophobia feed on each other and of sinking, deploring it, the "Torpignattara experiment", thus creating the favourable ground for the spreading of the perception of an "inter-ethnic" conflict, or worse of a "war between poor" and ending up belittling, almost justifying





unacceptable acts of violence.<sup>286</sup> In a context like this, violence risks becoming a “legitimate and indeed obligatory tool to resolve conflicts”.<sup>287</sup>

More than five years have passed since that terrible night in August, and yet really nothing seems to have changed<sup>288</sup>.

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<sup>286</sup> See Giuliano Santoro's book which traces the recent history of the neighborhood and reconstructs the killing G. Santoro, *Al palo della morte. Storia di un omicidio in una periferia meticcica*, Edizioni Alegre (Quinto Tipo), Roma, 2015.

<sup>287</sup> Thus in the judgment of the Court of re-examination rejecting the appeal of Maximilian's defenders, confirming the custodial measure in prison of Daniel's father, reported in Angeli F., Salvatore F. cit.

<sup>288</sup> Far right parties protest against mosques “Roma, a Torpignattara più moschee abusive che chiese (e non solo). La denuncia di FdI”, *Secolo d'Italia*, March 29 2019, [https://www.secoloditalia.it/2019/03/roma-a-torpignattara-piu-moschee-abusive-che-chiese-e-non-solo-la-denuncia-di-fdi/?fbclid=IwAR13T53UVfMN8HpMhdKXr5BpsQ26OufuHZHvae-tSjVH4u\\_9KquBznIEtQ8](https://www.secoloditalia.it/2019/03/roma-a-torpignattara-piu-moschee-abusive-che-chiese-e-non-solo-la-denuncia-di-fdi/?fbclid=IwAR13T53UVfMN8HpMhdKXr5BpsQ26OufuHZHvae-tSjVH4u_9KquBznIEtQ8) e Musacchio F. Rivolta a Torpignattara: “Via stranieri e moschee”, *Il Tempo*, may 22 2019, <https://www.iltempo.it/roma-capitale/2019/05/22/news/roma-tor-pignattara-residenti-contro-stranieri-moschee-petizione-esercito-1157299/>. In may 2019 Francesco Lollobrigida, an MP from the far right asked officially to the ministry of Interior and Defense, to send the army: <https://aic.camera.it/aic/scheda.html?numero=4/02945&ramo=CAMERA&leg=18>).



## Eugenio Tiraborrelli, who died as a recluse at 82 years of age for a solidarity “crime”<sup>289</sup>

*Annamaria Rivera*

The story I am writing about seems to be a dense narrative with a tragic ending: it was referred by the Rete Diritti in Casa - a group based in Parma that fights for the right to housing - as well as by some left-wing online newspapers, then relaunched by the Agi press agency and the daily newspaper “Avvenire”; not by other nationally important media.

Its main character, Egidio Tiraborrelli, was born in 1937 in Casalbordino, in the province of Chieti. As a child he was seriously injured in the head due to the explosion of a mine that was destined to destroy a German tank. Later, at the age of 16, he had to emigrate to Argentina by boat, with his mother, a brother and a sister, to join his father and older brother, who had been living there for some years. And there, in Comodoro Rivadavia, in the province of Chubut, Patagonia, he spent most of his adult life working as a welder for the long pipeline that carries natural gas to Buenos Aires.

After some time spent travelling around the world working for Snam, Saipem and other companies, he finally returned to Italy. He lived for a few years in Pavullo nel Frignano, a town in the province of Modena, where he tried to set up a small business. He finally came to Parma to get treatment for lung cancer, having just had heart surgery.

As he had such a modest pension that he was entitled to a supplementary allowance, he was initially housed by a Moroccan family in a small house, then he ended up in a Caritas accommodation. Intolerant as he was about fixed rules and hours, when, in 2015, he came into contact with the Rete Diritti in Casa, since there was no

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<sup>289</sup> Versions of this text have appeared on “il manifesto” January 20 2020 (Il «delitto» di Egidio) and “MicroMega Online” January 22 2020 (Il crimine di solidarietà di Egidio Tiraborrelli, eroe del nostro tempo).



accommodation available in the occupied buildings, he asked and obtained to "live" in his caravan, parked in the courtyard of the one in via La Spezia.

In this environment he integrated himself to the point of creating and cultivating, in the courtyard, a small vegetable garden, whose products he used to offer to the other occupants, with whom he had relations of friendship, solidarity and mutual help. This helped him to endure with courage, even serenity, the many ailments that afflicted him, the result of a life as intense and eventful as it was hard and difficult: from hernia to varicose veins, from circulatory problems to cancer.

Just a few months before the tragic outcome of his story, he had undergone an aortic operation, which he also faced with courage, strength of spirit, even a sense of irony: it was the qualities that distinguished him, together with a certain *bon vivant* spirit, with a taste for adventure and seduction, as underlined by those who met and frequented him. Despite being so run-down, on 18th December 2018 Egidio was taken from the small popular accommodation, where he had been living for three months, to be taken to the Parma prison. What crime had he been found guilty of, so serious as to allow him to inflict the prison sentence on someone so old and seriously ill? No less than "aiding and abetting illegal immigration".

It was only at the time of his arrest that Egidio learnt that on 2 November 2016 the criminal section of the Ancona court (a panel made up of Andrea Ausili, Sonia Piermartini, Tiziana Fancello, the latter honorary judge) had sentenced him - *in absentia* and with a final sentence, albeit of first instance - to three years and six months in prison for such a crime of solidarity that he would have committed back in 2012. Evidently, the court-appointed lawyer, the civil lawyer Fabrizio Naspi, who had been assigned to him without his knowledge, had considered that it was not appropriate to appeal, although he himself, at least during the first hearing, had objected to the irregularity of the notice to the defendant.



In short, traveling on a motorboat travelling from Greece to Italy, Egidio allegedly “transported inside a luggage carrier, placed in a car owned by others” - the sentence reads - a Moroccan woman “completely undocumented”, thus allowing her to violate the “sacred” borders of the homeland, from which she would be promptly expelled.

While recognising the extenuating circumstances of the absence of profit motive and the fact that Egidio was completely uncensored, the judges imposed such a prison sentence on him, plus a fine of ten thousand euros and the obligation to pay the costs of the trial and custody of the car: which had been confiscated immediately after landing, once stopped and identified by some members of the Maritime Border Police of Ancona.

All this in virtue of the crime that the criminal law of the enemy and his alleged accomplices - one could say - defines as “aiding and abetting illegal immigration”, introduced in Italy with the framework law n.40 of 1998, the so-called Turco-Napolitano, then merged in the legislative decree n.286 of 25 July 1998. It is a de facto crime useful to criminalise any form of aid to those who attempt to reach or actually reach our country, or who reside there “illegally”: even when the actions are guided solely by a spirit of solidarity and altruism. In addition, it is considered particularly regrettable, so much so that it is included among the offences that can be committed: those who are convicted cannot benefit either from the suspension of the detention order or from alternative measures to imprisonment.

Therefore, even though he was at such an advanced age and in an increasingly serious state of health, Egidio remained in prison for almost nine months, in very difficult conditions: for one thing, the Parma prison was equipped with a single oxygen ventilator, which the sick prisoners were forced to use in turn. In addition, one of the consequences of his conviction was that his pension was blocked and he was obliged to return what he had already received.

Five months after the imprisonment, finally a lawyer from Parma, solicited by activists of the Diritti a Casa Network, submitted a request for alternative measures, obtaining only the possibility of temporary hospitalization, when necessary, in a supervised ward



of the Maggiore Hospital. During one of these, Egidio worsened, perhaps because of what is called nosocomial infection, as some people hypothesize: he died on 6 September 2019.

His story illustrates at least three important and very topical themes in a tragically exemplary way. First, the fact that - as we once said - justice is still class justice, which tends to show its most severe, if not fierce, face towards the poorest and/or vulnerable. Secondly, there seems to be a predominant view of the prison sentence as a cruel punishment, such that it can also be inflicted on the elderly, even seriously ill people; and this in clear disregard of the European Convention on Human Rights, of our Constitution, of Italian legislation itself. In fact, Article 47b of the Prison Law provides for home detention for those sentenced to a prison sentence who are “in particularly serious health conditions”.

Finally, at the centre of this distressing story is, as mentioned above, the crime of aiding and abetting illegal immigration, which, being considered hostile, does not provide for alternative measures to detention, unless the convicted person suffers from serious health problems: as it was exactly in Egidio's case. Such a crime - as we know well - allows authorities, rulers, politicians to commit the worst evils, starting with the criminalisation of NGOs involved in search and rescue operations at sea; thus contributing, and greatly contributing, to what we have repeatedly, in the wake of Michel Foucault, called the *tanatopolitics* of the European Union.

Thanks to the existence of such a crime, even the most obvious and spontaneous acts of solidarity - such as those inspired by the primary moral duty to “feed the hungry” and “feed the thirsty” - can fall under the axe of repression, as has happened several times, even in Italy, especially in border areas. To cite just one example among many, it is enough to remember the ordinance, issued - or rather, renewed - in August 2016 by the mayor of Ventimiglia, the PD, Enrico Ioculano: it prohibited the distribution of food, even water, to refugees who, in very precarious conditions, were waiting for the right moment to cross the border into France. It was on the basis of this order that on 20



March 2017 three volunteers from the *Roya Citoyenne* association were arrested and denounced, “caught” distributing food and water to them.

Do not believe, therefore, that the infamies committed in relation to immigration and asylum issues are solely due to the work of the Salvinian gang. The aforementioned law known as Turco-Napolitano already established that anyone who favours “the entry of foreigners into the territory of the State in violation of the provisions of this law is punished with imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of up to thirty million lire”.

Egidio - a hero of our time, after all - is one of the victims of an ignominy that is inscribed in the long term.



## **Macerata: it was not revenge, but attempted massacre. Racist and fascist**

*Grazia Naletto*

Only two years have passed but, looking at the collective memory, a century seems to have passed. And yet, what happened in Macerata on 3 February 2018, in addition to upsetting the lives of six people, has marked, for many reasons, the history of our country<sup>290</sup>.

On that day in February, around 11 am, Luca Traini leaves his house in Tolentino, takes the car, stops at the bar and at a gas station announcing that he is going to “shoot the niggers”. Then he goes to Macerata. He wanders around the streets of the centre and begins his “hunt”. Equipped with a semi-automatic pistol he starts shooting out of the car window. He doesn’t do it at random. He chooses his target one by one among the black passers-by that come into his sights. There are about thirty shots, some of which hit, one woman and five foreign men, all African. Wilson Kofi, 20 years old, Ghanaian, is wounded in the chest. Omar Fadera, 23 years old, from Gambiano, has a gluttony smear wound. Gideon Azeke, 25 years old, is wounded in the leg. Jennifer Otio, 25 years old Nigerian, is shot in the shoulder. Mahmadou Touré, Malian, 28, is hit in the right hemithorax. Festus Omagbon, 32 years old, Nigerian, is injured in the left arm. That no one is wounded to death is just a case.

The raid takes place in the middle of the city, and before the man stops his car and is captured by the Carabinieri, an hour and three quarters passes. Traini has time to pass in front of Giardini Diaz and the station and walk along via dei Velini, corso Caroli and via Spalato, where he also damages the glass of a Democratic Party headquarters. He then stops in Piazza della Vittoria, where he gets out of the car, takes off his jacket, wraps himself in a tricolour and makes the Roman salute in front of the War Memorial, to the cry of “Viva l’Italia”. It is here that, finally, the Carabinieri block him.

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<sup>290</sup> We dealt with the events of Macerata on the site [cronachediordinariorazzismo.org](http://cronachediordinariorazzismo.org) underlining immediately the importance of an immediate response from the anti-racist world.



Luca Traini, as will be ascertained later on, is not a madman, he is lucid and in full possession of his capacity to understand and want. What he is staging, before being arrested, is a real *racist exhibition*.<sup>291</sup>

Traini is 28 years old and lives with his mother in Tolentino, about twenty kilometres from Macerata. His political profile and ideology of reference are immediately clear. He is close to CasaPound and Forza Nuova (from which he receives solidarity and the offer of legal support), before running with the Lega Nord as town councillor in Corridonia in 2017. He has two tattoos. On his temple (right) is a Wolfsangel rune, a symbol that in the 1930s was used in Germany by extreme right-wing forces and in Italy by the Fourth Position movement. On his neck, on the other hand, he has the inscription "wolf" imprinted. The wolf likes to define himself and the imagery of the "hunt" recurs in his statements relating to that day. If that were not enough, in his house the Carabinieri found a copy of Mein-Kampf, a history of the Italian Social Republic and a flag with a Celtic cross.

But from the very beginning, even when it is still in progress, the raid is put in connection with the murder of Pamela Mastropietro, the young eighteen-year-old girl brutally murdered a few days earlier, whose body was found on 31 January. A young Nigerian man, Innocent Oseghale, reported for drug dealing, was stopped the day before in connection with the girl's murder. The horrible massacre that was carried out on Pamela's body deeply shook the small town in the Marche region. The route followed by Traini that morning also crosses via Split, where Oseghale lives. And right from the start the man declared that he wanted to "avenge Pamela". There are all the premises for robbing the racist violence of that Saturday morning in the rank of a solitary attempt to "do justice on your own".

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<sup>291</sup> Annamaria Rivera describes it well, also underlining the cold determination with which Traini acts, in her article "Il terrorismo italico e i suoi complici: Macerata e non solo", published on February 7, 2018, in MicroMega (available here: <http://temi.repubblica.it/micromega-online/il-terrorismo-italico-e-i-suoi-complici-macerata-e-non-solo/>), even before Traini himself, long afterwards, declared that he had "imagined a scenic ending" in a well-known interview with Ezio Mauro, which we will talk about later.





The word “revenge” will remain engraved in the collective memory of most people. The connection of the violence of that Saturday morning with the atrocious murder of Pamela Mastropietro will be the key to the interpretation that will almost completely obscure its ideological and racist connotation. And this, despite the pronouncements of the judges of first and second instance<sup>292</sup>.

### *The trial*

Luca Traini’s first-degree trial begins on 9 May 2018. He is accused of massacre, illegal carrying of weapons and damage with the aggravating circumstance of “racial hatred”. During his first interrogation, the man showed no repentance: “I deny nothing”. His lawyer tries, therefore, to demonstrate his inability to understand and want at the moment of the raid; a thesis contradicted not only by the psychiatric expertise ordered by the Prosecutor’s Office, but also by the words pronounced by Traini himself during the trial. In the five-page spontaneous statement, in which he apologises, he recalls his difficult childhood, but also states that he is “neither mad nor borderline”.

The first-degree sentence was handed down on 3 October 2018: The Court of Assizes of Macerata accepted the requests of the Public Prosecutor’s Office and sentenced him to 12 months’ imprisonment. As the judges specify in the motivations of the sentence: *“The axiom from which the accused moves, trying to remove the obvious racial matrix of his act, is that all drug dealers, at least in Macerata, are black, so shooting a black person means hitting a drug dealer. Since this statement cannot be admitted as true, because drug dealers have no predetermined colour or nationality, the racial matrix is clear. Even not considering the incidence of fascist ideology and its racist drift has consumed a xenophobic raid”*. And that it was an attempted massacre, according to the Court, emerges from the fact that *“the intention was to kill an indeterminate number of people by firing into the crowd (...)”*

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<sup>292</sup> See the beautiful article by M. Pascoletti, “Luca Traini has committed an attack, stop calling it revenge”, Valigia Blu, 4 October 2019, available here: <https://www.valigiablu.it/luca-traini-strage-macerata-media/>.



*The fact, fortunate and independent of the defendant's will, that there were no deaths, does not affect the qualification of the crime as massacre".* The Court also judged the repentance expressed at the hearing as "late and unconvincing", where however Traini continued to deny the racist matrix of the raid.

Against the rejection of the request for house arrest, the defence appealed to the Court of Cassation, which rejected the appeal on 15 July 2019, recognising the extreme seriousness of the offence committed and considering that there is "a risk of recidivism due to the continuing lack of understanding of the facts".

Just one year later, on 2 October 2019, the Ancona Court of Appeal confirmed the first-degree conviction. Traini's defence had attempted to drop the crime of massacre and the aggravating circumstance of "racial" hatred, also asking for the renewal of the psychiatric report, in order to prove the man's incapacity to understand and want. These requests were all rejected by the Court. As the lawyer of three of the victims, Paolo Cognini, has had occasion to declare, the sentence is important, *"not so much with regard to the extent of the sentence or the number of years in prison committed, but more for the correct reconstruction and interpretation of the historical facts verified that day in Macerata. A reconstruction which, in fact, leads the commission to believe that on that occasion a crime of massacre was committed, and that Traini's hand was armed with a racially motivated and discriminatory motivation. In rejecting the request for renewal of the expert opinion, the Court of Appeal also confirmed another important fact, namely that Traini did not have a capacity to understand and want to reduce or diminish. On the contrary, the defendant was totally lucid and able to self-determine his actions. Moreover, at the time of the accused act, Traini gave practical and concrete application to the ideological system of racist and neo-Nazi matrix to which he clearly belonged in an organic way"*<sup>293</sup>.

*Revenge, apology and repentance: those lenses that distort memory*

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<sup>293</sup> Please see: "A Macerata fu tentata strage razzista: la conferma della Corte d'Appello", 9 ottobre 2019, here: [https://www.globalproject.info/it/in\\_movimento/a-macerata-fu-tentata-strage-razzista-la-conferma-della-corte-dappello/22285](https://www.globalproject.info/it/in_movimento/a-macerata-fu-tentata-strage-razzista-la-conferma-della-corte-dappello/22285).



It is not worthwhile here to dwell again on the attempt to dismiss the violent raid of that day as the isolated gesture of a madman (the Minister of the Interior at the time called it “a criminal initiative of individual character”). Instead, the obstinate removal of the racist and ideological matrix of that gesture that followed deserves attention, in the conviction that its explication would have provided further sap to the right. The Macerata raid takes place one month before the vote, in the middle of an electoral campaign in which the migration phenomenon is used as an electoral pick-pick by all parties (not only the right ones).

The thesis of “madness” and revenge sustained in the first hours, and the account of apologies and repentance, proposed with great visibility on the occasion of the two sentences, are basically complementary: they serve to seal a well-known interpretative “thesis”, the one that on the occasion of the most serious racist violence tries to bring them back to the frame of the “fear” perceived in the country. It has already happened, to give just a few examples, with the massacre carried out in Florence in 2011, with the barricades erected in Gorino in 2016, and it happens again in Macerata.

And when the category of fear reigns, any firm expression of protest and solidarity is presented as “dangerous”. In fact, there is an attempt, fortunately stopped, to ban the demonstration of solidarity called by the social centre Sisma<sup>294</sup>. The event takes place on 10 February and 20 thousand people take part, but in the meantime the delegitimization damage is done. Four national organizations withdraw their membership (Arci, CGIL, ANPI and Libera), many people choose to stay at home, the parade takes place in a deserted and fortified city.

Later, the Macerata raid was read as a turning point.

The political elections on the following 4 March registered a very high consensus for the Northern League, which rose from 4% to 20% in Macerata. In reality, the

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<sup>294</sup> On 7 February 2018, the mayor made an appeal calling for “stop all demonstrations”, evoking the risk of tension, followed by the Prefecture.



relaunch of the unscrupulous political initiative of the right was already well established throughout the country. Also, in Macerata. The local Left (as in the rest of the country) had underestimated these episodes, believing that all in all they involved small minorities. But, as we immediately wrote at the time, these small minorities had long since woven networks of relations such as to guarantee visibility and an ability to guide public opinion far beyond their real power relations.

The instrumental connection of Traini's raid with Pamela Mastropietro's murder "serves" exactly this, therefore, to evoke the category of social fear in order to obscure the racist connotation and the ideological background of what happened.

A sensationally losing strategy on the electoral and cultural level, but also very damaging because it opened the way to the subsequent "humanization" of Traini. One example among all deserves to be mentioned.

On 2 February 2019, one year after the massacre, the daily newspaper *la Repubblica* published an interview with Ezio Mauro<sup>295</sup> to Luca Traini<sup>296</sup>. The attack of the interview is the following: *"Repentant, ready to apologize, aware that he hit innocent people, for an absurd spirit of revenge that led him to shoot in the indistinct human, provided the target was black: indeed, "nigger", as he announced that day. One year after the Macerata raid, Luca Traini tells himself, retracing the motivations and above all the impulses that on 3 February 2018 drove him to leave the house with the Glock pistol, looking for his designated victims, even if personally unknown"*.

One of the most important national newspapers, one year after the massacre, therefore, decides not to interview the people affected, but to offer great visibility to the men who did it and to give great prominence to his "repentance". Traini was able to present himself as a man who acted on the impulse of "feelings", "emotions" and to

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<sup>295</sup> Ezio Mauro also dedicated to the Macerata massacre the book *L'uomo bianco*, published in 2018 by Feltrinelli, in which the fictionalised story of the raid alternates with considerations on the changes in Italian society in recent years, identifying the inability of politics to provide convincing answers to the widespread social "fear" and "anger" one of the factors that "explain" what happened.

<sup>296</sup> Please see: E. Mauro, "Traini pentito un anno dopo: Dentro di me non c'è più odio, voglio incontrare le mie vittime", *la Repubblica*, 2 febbraio 2019, here: <https://rep.repubblica.it/pwa/generale/2019/02/02/news/traini-218137347/>.



present himself as an “avenger” who wanted to “do justice”, on the wave of a hatred gutted yes, but not racist. Out of 25 questions asked during the interview, only one makes vague reference to his political opinions. An interview “all wrong”, as rightly titled *The submarine* in a commentary in which one observes<sup>297</sup>: “Something interesting to ask Traini could be there: for example, you could ask him a few more questions about his path of radicalisation, without being content to hear that for him doing the Roman greeting was a habitual gesture. One could ask him about his contacts, his network of support, his political references. In short, one could try to understand something more about the genesis of a neo-fascist terrorist than about his pathetic self-justifications”.

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<sup>297</sup> Please see: S. Bendinelli, “L’intervista di Ezio Mauro a Luca Traini è tutta sbagliata”, *The submarine*, 3 febbraio 2019, here: <https://thesubmarine.it/2019/02/03/lintervista-di-ezio-mauro-a-luca-traini-e-tutta-sbagliata/>.



# **Bad words, popular reactions, political choices and racist violence: a perverse plot in 11 exemplary cases**



## **Rosarno: a rebellion still unheard today**

*Veronica Iesùè*

Between 7 and 10 January 2010, the news of a hard and violent uprising broke out in Calabria and defined by some journalists as “urban guerrilla warfare” spread in the main national media.<sup>298</sup> A protest carried out by a group of immigrant workers, mostly Africans, in Rosarno, a town located in the Gioia Tauro plain: a small town of about 15,000 inhabitants, where, still today, thousands of laborers, almost all of them foreigners of African origins, are recruited every year to work in the fields, especially for the harvesting of oranges. The hygienic, housing and wage conditions in which these agricultural workers, unfortunately still persisting today, were poor. They were forced to massing in abandoned farmhouses and ruined structures, such as those of the former Rognetta factory and the former “Opera della Sila”. These buildings were used as dormitories, but they lacked electricity, gas and running water. The citrus groves' laborers, who lived essentially in conditions of semi-slavery, managed to earn an average of one euro (in black) for the harvesting of a crate of oranges weighing just under 20 kg. Behind the low quality of life and the exploitation of the labor of the agricultural laborers of the Gioia Tauro plain was hidden the hand of the corporal and the 'ndrangheta. This is the context of the protest that broke out in 2010.

The fuse that exploded the rebellion of those days was yet another physical violence against a migrant.<sup>299</sup> That January 7, 2010, in fact, Ayiva Saibou, a 26-year-old refugee coming from Togo (therefore, holder of a residence permit) was hit in the abdomen by some plungers fired from an air rifle. The boy, once he went to the emergency room of the hospital of Gioia Tauro to be treated (he was then given a prognosis of 10 days for a

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<sup>298</sup> Please see: “A Rosarno immigrati in rivolta: scene di guerriglia urbana”, *Il Sole 24ore*, 7 gennaio 2010, here: <https://st.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/Italia/2010/01/Rosarno-immigrati-rivolta.shtml?uuid=c7127>.

<sup>299</sup> Please see also: G. Naletto, “La ribellione di Rosarno”, in Lunaria (a cura di), *Cronache di ordinario razzismo. Secondo libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, Edizioni dell'Asino, Roma 2011, pp. 107-111.



gunshot wound), declared that he had been wounded while walking along the Via Nazionale 18, near the town of Rosarno, and that the shots had come from a person driving a car. This is the reconstruction of the police headquarters of Reggio Calabria at the time of the facts.<sup>300</sup>

The aggression against Saibou was not, as anticipated, an isolated case, but the umpteenth aggression of a foreign citizen in the area of the Plain of Gioia Tauro. Shortly after his injury, another laborer, Yacouba Camara, 25 years old, from Guinea, was reached by a shot fired by "a big black car with two people on board". (these are the words of a witness who walked with him).<sup>301</sup> The episodes of physical violence against African laborers in the Plain of Gioia Tauro were nothing new. The violence perpetrated against foreign workers in the citrus orchards had been recorded since 1992, when the exploitation of their labor in that area had begun. So much so that, as early as December 2008, the exploited laborers had already demonstrated peacefully against the serious gunshot wounds of two citizens from the Ivory Coast<sup>302</sup>. The exasperation for the attacks and aggression suffered, combined with terrible living conditions, had pushed many of them to demonstrate, in 2010 more harshly, to try to get out of a situation of persecution and labour exploitation.

For two days, hundreds of migrant workers protested by organizing roadblocks on the same State Road 18, where the two young people from Togo and Guinea had been hit. The anger that had matured from their injury had led the laborers to react violently, and this, of course, had immediately caught the attention of the media. "Immigrants in revolt, hundreds of cars damaged", "In Rosarno the revolt of immigrants", "The black revolt of Rosarno"... These are the titles that have appeared on some of the main Italian

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<sup>300</sup> See: "Rosarno. La ricostruzione della rivolta fatta dalla Questura", *Il Quotidiano del Sud*, 10 gennaio 2010, here: [https://www.quotidianodelsud.it/archivio/benevento/2010/01/10/rosarno-la-ricostruzione-della-rivolta-fatta-dalla-questura/?cli\\_action=1588752767.274](https://www.quotidianodelsud.it/archivio/benevento/2010/01/10/rosarno-la-ricostruzione-della-rivolta-fatta-dalla-questura/?cli_action=1588752767.274).

<sup>301</sup> Please see: "Human Rights Watch interviste con migranti africani gravemente feriti in singole aggressioni", 4 febbraio 2010, here: <https://www.hrw.org/it/news/2010/02/04/238782>.

<sup>302</sup> Please see: "Tensione in Calabria. Rosarno, 'pulizia etnica' decisa dalla 'ndrangheta", *Avvenire*, 10 gennaio 2010, here: [https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/rosarno-pulizia-etnica-decisa-dalla-ndrangheta\\_201001110749096870000](https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/rosarno-pulizia-etnica-decisa-dalla-ndrangheta_201001110749096870000).





newspapers., Particular emphasis was given to the rebellion of foreign laborers residing in the town of Calabria, but without investigating in depth on the premises and facts prior to the protest. The prominence given to the protest, combined with the little attention paid, instead, to the working and living conditions of the laborers, meant that they, as victims of an unjust system, quickly turned to the side of the wrong, and were painted as the culprits of the situation.

The representation of the facts, in most of the articles appearing in the newspapers, followed always the same pattern: a brief mention of the shooting of January 7, and a great emphasis on the protests of the laborers. Surely, the first protest had been violent and had involved the damage of some material goods, some store windows and cars, as well as burned bins: however, there had never been an attempt to voluntarily injure people and citizens of Rosarno and its surroundings, despite the various fake news circulated, such as that of a pregnant woman who would have lost her child due to the injury during the revolt. It should be pointed out, moreover, that the most violent forms of protest had been registered only when the news of the two immigrants wounded by gunshots had arrived. Already the next day, on January 8, the laborers had gathered to demonstrate peacefully,: about 700 had paraded near the headquarters of the Municipality of Rosarno, to try to explain, in a meeting with the President of the Extraordinary Commission of the Municipality, the reasons that had pushed them to react so hard.

What is most striking in the whole Rosarno affair is the violent counter-protest organized by some Italian citizens in the following days. As a result of their demonstration, the migrants-workers of the Gioia Tauro plain began to suffer (even more than before) harassment, threats, intimidation and continuous physical attacks. Several labourers were injured because they were shot with sticks, bars and shotguns. Episodes so serious that it was necessary, for their safety, a transfer to prevent the situation from escalating further. Escorted by the Police, over a thousand migrants were transferred to the CPA of Crotone and Bari. The "deportation" was probably the



objective of this attack. In the small town of Calabria, a real "hunt for the immigrant"<sup>303</sup> had taken place, with organized patrols. "We defend our city and our homes. We are on the hunt for Africans: if they want to work they stay, but if there is no work, they have to leave", "You have to beat them up and not us, because they are the real criminals": these are the absurd statements made by two men who took part in the patrols<sup>304</sup>. It was an organized expedition to "clean up" the area from migrants considered as "beasts".

The story of Rosarno was the occasion (yet another) to unleash an absurd instrumental polemic on "illegal" immigration. Roberto Maroni, MP of the Northern League, and at the time of the events, Minister of the Interior of the Berlusconi Government, had declared in Parliament on January 12, 2010: "The events in Rosarno also make evident all the negative consequences that derive from illegal immigration that, precisely for this reason, the Government has begun and will continue to fight without hesitation. Illegal entry into the territory of the State is the prerequisite for the marginalization and labor exploitation of many foreigners and, often, the reservoir for the recruitment of criminal laborers". Yet, in that same information, he himself had declared that almost all the migrants transferred to Crotone were in order with the residence permit, as well as half of those transferred to Bari. The majority of the laborers, therefore, had the necessary legal status to reside in Italy.

Ignazio La Russa, Minister of Defense, had been the same opinion at the time of the events: "Too much tolerance towards illegal immigrants. The State has a duty to enforce the laws, to enforce the rules. There can be no tolerance, especially for those who use

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<sup>303</sup> Please see: "Rosarno, caccia all'immigrato. Aggrediti e assediati nei casolari.", *La Repubblica*, 9 gennaio 2010, here: [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/01/09/news/notte\\_rosarno-1885961/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/01/09/news/notte_rosarno-1885961/).

<sup>304</sup> Please see: "Rosarno, altri quattro immigrati feriti. Spari e scontri in strada: è battaglia.", *Corriere della Sera*, 8 gennaio 2010, disponibile qui: [https://www.corriere.it/cronache/10\\_gennaio\\_08/rosarno-scontri-maroni\\_cef157a6-fc32-11de-98e4-00144f02aabe.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/10_gennaio_08/rosarno-scontri-maroni_cef157a6-fc32-11de-98e4-00144f02aabe.shtml); "Spari e spranghe contro gli immigrati, 4 feriti. Manganelli invia un contingente di polizia", *La Repubblica*, 8 gennaio 2010, here: [https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/01/08/news/maroni\\_troppa\\_tolleranza\\_con\\_i\\_clandestini\\_a\\_rosarno\\_situazione\\_difficile\\_come\\_altrove-1875099/](https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/01/08/news/maroni_troppa_tolleranza_con_i_clandestini_a_rosarno_situazione_difficile_come_altrove-1875099/).



violence so clearly, just because they are immigrants<sup>305</sup>. Those laws that, however, Italian citizens did not respect, when they violently hurt migrants.

Was it really "irregular" immigration the problem that triggered the events in Rosarno? Obviously not. But it would have been more difficult to admit the negligence and carelessness on the part of the State towards a situation now well known to all for several years. The violence unleashed by the patrols of Rosarno has only one face: that of racism and exploitation of the laborers, that of the mafia system of illegal hiring.

Ten years have now passed since the events of Rosarno, then, many promises were made to improve the situation. To date, what has changed in the Plain of Gioia Tauro? Apparently, nothing.<sup>306</sup> The foreign laborers continue to work in exploited conditions, abandoned to themselves. As testified by the words of the parish priest of St. Anthony at Bosco di Rosarno released to the newspaper *Avvenire* in January 2020: "After 10 years nothing has changed. Only that there is no longer the shantytown. But the children still live in the same way" <sup>307</sup>.

Medu (Doctors for Human Rights), an association that has been working in that area for a few years, has denounced, moreover, the poor living conditions of the laborers in the Plain in a recent report<sup>308</sup>: "Yesterday as today - underlines the NGO - the local institutions - often commissarized for mafia infiltration - and the national ones seem incapable of any effective, courageous and far-sighted political planning, limiting themselves instead to propose the vicious circle of eviction-camps-shantytown, which for ten years has left unchanged the scourges of labor exploitation, housing degradation and abandonment of the territories".

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<sup>305</sup> Please see: "Maroni: 'Clandestini troppo tollerati'. Bersani: 'Il ministro fa da scaricabarile'", *Corriere della Sera*, 8 gennaio 2010, here: [https://www.corriere.it/politica/10\\_gennaio\\_08/reazioni-politiche-rosarno\\_c4690e2c-fc47-11de-98e4-00144f02aabe.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/politica/10_gennaio_08/reazioni-politiche-rosarno_c4690e2c-fc47-11de-98e4-00144f02aabe.shtml).

<sup>306</sup> You can find a chronology of main events here: <https://www.terrelibere.org/rosarno-10-anni-dopo/>.

<sup>307</sup> Please see "10 anni fa. Dopo la rivolta di Rosarno nulla: stranieri più nascosti e sempre sfruttati", *Avvenire.it*, 7 gennaio 2020, here: <https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/rosarno-dopo-la-rivolta-nulla>.

<sup>308</sup> Please see: "Rosarno, 10 anni dopo l'emergenza umanitaria resta uguale. La denuncia di Medu.", *Redattore sociale*, 10 gennaio 2020, here: <https://www.redattoresociale.it/article/notiziario/rosarno-dieci-anni-dopo-l-emergenza-umanitaria-resta-uguale-la-denuncia-di-medu>.



The immobility (if not even the worsening) of the work and life situation of the workers of the Plain testifies how often it is not possible to draw lessons from painful past experiences. The protest in Rosarno could have been a starting point to mature a deep reflection, and then act accordingly to fight the illegal hiring (which unfortunately exists not only in Calabria, but in several Italian campaigns) and to promote social and work inclusion interventions for migrants. Despite the birth of solidarity projects, such as SOS Rosarno or Medu, the State continues not to care about them. It's like they're not even here.



## **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 canteen<sup>309</sup>.

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 Major.

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,

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<sup>309</sup> 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.



perhaps it could still happen in 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”<sup>310</sup>.

“I have always paid, but often late - tells another mother to the newspaper *la Repubblica*<sup>311</sup> - 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.<sup>312</sup> 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 canteen<sup>313</sup>, the forty-two children who risk exclusion from the school canteen, the

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<sup>310</sup> Please see: “Mensa scolastica, niente pasti ai bimbi delle famiglie morose”, 2 aprile 2010, *Bresciaoggi.it*.

<sup>311</sup> 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/](https://www.repubblica.it/scuola/2010/04/08/news/niente_mensa_ai_figli_di_chi_non_paga_la_retta-3188930/).

<sup>312</sup> 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>.

<sup>313</sup> 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:



school institution, 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 Mayor<sup>314</sup>.

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".<sup>315</sup>

There are, instead, those who defend the benefactor's gesture. In a letter, published on the website [bambinicoraggiosi.com](http://bambinicoraggiosi.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 it<sup>316</sup>.

Initially, the news of Adro's circular letter is taken up only by the [Bresciaoggi.it](http://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.<sup>317</sup>

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

<sup>314</sup> "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.

<sup>315</sup> 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>.

<sup>316</sup> Please see: "Adro, caso mensa: lettera aperta a chi critica il benefattore che ha saldato il debito", [www.bambinicoraggiosi.com](http://www.bambinicoraggiosi.com).

<sup>317</sup> "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





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.<sup>318</sup>

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.<sup>319</sup>

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”<sup>320</sup>. 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 donation<sup>321</sup>. 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”<sup>322</sup>.

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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>.

<sup>318</sup> Please see: “I tg snobbano il benefattore di Adro. Troppo difficile riflettere sulle contraddizioni sociali”, *Dongiorgio.it*, 13 aprile 2010.

<sup>319</sup> 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>.

<sup>320</sup> Please see: Sandro Ruotolo da Adro, here: <http://www.rai.it/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-19235df3-c11c-4bd0-8b3f-5a19dd8bf38a.html#p>.

<sup>321</sup> Please see: M. Ovadia, “L’Italia si è fermata ad Adro”, *L’Unità*, 24 aprile 2010.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibidem*





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 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 months<sup>323</sup>, 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.<sup>324</sup> 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”.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Please see: C. Gubbini, “Se il razzismo si siede a tavola”, *il manifesto*, 15 aprile 2010.

<sup>324</sup> Ibidem

<sup>325</sup> Ibidem.



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.

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 Alps<sup>326</sup>, the Mayor of the Northern League was later condemned by the Court of Auditors to pay 10,600 euros.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> 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>.

<sup>327</sup> Please see here:

[https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/10/24/news/adro\\_sindaco\\_e\\_giunta\\_condannati\\_per\\_il\\_sole\\_del\\_le\\_alpi\\_nella\\_scuola-69381498/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/10/24/news/adro_sindaco_e_giunta_condannati_per_il_sole_del_le_alpi_nella_scuola-69381498/).



## "Let's burn them alive." Tor Sapienza, year 2014

*Veronica Iesù*

Rome, night between 10th and 11th November 2014. The reception centre located in Viale Giorgio Morandi 153, in the Tor Sapienza district, in the eastern suburb of the capital, is being stormed by a group of local residents.

The protestors, around a hundred of people, chanted "Let's burn them alive!", "The niggers must leave here!", "Viva il Duce!" with xenophobic banners and placards such as "No more uncivilized immigrants!", "Stop the invasion! ". The mob had turned up at the centre to protest against the presence of immigrants, "guilty", according to them, of fostering crime and violence in the neighbourhood and "uncivilized" behaviour such as "harassing passers-by by exposing themselves naked at the windows ".<sup>328</sup>

Stones, paper bombs and firecrackers were thrown at the centre, triggering the reaction of the immigrants who, frightened, threw objects at the mob, and used bedframes and unhinged doors to barricade themselves inside the structure for fear that some of the protestors might enter and physically attack them. A legitimate fear, especially after the attack, which took place just in those days in Tor Sapienza, against a foreign 40-year-old man who was seriously injured with a deep cut on his head and immediately helped by the operators of the centre.

The police intervened to stop the acts of vandalism and defuse the tension, yet their intervention only fuelled the rage of the protestors who set fire to cars and dumpsters shouting at the officers: "Defend us, not them because we pay your taxes and salary".<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Please see also: "Tor Sapienza: se il rancore si trasforma in razzismo", 13 novembre 2014, here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/tor-sapienza-se-rancore-si-trasforma-in-razzismo/>.

<sup>329</sup> Please see: "Scontri Tor Sapienza, aperta inchiesta. Aggredito un altro straniero. Salvini: Ci andrò", *AdnKronos*, 12 novembre 2014, here: [https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2014/11/12/ancora-scontri-anti-immigrati-tor-sapienza-roma-bombe-carta-contro-polizia\\_TIYgBmeDeY1071xHgO0j2H.html?refresh\\_ce](https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2014/11/12/ancora-scontri-anti-immigrati-tor-sapienza-roma-bombe-carta-contro-polizia_TIYgBmeDeY1071xHgO0j2H.html?refresh_ce); "Proteste anti-immigrati, riesplode la rabbia", *La Stampa*, 12 novembre 2014, here:



The clashes, of what had been described by many newspapers as a real "urban guerrilla warfare", caused several injuries among both the policemen and the protestors on the second night of the clashes, and were preceded, on the afternoon of 11th November, by a demo organized by locals to demand greater security in a neighbourhood "invaded by immigrants".<sup>330</sup> Hence, the municipal administration's decision to move the centre's immigrants to other municipal facilities in order to guarantee their safety.

The Rome Public Prosecutor's Office opened an inquiry to ascertain whether the citizens of Sapienza spontaneously organised the demonstration against the centre or whether there was a criminal network behind it.

The building affected by this harsh aggression is a large six-floor block of flats, run by the cooperative "Il Sorriso": it hosts a Sprar centre (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), a reception centre for unaccompanied minors (36 in all from Bangladesh and African countries), a family home and the cooperative's offices.<sup>331</sup>

### **The "arguments" of protesters**

The violent attack on the reception centre, according to the demonstrators, broke out due to an assault on a woman in the park located in Via Tranquillo Cremona, a few metres away from the centre in Viale Morandi. The woman claimed to have been attacked by men who, "because of the accent", seemed to be "of Romanian or Albanian

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<https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2014/11/12/news/proteste-anti-immigrati-riesplode-la-rabbia-1.35589937>; "Tor Sapienza, ancora scontri. Immigrati trasferiti", *Il Tempo*, 13 novembre 2014, here: <https://www.iltempo.it/roma-capitale/2014/11/13/news/tor-sapienza-ancora-scontri-immigrati-trasferiti-foto-959974/>.

<sup>330</sup> Please see: "Tor Sapienza, un'altra notte di guerriglia: bombe carta e cariche della polizia", *La Repubblica*, 11 novembre 2014, here: [https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/11/11/news/tor\\_sapienza\\_un\\_altra\\_notte\\_di\\_guerriglia\\_bombe\\_carta\\_e\\_cariche\\_della\\_polizia-100327280/](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/11/11/news/tor_sapienza_un_altra_notte_di_guerriglia_bombe_carta_e_cariche_della_polizia-100327280/).

<sup>331</sup> Please see: "Cosa succede a Tor Sapienza", *Internazionale*, 12 novembre 2014, here: <https://www.internazionale.it/notizie/2014/11/12/cosa-succede-a-tor-sapienza>.



nationality"<sup>332</sup>. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that none of the immigrants in the centre comes from Eastern Europe.

The residents who participated in the protest claimed to be "exasperated" by the situation in the neighbourhood: "We will not stop until all the immigrants have left our neighbourhood", "we are not racists but these people commit thefts, assaults and make our neighbourhood unlivable. If no one can guarantee justice and safety we are forced to take the matter in our hands, since it has become too difficult to live here" and again "We will carry on until everyone leaves: from the reception centre to the nomad camp, to the social housing where Romanians and Albanians live ".<sup>333</sup>

Well-known arguments used by those who hide themselves behind the "I am not racist but...", and then instead represents and embodies exactly what they claim not to be. The unequivocal slogans pronounced or displayed on banners during the protest are proof of this.

The attack on the centre of Viale Morandi is one of the many cases in which, in the past decade, foreigners have been become the scapegoats of social pent-up frustration that has singled out the other - the foreigner - for being the convenient target.

The district of Tor Sapienza is located close to the Grande Raccordo Anulare, isolated and very far from the centre. It is mostly made up of public housing and large buildings where drug dealing and prostitution, unfortunately, are well known. There are many problems: poor public lighting, poor public transport service, lack of social and cultural services and a distance from the institutions which has favoured the spread of fascist and racist ideologies. The anger, triggered by decades of urban decay in the neighbourhood, has allowed far-right organisations to infiltrate in the fabric of the community and exploit their anger and turn it to the young foreigners who, after much

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<sup>332</sup> Please see: "Guerriglia a Tor Sapienza, la rabbia dei residenti: Via i rifugiati o faremo da soli", *RomaToday*, 11 novembre 2014, here: <http://centocelle.romatoday.it/tor-sapienza/manifestazione-viale-morandi-11-novembre.html>.

<sup>333</sup> Please see: "Roma, alta tensione a Tor Sapienza: scontri e feriti a protesta anti-immigrati. La procura apre un'inchiesta. Aggredito un altro straniero", *Il Messaggero*, 12 novembre 2014, here: [https://www.ilmessaggero.it/ROMA/CRONACA/roma\\_tor\\_sapienza\\_scontri\\_feriti\\_proteste\\_anti\\_immigrati/notizie/1007869.shtml](https://www.ilmessaggero.it/ROMA/CRONACA/roma_tor_sapienza_scontri_feriti_proteste_anti_immigrati/notizie/1007869.shtml)



suffering and hardships, arrived in Italy because of their dramatic past in their home countries.

The signs of intolerance towards the guests of the centre had already manifested in the past. The structure in Viale Morandi had already been targeted, even before the violent attacks in November: not only the residents of the centre, but also the operators of the Cooperative had been insulted for being "guilty of helping foreigners". Despite this, no attempt had ever been made to find lasting solutions.<sup>334</sup>

The problem of Tor Sapienza, as well as many other suburbs of Rome (the same "model" has been reproduced in other areas), cannot in any case justify senseless and violent attacks on vulnerable people who also have to face traumatic situations and overcome intolerable levels of hardship. Nevertheless, there have been those who have not hesitated to side with the aggressors. For example, *Il Giornale* entitled "Rome, the citizens of Tor Sapienza can't take it anymore: stones been thrown at immigrants",<sup>335</sup> as if the shocking violence on foreign citizens could find a justification in the "exasperation" of the residents of the neighbourhood.

The events of Tor Sapienza are symptomatic of how racism can stem from the social issues that blight our cities. For example, it is worth remembering that in the last few years, projects for the reception of asylum seekers received in the city have been concentrated in the eastern quadrant of Rome, without any rethinking and strengthening of the service system by local institutions.

The events of Viale Morandi have no winners, only losers: the residents, who with their racist violence have not found the solution to their problems, and the immigrants of the centre, moved to another area in order to guarantee their safety.

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<sup>334</sup> Please see: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/tor-sapienza-se-rancore-si-trasforma-in-razzismo/>

and <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/tor-sapienza-nessuno-parla/>

<sup>335</sup> Please see: <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/roma-i-cittadini-tor-sapienza-non-ce-fanno-pi-sassi-contro-1067069.html>.



## The virtual and actual barricades in Gorino

*Leone Palmeri*

On October 24, 2016, the Prefect of Ferrara issued an order of partial seizure of the hostel-bar in Gorino "Amore e Natura", a building owned by the province, a centre of aggregation for the inhabitants of the village of about 600 residents, on the border between Emilia Romagna and Veneto. The objective is to allocate six rooms of the structure to host 12 women and 8 children who landed a few days earlier on the Italian coast, coming from Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Guinea.

At 2.30 p.m., the Carabinieri posted an order on the bar-hostel, arousing protests from the managers and residents; the former had already expressed their opposition to the partial use of the bar-hostel as a reception structure during a call from the Prefecture asking for information about the availability of rooms. At 3.30 p.m. the word of mouth stirred up the citizens of Gorino and some neighbouring villages who decided to block the three access points to the village with cars, pallets. The numbers grew during the evening, when two hundred people occupied the streets. Nicola Lodi, current deputy mayor of the Municipality of Ferrara, councillor for security, mobility, hamlets, as well as a member of the League known for the patrols organized against Roma camps, is among the voices that give more support to the protest with his presence and through social media.

The bus that was supposed to transport the 12 women and 8 children to Gorino remains stuck in Comacchio. The negotiations between Carabinieri, Prefect, Mayor and residents last until midnight with moments of tension and bitter verbal clashes. In order to avoid the use of force against the demonstrators, the Prefect decides to renounce to the transfer and temporarily lodge the women and children in three centres located in Comacchio, Fiscaglia and Ferrara<sup>336</sup>.

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<sup>336</sup> See: Naletto G., *Le barricate di Gorino*, in *Cronache di Ordinario razzismo. Quarto libro bianco sul razzismo in Italia*, pp. 184-189.



Gorino is a clear example of the effects of a certain kind of narrative developed in the media and in public debate can have on the collective imagination and can fuel attitudes of hostility and violence. They are not limited to the lexicon, but permeate, circumscribe and inform a certain way of acting and interacting with "the migrant", often de-humanized with rhetoric of otherness.

People moving towards Europe along the routes crossing the Mediterranean tend to be systematically confined by the media and political society within a narrative scheme that represents them in a perpetual state of disadvantage, relegating them to a state of need and dependence that establishes a vertical, paternalistic, and caring power relationship with the host society. Migrants are not recognised (nor granted) any ability to emancipate themselves autonomously.

The imperialist and colonial dynamics that are at the root of the reasons that push these people out of their countries of origin and keep them in a state of exploitation with institutionalised and structural violence at the points of arrival, are completely removed, their suffering becomes a result of their "inability" to reach European "development" standards. These narratives of otherness establish a distance between citizens and migrants that is built on the assertion of irreconcilable social and identity differences. This distance is made wider by the security approach that has characterized and continues to characterize migration policies.<sup>337</sup>

The lack of a strategic planning of the reception and the scarce involvement of local communities, with particular reference to the Extraordinary Reception Centres managed by the Prefectures, have in fact opened a door to the delegitimization of the public reception system which was skilfully promoted by some unscrupulous political actors. Reception has therefore been represented in political propaganda as an authoritarian

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<sup>337</sup> See: Lunaria (ed.), *I diritti non sono un costo. Immigrazione, welfare e politiche pubbliche*, 2013: [http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/i\\_diritti\\_non\\_sono\\_un\\_costo-tot..pdf](http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/i_diritti_non_sono_un_costo-tot..pdf); Lunaria (ed.), *Il mondo di dentro. Il sistema di accoglienza per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati a Roma*, 2016: [http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Il\\_mondo\\_di\\_dentro.pdf](http://www.lunaria.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Il_mondo_di_dentro.pdf)





imposition of the State<sup>338</sup> guilty of giving priority to migrants' needs and neglecting those of Italian citizens.

This way of representing people migrating to Italy therefore places them in a perpetual state of need which is formulated and interpreted as the result and at the same time the cause of a moral "degradation" which can "contaminate" the communities they come into contact with.

From this point of view, the words of the citizens of Gorino that justify the barricades are exemplary, calling it "a clean village" where residents cannot "accept that [the migrants] dirty it"<sup>339</sup>. When Nicola Lodi, one year later, proudly states that "they should thank [them] for having saved that village from invasion", and that "migrants bring crime and degradation"<sup>340</sup>, the univocal attribution of negative moral categories to those who come from elsewhere is clear.

The women that were going to be hosted in Gorino were deprived of their humanity and subjectivity *a priori*, they are less women than Italian women; they are victims, a burden for the community forced to welcome them, and bear all the negative connotations of the "social degradation" that will inevitably infect the small community of Ferrara in case of direct contact.

As the editorial staff of Global Project observed<sup>341</sup> "the use of a securitarian language, which identifies the migrant as an enemy of security and migration as a destabilizing phenomenon of traditions and status quo, contributes to the crystallization of an imaginary only linked to fears and hysteria" that forces people migrating within a logic that establishes a false link between socio-economic status and moral stature.

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<sup>338</sup> See: Bianchi L., *La rivolta del baretto: cosa c'è dietro alle barricate di Gorino contro i migranti*, 26 Ottobre 2016, Vice, <https://www.vice.com/it/article/mvmmdv/barricate-anti-profughi-gorino-analisi>

<sup>339</sup> See: *ibidem*

<sup>340</sup> See: Martini G., *Un anno dopo le barricate la redenzione di Gorino. "Pronti a ospitare profughi"*, 22 Ottobre 2017, La Stampa, [https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2017/10/22/news/un-anno-dopo-le-barricate-la-redenzione-di-gorino-pronti-a-ospitare-profughi-1.34406926?refresh\\_ce](https://www.lastampa.it/cronaca/2017/10/22/news/un-anno-dopo-le-barricate-la-redenzione-di-gorino-pronti-a-ospitare-profughi-1.34406926?refresh_ce)

<sup>341</sup> See: Global Project (Redazione), *I Bastardi di Gorino. Appunti di Fase su Razzismo ed Antirazzismo*, 28 Ottobre 2016, Global Project, [https://www.globalproject.info/it/in\\_movimento/i-bastardi-di-gorino-appunti-di-fase-su-razzismo-ed-antirazzismo/20428](https://www.globalproject.info/it/in_movimento/i-bastardi-di-gorino-appunti-di-fase-su-razzismo-ed-antirazzismo/20428)



"No one knows who I they are. We have three roads in all, [...] how will they spend their time? Just doing crime?" said a woman interviewed by La Repubblica<sup>342</sup>. "We are all women here, often alone, because our husbands are fishermen. These women who come here will also have companions. This is also what scares us"<sup>343</sup>. These are words that exemplify how the racism of the Gorinese people recalls their vision of the world. A vision in which the women who should be hosted in the hostel-bar are not recognised as having any possibility of emancipating themselves from the negative model that media and political society depict. There is no room for their humanity, their suffering and the scars that the journey to Europe has left on their skin and in their spirits are consequences of the "degradation" that has characterised and informed their lives.

This representation contributes to create a deep dichotomy between Italians and migrants, in which the categories of good and evil are attributed according to geographical and cultural origin, and a sad parallel between skin colour and moral stature is established. Hence the ease with which movements for the "protection" of the territory and local communities spread locally.

Saturated with racist messages and hate speech that creates a perception of the fictitious reality in which Italian society is the victim of "a barbaric invasion", the residents of Gorino, intoxicated by hatred and fear, have responded with violence by raising barricades against a helpless group of women and children.

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<sup>342</sup> Please see: Di Raimondo R., *Migranti, gli abitanti di Gorino: "No all'invasione, dovevano avvertirci prima"*, 25 Ottobre 2016, La Repubblica, RepTv-Fb Live, [video.repubblica.it/edizione/bologna/migranti-gli-abitanti-di-Gorino-no-all-invasione-dovevano-avvertirci-prima/256705/256953](https://video.repubblica.it/edizione/bologna/migranti-gli-abitanti-di-Gorino-no-all-invasione-dovevano-avvertirci-prima/256705/256953)

<sup>343</sup> Please see: Chiodo S., *Cronache di ordinario razzismo* (ed.), *Contro donne e bambini le barricate del rifiuto a Gorino*, 26 Ottobre 2016, Associazione Carta di Roma, <https://www.cartadiroma.org/news/barricate-donne-bambini-Gorino/>



## **Humanity trapped. The case of the two Roma women locked in the garbage cage in Follonica**

*Roberta Salzano*

The story begins on February 23, 2017, with a video in which two employees of the Lidl supermarket in Follonica, Tuscany, after having caught two Roma women rummaging in a "metal cage" - the garbage space outside the supermarket - lock them up by blocking their exit with a forklift.

Women react desperately. A third employee is filming the scene with his cell phone. "See, you can't get into the breakup corner!" referring to the unsaleable merchandise. The other two men laugh complacently. In a very short time, the footage is shared among the supermarket employees and then publicly broadcasted on the net.

The police open an investigation for false imprisonment just after seeing the video on Facebook. One of the two women, Margherita, is thus traced. Police collects her statement and the identity of the three attackers is hence revealed. In the meantime, the video and several parodies<sup>344</sup> of it go viral while the Lidl company is forced to issue an official statement to dissociate itself from the video content<sup>345</sup>.

The post by Lidl on Facebook is echoed by hundreds of comments that criticize the management while expressing solidarity with the three men; they even threat to boycott the chain if they will be fired. The public opinion divided between those who attribute the episode to a clear example of xenophobia and racism, and those who belittle it,

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<sup>344</sup> In addition to several videos and even carnival disguises, so commented by the Mayor of Cascina (PI), Susanna Ceccardi: "Carnival mask yesterday at Cascina! It makes me laugh!! At carnival every joke counts! The comment refers to a photo, posted by the mayor herself on her Facebook page, that depicts a woman masked by one of the women locked in the cage and a man masked as a Lidl employee. Please see R. Nenzi, "Si travestono da Rom ingabbiata e da dipendente della Lidl. Il sindaco: "A Carnevale ogni scherzo vale"", *Il Giornale*, 27 Febbraio 2017, in <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/si-travestano-rom-ingabbiata-e-dipendente-lidl-sindaco-1369512.html>.

<sup>345</sup> Here the Facebook post from Lidl Italia <https://www.facebook.com/lidlitalia/posts/1473525486014726>.



considering it more like a stunt. The employees, for their part, declare that they never had bad intentions towards the two women, but that they only wanted to joke.

### **The reactions**

The Follonica "cage" episode soon becomes a case discussed nationally, arousing a vortex of reactions involving representatives of national and local institutions, politicians and public actors, with often opposing positions.

The lawyer of the two employees who had recorded the episode, builds his clients' defense by refusing any accusation of racism and emphasizing the position of the management Lidl Italia, blamed for having unduly accused their workers, without considering that their behavior was aimed at protecting the supermarket and their jobs.

Margherita, one of the two victims of the attack, known in the area for her assiduous presence near the supermarket, in some interviews recorded in the aftermath of the incident, confirms her confidential relationship with the employees.

No official condemnation of the episode has ever come from Lidl's management in Follonica, except for a few timid attempts to justify the act by blaming the "exasperation" of the supermarket's employees due to the constant presence of a few Roma in the supermarket and the parking lot, and the numerous thefts that had taken place<sup>346</sup>.

Even a journalist from a national newspaper<sup>347</sup> stated that exasperation can lead to these consequences.

Associazione 21 Luglio<sup>348</sup> - a non-profit organization that supports groups and individuals in condition of extreme segregation and discrimination, protecting their rights and promoting children's well-being - is among the first to express great concern

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<sup>346</sup> "Rom chiuse nel cassonetto, dal supermercato: «Se sparisce merce anche di scarto perdiamo il posto»", *Il Tirreno*, 24 Febbraio 2017, "<https://iltirreno.gelocal.it/regione/toscana/2017/02/24/news/rom-chiuse-nel-cassonetto-dal-supermercato-se-sparisce-merce-anche-di-scarto-perdiamo-il-posto-1.14931195>."

<sup>347</sup> On the national newspaper *Libero*, the day after the publication of the video the chief editor Vittorio Feltri writes "LA BRUTTA STORIA DI FOLLONICA. Vittorio Feltri e le zingarelle in gabbia al Lidl: "La verità, italiani esasperati", <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/opinioni/12315050/vittorio-feltri-zingarelle-supermercato-lidl-gabbia-italiani-esasperati-.html>.

<sup>348</sup> <https://www.21luglio.org/>



about what happened and to talk of an act of multiple discrimination linked to gender identity and ethnicity of the victims<sup>349</sup>.

The Codacons<sup>350</sup> association affirmed that it was in favour of the firing of the two employees and, as the Committee for the defense of equal opportunities and against racism, urges the Grosseto Public Prosecutor's Office to extend the investigation to the members of some Facebook groups, responsible for having posted comments on the racist video and inciting hatred<sup>351</sup>.

The Secretary of the Chamber of Labour of Grosseto, Claudio Renzetti, ensures that employees involved in the episode and enrolled in his trade union will be expelled, with consequent deprivation of any legal protection.

Matteo Salvini, instead, take the employees' sides<sup>352</sup> and calls for the eviction of Roma settlements and ethnic cleansing, a proposal that he will promptly put forward when he becomes Minister of the Interior, through the announcement of a so-called census of the Roma and Sinti population<sup>353</sup>.

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<sup>349</sup> Please see <https://www.21luglio.org/follonica-associazione-21-luglio/>.

<sup>350</sup> Codacons is a non-profit association founded in 1976 in defense of consumers and the environment.

<sup>351</sup> Please see Codacons press release here <https://codacons.it/nomadi-in-gabbia-codacons-chiede-licenziamento-in-tronco-per-autori-video/>.

<sup>352</sup> "I am with the employees to whom we offer legal support and not with the #ROMA #ROOMMAGERS" Please see [https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/835081733389307904?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etw%5Eetembed%7Ctwterm%5E835081733389307904&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.esquire.com%2Fit%2Fnews%2Fpolitica%2Fa13594062%2F10-peggiori-tweet-matteo-salvini%2F](https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/835081733389307904?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etw%5Eetembed%7Ctwterm%5E835081733389307904&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.esquire.com%2Fit%2Fnews%2Fpolitica%2Fa13594062%2F10-peggiori-tweet-matteo-salvini%2F). The same post was published by Salvini on Facebook, with the same comment, then (repeatedly) modified, as the Facebook history shows. From "I'm with the employees (I will contact them already today to offer all our support, even legal) and not with the Roma "ROOMMAGERS" to here is the video of the nomads caught poking around in the corner of Lidl's broken products". To consult the cronology of modifications to the link, please visit <https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/posts/10154727113888155>.

<sup>353</sup> On August 7, 2018 Aliesvki Musli, a Roma activist reported, via Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/musli.alievski/posts/2109857099039100>), has reported the Minister of the Interior for spreading ideas based on racial and ethnic hatred (under Articles. 43 TU Immigration and 3 of Law No. 654/1975), referring to some phrases pronounced at a television show in which Salvini announced: "I am having a dossier prepared on the Roma issue in Italy. It is necessary to understand who, how, how many are, then a census. Let's make a registry, a picture of the current situation. While irregular immigrants can be expelled, the Italian Roma unfortunately remain here". The physical removal of the Roma population and the material destruction of illegal settlements was the subject, in 2019, of the circular of the Ministry of the Interior n.16012/110 ([https://issuu.com/opengol/docs/circolare\\_campi\\_rom](https://issuu.com/opengol/docs/circolare_campi_rom)), addressed to all the Prefects, having as its object "Settlements of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti communities", which asked the Territorial Offices to collaborate, to outline the picture of the situation of



The post of the Secretary of Lega Nord is echoed by several criticisms from politicians and journalists, from Enrico Rossi<sup>354</sup> - President of the Tuscany Region, - to the writer Roberto Saviano<sup>355</sup>, from the Secretary of the Sinistra Italiana, Nicola Fratoianni<sup>356</sup> and Andrea Orlando<sup>357</sup>, to the then Minister of Justice to Massimo D'Alema<sup>358</sup>.

A few days later, Andrea Maestri, lawyer and member of parliament from the political party Possibile, in opposition to Matteo Salvini's comment, offered free legal assistance to the victims and presented a complaint to the Court of Ravenna asking the judges to rule on Salvini's violation of the principle of parliamentary immunity, and for public condoning of a crime and incitement to racial hatred<sup>359</sup>.

### Case dismissed

In spite of the numerous acrimonious comments, two months after the episode, Lidl Italia confirms its first decision of not renewing the work contract of one of the two men involved in the episode, and firing, for good cause, the other.

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the illegal camps, to prepare a plan of evictions. Please see <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/censimenti-e-sgomberi-delle-comunita-rom-una-nuova-circolare-ai-prefetti/>.

<sup>354</sup>Please see , "Rom rinchiuse, Rossi: «Episodio gravissimo, frutto avvelenato della xenofobia»", *IlGiunco.net*, 24 Febbraio 2017, in <https://www.ilgiunco.net/2017/02/24/rom-rinchiuse-rossi-episodio-gravissimo-frutto-avvelenato-della-xenofobia/>

<sup>355</sup> R. Saviano, "Scusate se parlo ancora dei deliri di Salvini", *La Repubblica*, 25 February 2017, <https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/02/25/news/scusate-se-parlo-ancora-dei-deliri-di-salvini-159164230/>

<sup>356</sup> "It is a shame. You are a barbarian and a leader who stands to lead the country and writes and says these things is unacceptable". During the TV show Tagadà, 24 February 2017, in <https://www.la7.it/tagada/video/salvini-sto-con-i-lavoratori-contro-le-rom-e-fratoianni-lo-attacca-sei-un-barbaro-24-02-2017-205440>.

<sup>357</sup> "Can we accept that two people who lock two Romas in a cage have the praise of the leader of one of the Italian political forces, who even offers to pay the legal fees, without anyone from our party saying anything?". Reported on *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 26 Febbraio 2017, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/02/26/pd-orlando-furioso-coi-suoi-salvini-plaude-per-le-rom-in-gabbia-e-noi-zitti-destra-trionfa-anche-se-vinciamo-noi/3417553/>

<sup>358</sup> "A political leader who incites to commit a crime is dangerous for himself and others. We know that unfortunately that there is a polluted political climate in Italy" As reported by S. Rame, "Le Rom messe in gabbia al supermercato da un dipendente iscritto alla Cgil", on *Il Giornale.it*, 24 Febbraio 2017, in <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/rom-messe-gabbia-supermercato-dipendente-iscritto-cgil-1368468.html>.

<sup>359</sup> Please see <https://www.facebook.com/andrea.maestri.16/posts/10210528654946935> and C. Matteini, "Rom rinchiuse alla LIDL, esposto contro Salvini: "Istiga all'odio razziale"", *Fanpage.it*, 2 March 2017 in <https://www.fanpage.it/politica/rom-rinchiuse-alla-lidl-esposto-contro-salvini-istiga-all-odio-razziale/>.





The investigation for false imprisonment continues until the end of September, when the Deputy Prosecutor of the Court of Grosseto issues a decree of dismissal, considering the charge excessive and therefore unfounded.

Also, both the local and national label the case as of press playful.

The case is dismissed as a prank, "maybe of bad taste, but nothing more"<sup>360</sup>. The version of Margherita, the woman in the video who screamed from fright, is nevertheless different. A few days after the episode, she told to RepTv<sup>361</sup> and Fanpage<sup>362</sup> that both herself and the other woman in the video actually knew the two employees, who used to "joke" with each other.

From these interviews it emerges the image of a frightened and humiliated woman, who declares to have reacted in that way because seriously frightened, confirming, in fact, that the mockery had actually gone beyond an innocent joke. Margherita's version however does not generate any compassion in the supermarket's customers who – in majority – take the employees' side while others inveigh against the woman<sup>363</sup>. Once again, it is the Secretary of the Northern League, who, after hearing the news of the firing of the two employees, invites his "followers" to boycott the supermarket<sup>364</sup>.

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<sup>360</sup>V. Feltri, "L'Editoriale", *Libero*, 14 September 2017, <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/editoriali/13236166/vittorio-feltri-editoriale-scuse-burloni-follonica-assolti-giudici-rom-rinchiuse-gabbia.html>

<sup>361</sup>A. Lattanzi, "Follonica, la Rom ripresa nel video-scandalo: "Era uno scherzo, ma la paura era vera"", *RepTv*, 25 February 2017, <https://video.repubblica.it/edizione/firenze/follonica-la-rom-ripresa-nel-video-scandalo-era-uno-scherzo-ma-la-paura-era-vera/268805/269238?ref=fbpr&fbclid=IwAR1TCb9cKniTYquWjI-KzLwLU5VFsgmvEBr9IINyT2RoQiRcAqyU4EE2njY>.

<sup>362</sup>T. Saveri, "Parla la Rom chiusa nel gabbiotto: "Avevo paura". I passanti: "Dovevano metterla nel tritacarne"", *Fanpage.it*, 24 February 201, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLUPXDF8qL0&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>363</sup> "Even if the gesture of the employees was wrong, the women were stealing", these are "people who hinder you in your daily life", say some of the people to Saverio Tommasi, "in my opinion they should have set them on fire, because it's easy to judge, but these women have been living here in Italy for years now and they steal everything there is to steal [...] as soon as you see that they are in the wrong, you have to teach them a lesson". Please see the previous note for the full interview.

<sup>364</sup> "With a mortgage to and a family to feed, the two employees were fired for stopping and filming two thieves! Solidarity to Ramon and Andrea. #BOICOTTALIDL.P.s. Please, leave your comment here: [www.facebook.com/lidlitalia](https://www.facebook.com/lidlitalia)". Please see [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10154727113888155&id=252306033154](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10154727113888155&id=252306033154).



## Why to reflect on the episode happened in Follonica

What is striking about this episode is not only the violence of the act and the ruthlessness of the video images. To lock someone in a cage implies a thought of contempt. The unconsciousness with which the three men make such a brutal gesture and the lust for exhibitionism expressed through the video are unacceptable. But even more impressive is the "success" recorded on social platforms, the hundreds of shares, the thousands of comments, the millions of views. An episode that pose once again the age-old question of digital space as a place without rules on one hand, and on the other exemplifies the development of a rhetoric that is expressed through social networks and increases even more the confusion between politics and propaganda. Astonishing are the statements of those, including politicians, who speak out about the "heroic act"<sup>365</sup> of those who rightly wanted to punish two thieves<sup>366</sup>. As well as surprising are the positive reactions to the call for boycott the supermarket chain for having distanced themselves from the gesture. It is disturbing that such a denigrating gesture is legitimized, trivialized and labeled as a "prank"<sup>367</sup>.

By reading this kind of comments and looking at the interviews, one can understand how serious are the reactions of those who defend such violent actions, instead of condemning them. The other aspect worth noting is that - besides those comments in

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<sup>365</sup> As reported in some comments to the video, Facebook posts and online articles.

<sup>366</sup> "Solidarity with the Lidl employees. They are suffering unacceptable persecution, even risking their jobs. We can no longer resist in a state that forces people to take justice in their own hands because of the poor resources allocated to security sector and then it condemns them when they do so, leaving the real criminals with absolute impunity. I am with those who defend themselves!" So the words of the mayor Susanna Ceccardi. Please see <https://www.facebook.com/susanna.ceccardi/posts/10211123311893898>.

<sup>367</sup> "Lidl Follonica, beccano due nomadi a rovistare nell'immondizia e le chiudono in gabbia", Liberotv, 24 February 2017, <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/video/libero-tv-copertina/12313521/lidl-follonica-nomadi-immondizia-chiuse-gabbia-video-facebook-bestiale-urlo.html>. "Stunt is the same term used to refer to the episode that took place in 2018 where Daisy Osakue was attacked with egg throwing. Please also see C. Sarra, "Daisy Osakue, presa la "banda dell'uovo": uno dei tre figlio di consigliere Pd", *Il Giornale*, 2 Agosto 2018, in [www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/daisy-osakue-presa-banda-delluovo-hanno-agito-goliardia-1561225.html](http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/daisy-osakue-presa-banda-delluovo-hanno-agito-goliardia-1561225.html), "Daisy Osakue parteciperà agli Europei, gli aggressori sono tre giovani italiani: uno è figlio di un consigliere del Pd", *Il Mattino*, 2 Agosto 2018, <https://www.ilmattino.it/primopiano/cronaca/daisy-osakue-aggressori-tre-giovani-italiani-goliardia-3892424.html>, and "Una goliardata", presi aggressori di Daisy", *Adnkronos*, 2 Agosto 2018, in [https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2018/08/02/presi-gli-aggressori-daisy\\_ptUcBflswBw0aApuK2ezpJ.html](https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2018/08/02/presi-gli-aggressori-daisy_ptUcBflswBw0aApuK2ezpJ.html).





reaction to Matteo Salvini's statements - there have been very few explicit condemnations of the episode by political representatives and public figures. A silence most probably due to the imminent local elections in Italy.



## Desirée Mariottini: Killed twice

*Veronica Iesùè*

Rome, October 19th, 2018. The lifeless body of a young woman is found wrapped in a duvet and abandoned on a mattress in a crumbling building located in Via dei Lucani 22, in the university district of San Lorenzo.

The victim is Desirée Mariottini, a 16-year-old from Cisterna di Latina, a small town just a few kilometres from Rome. Last time her family has heard from her was on October 17th, when the girl informed that she would have spent the night at a friend's house in Rome. Two days later, the tragic discovery: Desirée is dead.

### **What happened to Desirée?**

On the night between October 18th and 19th, around 4 a.m., Emergency numbers receive an anonymous call: "There is a girl who needs help. She's dying." <sup>368</sup>

But when the ambulance reaches the site, the entrance of the building was locked (with a padlock) and doctors had to wait for the intervention of the fire fighters. A delay that proved fatal for the young woman. The cause of death was due to a cardiorespiratory insufficiency caused by the intake of a lethal mix of drugs.

The autopsy performed on the girl's body showed that Desirée was also victim of sexual abuse. According to the reconstruction carried out by the investigators and based on the testimony provided by those who were in the building the night Desirée died, the abuse occurred when the girl had already lost conscious due to the drugs' effects and her death came after hours of agony during which none of those who were on the crime scene did anything to save her life<sup>369</sup>.

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<sup>368</sup> Please see "Giallo a San Lorenzo: trovata ragazza morta in uno stabile abbandonato", October, 19th 2018, <http://www.romatoday.it/cronaca/ragazza-morta-san-lorenzo-via-dei-lucani.html>

<sup>369</sup> "Roma, sedicenne trovata morta a San Lorenzo: violentata da un gruppo", 23 October 2018, [https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/10/23/news/roma\\_sedicenne\\_trovata\\_morta\\_a\\_san\\_lorenzo\\_violenta\\_da\\_un\\_branco-209776238/](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/10/23/news/roma_sedicenne_trovata_morta_a_san_lorenzo_violenta_da_un_branco-209776238/)



In the days that came right after the crime, the investigation led to the indictment and immediate arrest of four African men identified as responsible for Desirée's death: Mamadou Gara (26 years old) and Brian Minthe (43 year old) both Senegalese, Alinno Chima (40-year-old) Nigerian and Yussef Salia (32 years old), from Ghana.

All four, currently on trial, are accused, with different degrees of charge, of the crimes of: murder, (aggravated) gang sexual assault and deal drugs to minors. The finding of traces of DNA both on the body and on the victim's clothing helped frame them.<sup>370</sup>

Besides them, Marco Mancini and Antonella Fauntleroy are also accused. The latter allegedly took Desirée to the building in Via dei Lucani and together with Mancini sold the girl drugs. According to the Public Prosecutor's Office of Rome, a seventh man, Alexander Asumado, is guilty of dealing drugs, not directly to Desirée, but to other people in the building where her dead body was found<sup>371</sup>.

## The context

Desirée's death understandably upset public opinion, both because of the violent fashion in which it happened and because of the young age of the victim. It immediately became the object of intense media and political attention, occupying the front pages of the most important national newspapers for several days.

Residents of the historically anti-fascist neighborhood of San Lorenzo where Desirée died, immediately demanded justice. A few days after Desirée was found dead, a mural appeared on the gate of the building where she died: "Justice for Desirée - San Lorenzo does not forget you". A group of residents told how adequate redevelopment works have never been carried out, and that the neighborhood has been left at the mercy of the nightlife where drugs circulate with ease.

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<sup>370</sup> "Roma, morte Desirée Mariottini: quattro persone a processo per violenza e omicidio", 21 October 2019, [https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/10/21/news/roma\\_morte\\_desire\\_e\\_mariottini\\_quattro\\_persone\\_a\\_processo-239112661/](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/10/21/news/roma_morte_desire_e_mariottini_quattro_persone_a_processo-239112661/)

<sup>371</sup> "Un anno fa moriva Desirée Mariottini: la 16enne violentata, drogata e lasciata morire a San Lorenzo", 18 October 2019, <https://roma.fanpage.it/un-anno-fa-moriva-desiree-mariottini-la-16enne-violentata-drogata-e-lasciata-morire-a-san-lorenzo/>



On October 24th, Matteo Salvini, Minister of the Interior at the time of the murder, visited the neighborhood and using the tragic episode to carrying out his propaganda against migrants, he declared: "I am afraid that this time too they are all foreign citizens and I will do everything that is in my power to send them back to their countries immediately<sup>372</sup>". He then invoked the "bulldozer" as the final solution, confusing an abandoned building, like the one where the episode happened, with an illegal occupation and stating that the squats are "in almost all cases occupied by migrants and left-wing antagonists".<sup>373</sup>

Two opposing factions waited for the arrival of the leader of Lega Nord (Northern League) in San Lorenzo. On one hand, a large group of activists, including students, neighborhood residents and representatives of the feminist movement "Non una di meno" (Not one less) (who displayed a banner that read "Salvini speculates on tragedies. San Lorenzo is not your electoral catwalk"), who prevented Salvini from entering the building where Desirée's body was found, accusing him of looting<sup>374</sup>.

On the other hand, there was a small number of supporters of the Minister, who self-proclaimed "security guards" in the aftermath of the murder had started patrolling the neighborhood to monitor "undocumented and regular immigrant who have now declared war on us" to "stop the genocide of the Italian people"<sup>375</sup>.

The murder of Desirée provided with the opportunity to bring back racist themes, such as that of the "uncontrolled immigration" and the existence of an alleged relationship between criminality and foreign citizens. The titles of some of the articles published in

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<sup>372</sup> "Desirée, il blitz di Salvini in via dei Lucani scatena la bagarre. E parte il duello su Roma con il M5S", 24 October 2018, [https://www.corriere.it/politica/18\\_ottobre\\_24/blitz-salvini-scatena-bagarre-parte-duello-roma-il-m5s-9f152760-d7cf-11e8-9629-6aae524f65ea.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/politica/18_ottobre_24/blitz-salvini-scatena-bagarre-parte-duello-roma-il-m5s-9f152760-d7cf-11e8-9629-6aae524f65ea.shtml)

<sup>373</sup> "Matteo Salvini e CasaPound, un rapporto lungo cinque anni", 2 May 2019, <https://www.open.online/2019/05/02/matteo-salvini-e-casapound-un-rapporto-lungo-cinque-anni/>

<sup>374</sup> "Matteo Salvini e la speculazione sulla morte di una ragazza a Roma", 25 October 2018, <https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/annalisa-camilli/2018/10/25/salvini-san-lorenzo-desiree-mariottini>

<sup>375</sup> These are the words used in the public note with which the extreme right party "Forza Nuova" announced the "surveillance" patrols". Please see "Omicidio Desirée, Raggi: No alle ronde, la forza non è una soluzione", 26 October 2018, <https://roma.fanpage.it/omicidio-desiree-raggi-no-alle-ronde-la-forza-non-e-una-soluzione/>



the aftermath of the murder are an example: "Rape, degradation and illegal immigrants: the ghetto bomb of the beast", *Il Giornale*, 26 October 2018<sup>376</sup>; "Desirée Mariottini, Laura Boldrini: her "resources" rape and kill, but she attacks Salvini", *Libero*, October 28, 2018<sup>377</sup>; "Desirée Mariottini, the dreadful details: "Raped even when she was dead", the slaughter of the beasts", *Libero*, October 31, 2018<sup>378</sup>.

As we have already pointed out in an article published on the website *Cronache di ordinario razzismo* (Chronicles of ordinary racism) on November 2nd, 2018<sup>379</sup>, it is interesting noting that terms such as "beast" or "gang" are used by many newspapers exclusively when referring to those crimes that are not "white" or that in general are allegedly perpetrated by foreigners. Every day we hear of episodes of violence committed by "Italians", to whom is reserved a different treatment, perhaps because it is easier to find a scapegoat - the one who is not Italian in this case - rather than digging deep and reconstruct what happened correctly.

On October 27, 2018, the well-known journalist Gad Lerner tweeted the following: "After #PamelaMastropietro we look at the life and death of #DesiréeMariottini: addicted to heroin, daughter of Italian drug dealer and 15-year-old mother, victim of immigrant pusher. Tragic events that should suggest us something more and different from racial hatred". With this twitter, Lerner invited to reflect on the family context in which Desirée lived: the girl came from a disadvantaged family and had been fighting against her drug addiction for some time. The journalist's tweet was followed by many racist comments. The Minister of Interior Salvini even tweeted that he should "be ashamed" of what he said triggering a controversy on social media<sup>380</sup>.

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<sup>376</sup> See: <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/borgo-mezzanone-ghetto-bomba-dove-si-rifugiano-i-criminali-1593231.html>

<sup>377</sup> See: <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/13393504/desiree-mariottini-immigrati-risorse-laura-boldrini-stuprano-e-uccidono-lei-se-la-prende-con-matteo-salvini.html>

<sup>378</sup> See: <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/italia/13394344/desiree-mariottini-stuprata-morta-quattro-clandestini-ultimo-scempio-bestie-branco-spacciatori.html>

<sup>379</sup> See: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/roma-la-doppia-violenza-sul-corpo-di-desiree/>

<sup>380</sup> "Desirée, tra Gad Lerner e Matteo Salvini è scontro social: <<Vergognati>>", October 28, 2018, [https://www.corriere.it/politica/18\\_ottobre\\_28/desiree-scontro-social-salvini-lerner-colpi-vergogna-99232bae-da86-11e8-aca4-abf222acb144.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/politica/18_ottobre_28/desiree-scontro-social-salvini-lerner-colpi-vergogna-99232bae-da86-11e8-aca4-abf222acb144.shtml)



The murder of Desirée occurred in an already hostile climate towards immigrants, exacerbated by the murder of Pamela Mastropietro, a 18-year-old Roman girl killed in Macerata by a Nigerian citizen a few months earlier.

Given a context of strongly polarized public debate, the words used by Salvini and some newspapers have poured gas on the fire.

For example, on November 3, 2018 a banner that read: "Desirée like Pamela - Immigration kills" was hung on the facade of a hostel in Cremona, Lombardy.<sup>381</sup>

Only a few days earlier, on the Facebook page of a private club called "Salottino del Ponte", in Susa (Piedmont), the following post had appeared: "In the name of solidarity with Desirée's family, entry is forbidden to Nigerians and Senegalese and fake refugees in general. This is the only way we can protest. Share so that others do the same. Goodbye, little star".

Due to numerous criticisms received, the club then apologized stating that "honesty and fairness have nothing to do with skin colour"<sup>382</sup>.

A few months later, in the same neighborhood where Desirée was found dead, a young man from The Gambia was beaten-up and heavily insulted by two Italian men, 45 and 50 years old respectively, affiliated to the Roman extreme right-wing and already known to the police. The "reason" for this aggression was the colour of his skin.

The Gambian man had entered into a pub to ask for a beer when the two of Italian men started hitting him violently and shouting at him xenophobic phrases such as "Monkey nigger (BLEEP), you have to go away we don't want you here". The culprits were investigated for incitement to racial hatred.<sup>383</sup> It was later discovered that one of the

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<sup>381</sup> " <<Desirée e Pamela: l'immigrazione uccide>>: a Cremona striscione razzista davanti al centro d'accoglienza", 3 November, 2018, [https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/03/news/omicidio\\_desire\\_e\\_cremona\\_striscione\\_contro\\_immigrati\\_davanti\\_al\\_centro\\_di\\_accoglienza-210677606/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/03/news/omicidio_desire_e_cremona_striscione_contro_immigrati_davanti_al_centro_di_accoglienza-210677606/)

<sup>382</sup> "Susa, << Ingresso vietato a nigeriani e senegalesi dopo il delitto di Desirée>>: annuncio choc di un circolo privato, aperta inchiesta", 28 October 2018, [https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/10/28/news/susa\\_ingresso\\_vietato\\_a\\_nigeriani\\_e\\_senegalesi\\_dopo\\_il\\_delitto\\_desire\\_e\\_annuncio\\_choc\\_di\\_un\\_circolo\\_privato-210242925/](https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/10/28/news/susa_ingresso_vietato_a_nigeriani_e_senegalesi_dopo_il_delitto_desire_e_annuncio_choc_di_un_circolo_privato-210242925/)

<sup>383</sup> Please see: "Aggressione razzista a Roma, due arresti", 9 July 2019, [http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2019/07/09/aggressione-razzista-a-roma-due-arresti\\_cd6ad473-9231-4e11-a592-ae3b7a88a1b8.html](http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2019/07/09/aggressione-razzista-a-roma-due-arresti_cd6ad473-9231-4e11-a592-ae3b7a88a1b8.html)



two, Andrea Chilelli, was part of the group of supporters of the former minister Salvini, when he visited to San Lorenzo neighborhood after Desirée's death, the same group that, as reported on Fanpage.it, "praised the Duce and hoped for the return of Benito Mussolini against foreigners living in the neighborhood."<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Please see "*Uno degli aggressori razzisti di San Lorenzo accoglieva Salvini dopo la morte di Desirée*", 10 July 2019, <https://roma.fanpage.it/uno-degli-aggressori-razzisti-del-32-accoglieva-salvini-a-san-lorenzo-dopo-la-morte-di-desiree/>



## Torre Maura: racism in East Rome

Francesca Giuliani

Rome, Torre Maura, eastern outskirts of the capital.

On the afternoon of April 2, 2019, in the neighborhood inside the ring road, where 20,000 inhabitants live, 70 Roma citizens arrived (33 children and 22 women, three of whom are in an advanced state of pregnancy) to be housed in the reception centre in Via dei Codirossoni, a building of the 90s in poor condition<sup>385</sup>.

The arrival of the new guests triggers the protest of some inhabitants, supported by a group of militants of CasaPound and Forza Nuova.

In the late afternoon, the situation degenerates. Some residents move garbage bins in the middle of the street and set them on fire. Some Forza Nuova militants throw some sandwiches addressed to Roma on the ground and trample them on the floor, shouting racist slogans: "Gypsies, you must starve to death"<sup>386</sup>. "Roma steal", "must die of hunger" and so on<sup>387</sup>. That tremendous gesture of wickedness and contempt outrages Simone, a 15-year-old boy passing by, who finds the courage to say: "Stay and use the anger of the people to gather votes. This is always going against minorities, and I don't like it"<sup>388</sup>. That free act is so unusual in these times of anger and rage that the media machine turns him into a hero for a few hours.

The protest ends only around 1:30 a.m., when Stefano Castiglione, head of Cabinet of the Mayor, arrives on the scene and speaks with the demonstrators. The municipal administration yields to pressure and decides to transfer the Roma group elsewhere. The alternative solution proposed is to accommodate mothers and children

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<sup>385</sup> The center, until a few weeks before, housed asylum seekers, while the new guests came from another center in Torre Angela, closed by decision of the municipality. See "Cosa è successo a Torre Maura e perché Roma esclude i rom", *Internazionale*, 4 aprile 2019.

<sup>386</sup> See "Roma, proteste a Torre Maura contro l'arrivo dei rom: incendiata un'auto", *la Repubblica*, 3 aprile 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ds3nY86vSHw>.

<sup>387</sup> See: "Roma, Torre Maura non vuole i rom", *La7*, 7 aprile 2019, here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNKYv\\_Dqb9E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNKYv_Dqb9E).

<sup>388</sup> See: [https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2019/04/04/simone-il-quindicenne-di-torre-maura-contro-casapound-state-a-fa-leva-sulla-rabbia-della-gente.-plauso-raggivideo\\_7a4bc495-bb4d-4c21-a1f7-2ecbc8422ea5.html](https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2019/04/04/simone-il-quindicenne-di-torre-maura-contro-casapound-state-a-fa-leva-sulla-rabbia-della-gente.-plauso-raggivideo_7a4bc495-bb4d-4c21-a1f7-2ecbc8422ea5.html).





in foster homes. This involves the dismemberment of the families: for this reason, some families refuse the transfer.

Certainly, that of Torre Maura, is not an isolated episode. Just a month later, something similar happens in Casal Bruciato<sup>389</sup>, also in the eastern suburbs of Rome, where some residents take to the streets against the assignment of a popular housing to a Roma family from the La Barbuta camp.

A story of racism that is intertwined with social unease and that testifies to an intolerant climate already rooted in the city.

On the Torre Maura affair, even the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) intervenes, which feels the need to write to the Italian Government to receive updates on the consequences of the demonstrations that took place in the Roman quarter<sup>390</sup>. As OHCHR points out, “these violent demonstrations took place against the background of a significant increase in the number of recorded episodes of hate crimes and incitement to hatred and discrimination against individuals on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, color, descent or national origin. In particular, there has been an increase in hate speech and forced evictions against the Roma minority”<sup>391</sup>.

In response to OHCHR's letter, the Italian government explains that, due to the obstructionist activity of the demonstrators, the municipal administration has provided for a further transfer of Roma to other centers located in different areas of the city<sup>392</sup>.

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<sup>389</sup> See: “Roma: le case mancano ma il “problema sono i rom”, *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo*, 7 maggio 2019, here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/roma-le-case-mancano-ma-il-problema-sono-i-rom/>.

<sup>390</sup> The objective of the UN communication was, on the one hand, to request official information regarding the situation of the transferred persons and their effective possibility to access local services and national protection mechanisms to deal with situations of discrimination and hatred. On the other hand, the UN requested updated information about the investigation opened by the Prosecutor's Office for damages and threats aggravated “by racial hatred”, in particular regarding the identification and prosecution of the perpetrators of acts of hatred and the sanctions adopted against them. See: “Gli esperti ONU dei diritti umani hanno interrogato il Governo sui fatti di Torre Maura”, *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo*, 4 luglio 2019, disponibile qui: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/gli-esperti-onu-dei-diritti-umani-hanno-interrogato-il-governo-sui-fatti-di-torre-maura/>.

<sup>391</sup> See <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24552>.

<sup>392</sup> See <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=34762>.



In the following days, a file was opened for “incitement to racial hatred and apology of fascism” for the riots that occurred in Via dei Codirossoni. Following the investigations carried out by Digos of Rome, the investigators have filed an informative report with which 41 people, including residents and members of the extreme right, have been reported to the Judicial Authority.

So here is how, especially thanks to political propaganda aimed at exploiting at media level the social and economic hardship of working-class neighborhoods like this, an ordinary action of housing allocation can trigger acts of xenophobia and racism. And the propaganda flies, by now, especially on the social networks.

On April 3, 2019, for example, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini writes: “Roma Chaos in the Capital. No to all forms of violence, no to dump all problems on the peripheries. I repeat the objective I am working for: ZERO Roma camps by the end of my mandate. Those who integrate themselves are welcome, those who prefer to steal will be sent elsewhere”<sup>393</sup>.

Also the tweet of Simone Di Stefano, national vice-president of CasaPound, is emblematic: “Dear Mayor the suburbs are abandoned! They wait for answers and solutions, but only evictions and Roma people arrive at the expense of the State. Did you want a rainbow banner with the words “welcome”? You live in the Palaces, outside of the world, and you even allow yourself to judge”.

The rhetoric of “First the Italians” shows itself, therefore, also in this case in all its instrumentality. The sandwiches thrown and trampled on the ground are at the same time a symbol of inhumanity and contempt, of rejection as an end in itself: if the problem is the Italians dying of hunger, that food has been lost, certainly not redistributed<sup>394</sup>. And, of course, TV news and talk shows have not missed an opportunity to reproduce the images of the protest, full of racist slogans<sup>395</sup>.

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<sup>393</sup> See <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1113393862649708544>.

<sup>394</sup> See “Il bullismo di Stato di Salvini, la risposta di Murgia: se il problema è come si dissente e non le ragioni del dissenso”, *Valigiablu.it*, 20 aprile 2019.

<sup>395</sup> See “Chiara Proietti D'Ambra racconta la protesta degli abitanti di Torre Maura, periferia est di Roma, per l'arrivo improvviso di un gruppo di famiglie rom”, *La7*, 7 aprile 2019, here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ee9X9acY6BQ>.



With the Torre Maura affair, words that hadn't been read for a long time, "gypsies", "nomads" or "anti-nomad protests" recur in the headlines of various newspapers.

On the other hand, as recalled by Carlo Stasolla<sup>396</sup>, president of the association 21luglio<sup>397</sup>, the return of some words used in the common language “recalls all the ghosts of the past, from the 'nomadic emergency' to the 'kidnapping gypsy'”. Stasolla points out that “talking about nomads and nomad camps is improper and misleading, as it has discriminatory outcomes in the common perception and confirms a series of prejudices widespread in particular in Italian society”<sup>398</sup>.

### **The Roman suburbs and the social question**

There is also the mismanagement of the Roma presence in the city that is treated as a constant emergency. The revolt against the Roma in Torre Maura is placed in a difficult social context. The district, according to Maproma data<sup>399</sup>, records worse indicators of education, income, health and culture than the average in the city.

Several suburban districts of Rome emerge, now periodically, to the honors of the news, which are crossed by real urban revolts against the most vulnerable population groups: revolts that are often fomented by local right-wing politicians and neo-fascist movements. In a few years, first Tor Sapienza, then Tiburtino III and finally Torre Maura.

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<sup>396</sup> See: “Torre Maura e il ritorno del termine “nomadi” per indicare i rom”, *Redattore Sociale*, 10 aprile 2019.

<sup>397</sup> See 21 Luglio, <https://www.21luglio.org>.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>399</sup> Of the 15 municipalities of Rome, the VI, which includes Torre Maura, has the worst human development index, with a particularly negative performance since it is the only one with a value below 0.5 below the threshold of “low human development”, and the worst values for all its components of income, education and health. In particular, in Torre Maura, which corresponds to urban planning area 8B, the most worrying indicators compared to the Roman average, as highlighted by the analysis of #mapparoma, are both education, with few graduates (8.6% against 20.2%) and many residents with elementary or no qualifications (28.2% against 20.3%), and cultural offer (zero cinemas, theaters or libraries). See “#notedimapparoma4 – Torre Maura tra disagio sociale, case popolari e welfare emergenziale”, aprile 2019, disponibile qui: <https://www.mapparoma.info/notedimapparoma4-torre-maura-tra-disagio-sociale-case-popolari-e-welfare-emergenziale/>.



It is clear how the extreme right is blowing on the fire to gain consensus, using instrumentally the city's discontent and the abandonment of the suburbs by left-wing parties and institutions.

On the part of the Capitoline administration, we have seen only evictions without alternative solutions. The Raggi plan, which foresaw the overcoming of the Roma camps, was absolutely inadequate and unsuccessful<sup>400</sup>.

For the management of public order in Torre Maura, the military intervened in place of the traffic police, just to reiterate that the Roma is an emergency. But this is a social issue that needs to be addressed with a medium and long-term strategy, shared with Roma communities<sup>401</sup>.

As it has been recalled, “in Rome, situations of tension on this issue are frequent, because policies of ghettoisation and Roma exclusion have always been implemented in the city”<sup>402</sup>. Rome therefore remains the “city of camps”<sup>403</sup>. About five thousand people live in the institutional camps. In addition to those recognized, there are also many informal settlements: there are about 1,800 Roma in the capital living in an emergency housing situation and the various administrations that have governed the city have not been able to define together with the Roma alternative housing solutions.

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<sup>400</sup> Si veda: “Roma. «Piano rom, il fallimento della giunta Raggi»”, *Avvenire*, 14 gennaio 2020.

<sup>401</sup> See: “Torre Maura, i Rom e l'emergenza infinita”, *Cronache di ordinario razzismo*, 3 aprile 2019, disponibile qui: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/torre-maura-i-rom-e-lemergenza-infinita/>.

<sup>402</sup> See: “Cosa è successo a Torre Maura e perché Roma esclude i rom”, *Internazionale*, 4 aprile 2019.

<sup>403</sup> As reported by 21 Luglio association in its annual report. See: <http://www.romatoday.it/politica/campi-rom-rapporto-annuale-2017-associazione-21-luglio.html>.



## Casal Bruciato: the besieged house

*Elisa Pini*

On May 6, 2019, in the area of Casal Bruciato, a neighbourhood on the eastern outskirts of Rome, some residents took to the streets to protest against the allocation of a popular housing to a Roma family from Camp La Barbuta<sup>404</sup>.

A 40-year-old Bosnian man, his wife and 12 children, the youngest of 2 years and the oldest of 21, all born in Italy, are the 14 members of the Omerovic family who, as part of the Romany Plan of the Municipality<sup>405</sup>, have received the assignment of a 110 square meter apartment with empty rooms and without electricity connection, on the second floor of a building in Via Sebastiano Satta.

While the assignee's family is accompanied to their apartment, a volunteer and intercultural worker of the association Opera Nomadi who is with them, is insulted by a group of people. It is suspected that someone leaked the news of the assignment of the accommodation voluntarily, with the intention of creating tension among the citizens of Casal Bruciato and the Roma family<sup>406</sup>. The transport of mattresses and parcels in the

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<sup>404</sup> The institutional shantytown La Barbuta is located in the Town Hall VII, outside the GRA, in via di Ciampino 63. It was expanded in 2012 by the Capitoline Administration; in 2018 the surveys and interviews collected by the Association 21 July estimate the presence of 500 guests welcomed (see: The margins of the margin. 2018 Report of the Association 21 July), who live in precarious sanitary conditions and whose human rights are constantly violated. On May 30, 2015, the Civil Court of Rome recognized the "discriminatory character" of La Barbuta, accepting the appeal filed in 2012 by the Association July 21 and ASGI (Association of Legal Studies on Immigration) with the support of Amnesty International Italy and the European Centre for Roma Rights (ERRC). It was fully accepted the thesis of the two organizations, which supported the discriminatory nature of the equipped village because it represented a large housing solution aimed at a specific ethnic group. "It must in fact be understood as discriminatory," writes the judge, "any large housing solution aimed exclusively at people belonging to the same ethnic group, especially if implemented, as in the case of the settlement located in La Barbuta, so as to hinder the effective cohabitation with the local population, access in a condition of real equality to school and social health services and located in a space where the health of the people housed within it is at serious risk. According to the Association 21 July, this ruling is a historic achievement because for the first time in Europe a court has confirmed the discriminatory nature of a "nomadic camp".

<sup>405</sup> On May 26, 2017, the Capitoline Council adopted the "Roma Capitale Address Plan for the inclusion of the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Populations" (so-called "Roma Plan"). The Plan was to be developed in accordance with the principles of the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti and initially provided for a series of interventions to overcome the settlements to be implemented on an experimental basis in the camps of La Barbuta and Monachina. On June 28, 2017, the plan was modified, the experimental measures for inclusion are also extended to the Roma present in the Camping River settlement, which became the first settlement in which to implement the measures of the Roma Plan.

<sup>406</sup> "When we went up the front door he was talking to a neighbor and said that he knew from this morning at 5 a.m. that they were coming. Then I say: who leaked this news? I didn't know either and the assignees didn't know the



house is done with the protection of police officers in plain clothes. Some antiracist activists express their solidarity with the family of Imer and Sedana Omerovic, comforting the besieged and spending the night in the apartment with them.

On Tuesday, May 7, after having accompanied their children to school, the family participates in a meeting in the Campidoglio at the end of which they decide to stay in the house assigned to them, which represents the opportunity for a new life. When some members of the family return to the house, it is all a chaos of shouting and shoving, even an unpronounceable “I rape you” to the Bosnian mother with a child in her arms, pronounced by one of the activists of CasaPound.

The neighbourhood on the eastern outskirts of the capital has been divided in two: on the one hand, the CasaPound gazebo, installed inside the courtyard of the building where the Roma family lives; on the other, the Asia USB movement<sup>407</sup>, which, along with other organizations, has demonstrated in solidarity with the Roma. To separate them, two police cordons in riot gear.

This episode in Casal Bruciato, adds up to the one that took place on April 2 in Torre Maura, another suburban area of Rome, where, in protest against the transfer of some Roma families to a reception centre, some citizens set fire to garbage bins, threw on the ground and trampled on bread brutally<sup>408</sup>.

Also, in Casal Bruciato, harshly contested was the Mayor of Rome Virginia Raggi, who went there to visit the Roma family threatened by some residents and hostage of CasaPound. At the end of the visit, the Mayor said that the family was the legitimate assignee of the accommodation and had the right to enter, invited to resist and seek an insertion in the neighbourhood, divided between those who welcome and

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house number of the apartment”, Patrizia, Opera Nomadi volunteer, as reported in: “Roma, proteste a Casal Bruciato contro casa assegnata a rom. ‘Vi tiriamo una bomba’”, *la Repubblica*, 6 maggio 2019.

<sup>407</sup> “It was also thanks to the call for the mobilization of Asia USB, moved first and in solitude, that finally in Casal Bruciato the Roman antifascism met, with a large and determined garrison, turned into a parade despite the attempts of provocation by the police, to reiterate that in the working-class neighborhoods there is no room for those who want to stir up the war among the poor”. (See. “Asia USB baluardo contro i tentativi di invasione fascista delle periferie”, Asia USB, 9 maggio 2019).

<sup>408</sup> See “Torre Maura, i rom e l’emergenza infinita” di *Cronache di ordinario razzismo*, 3 aprile 2019. The Roma had to leave the center. Also in this case, the protests were attended by representatives of CasaPound and the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Rome opened a file for crimes of harm and threats aggravated “by racial hatred”.



those who reject<sup>409</sup>. The Shroud, moreover, responded harshly to the militants of CasaPound, inviting them to respect the laws and not to speculate on people's skin. Together with the Mayor, present at the meeting with the family, were some neighbours, the director of the diocesan Caritas of Rome and Fr. Gianpiero Palmieri, auxiliary bishop of East Rome, according to whom only the two parents with the youngest daughter remained at home, while the other 11 children had returned to Camp La Barbuta fearing the reactions of the demonstrators.

One of the dark points of this affair is the management of public order by the Questura di Roma. Many people have wondered how it was possible for CasaPound to set up a gazebo inside a condominium courtyard to do its propaganda action and how permission was granted to the sit-in organized by militants of the extreme right, which took place on May 8th in front of the entrance of the condominium, as opposed to the one organized by anti-racist activists. A CGIL delegation met with Carmine Esposito, Chief of Police of Rome, highlighting how unacceptable it is to tolerate demonstrations characterized by repeated threats and intimidation by the militants of CasaPound<sup>410</sup>.

After the May 8th demonstration in Via Satta, some associations<sup>411</sup> decided to present a complaint to the Public Prosecutor's Office of Rome against CasaPound, assuming the crime of threat and propaganda, incitement to commit crimes for reasons of "racial" discrimination up to the apologia of fascism<sup>412</sup>.

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<sup>409</sup> "Those who insult children and threaten to rape women should perhaps examine their conscience. This is not a society where you can continue to live", these are the words of the Virginia Raggi syndicate reported on *La Stampa*, 9 maggio 2019.

<sup>410</sup> "In the meeting we highlighted how unacceptable it is to tolerate demonstrations that prevent the allocation of houses according to the procedures provided by law. Demonstrations, we reiterated, characterized by repeated threats, verbal aggression and intimidation against a woman - guilty, according to the militants of CasaPound, of being the legitimate assignee of a social housing - and her children. To take advantage of a right guaranteed by the Constitution, such as the right to demonstrate, to prevent by violence the respect of the law is intolerable (...). The Quaestor emphasizing that it is the duty of the Police to defend the democratic system of the country and the respect of the legitimate allocations of housing on the basis of the law and confirming that the demonstration of CasaPound, authorized in a place far from the apartment concerned, took place outside the democratic rules, informed us that all participants were referred to the judicial authorities and that the members of CasaPound who made threats and intimidation were denounced", See press release of CGIL di Roma e Lazio, 8 maggio 2019.

<sup>411</sup> LasciateCIEntrare campaign together Nonna Roma, Sportello Tuteliamoci-Astra 19, A buon diritto, Alterego-Fabbrica dei Diritti, Baobab Experience, Adif, Arci Roma, Focus Casa dei diritti sociali, Lunaria e molti singoli e privati cittadini.

<sup>412</sup> "In fact, the umpteenth little theater put on by CasaPound in one of the suburbs of our city, supported by a small group of people, cannot be qualified as a "protest" by the residents. As well as the inexplicable attitude of the





On the other hand, it is inexplicable how politics, in the last thirty years, has not intervened on one of the great social problems of the country: that of housing discomfort that still involves thousands of families and that would require the launch of a new public housing plan. The economic and social difficulties do not directly produce hatred and racism but, if nothing is done to remove them, they can be very cleverly used to foment propaganda and racist violence.

In the end, the family was not kicked out: today, it can still live in Casal Bruciato, also thanks to the mobilization of housing movements, grassroots unions and individual citizens who have been in solidarity with the family involved in this vile affair.

Casal Bruciato, like Torre Maura, exemplify very well how a fact that should be ordinary (the assignment of a Municipality house) can provoke a vortex of xenophobia and racism, when political propaganda becomes an instrumental interpreter of popular unease and artfully feeds dramatized and simplistic media representations of the suburbs of big cities. In Casal Bruciato, there were not only the intimidations of CasaPound and the self-styled spontaneous neighbourhood committee, but also many supportive citizens. Many pieces of news, however, describe the “tensions” and the organized protest against the arrival of the Omorovic family, leading the reader to think that the entire neighbourhood is involved<sup>413</sup>.

Alberto Campailla, one of the activists close to the family during the days of the protest, explained it well: “It has been a long time, however, that for every foreign family to which a house is assigned there is a protest organized or actively supported by CasaPound or other neo-fascist forces with the attempt to make media cases and to involve the citizenship. The fact that these events hold their own in the press and on TV is an established fact. These are scenes that lend themselves to being emphasized,

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police forces that, not intervening promptly and not even after the evident violations of the CasaPound exponents, have made it possible for them to act undisturbed for more than two days. Those same law enforcement agencies that, in riot gear, have hindered the activists and citizens who arrived yesterday to show all their solidarity with the family affected by this despicable event”. See: *Articolo21*, 9 maggio 2019.

<sup>413</sup> See for example: Sturaro P., “Roma, casa popolare ai rom: tensione a Casal Bruciato, rabbia e lacrime tra i residenti”, *Secolo d'Italia*, 7 maggio 2019; “Ancora tensioni a Casal Bruciato: residenti e CasaPound contro casa a famiglia rom”, *RomaToday*, 7 maggio 2019.





mediatized, spectacularized. The reality, however, is not exactly as it is often told. It is not true that CasaPound manages to involve the citizens in these protests. In Casal Bruciato we did not see the neighbourhood take to the streets to drive out the Roma family. Instead there were, as always, 30 or 40 fascist militants shouting slogans against migrants, Roma and protesters who oppose their political initiatives”.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> See: Campailla A., “L’assedio è rotto”, *Jacobin*, 10 maggio 2019, disponibile qui: <https://jacobinitalia.it/lassedio-e-rotto/>.



## Carola Rackete. Looking for a “safe harbour” against hate

*Paola Andrisani*

It is on June 12, 2019, when Carola Rackete<sup>415</sup> rescues at sea 52 migrants from Libya with the ship that commands, the Sea-Watch 3, flying the Dutch flag and owned by the German NGO Sea Watch. Despite the Libyan Coast Guard has formally taken over the coordination of the rescue, the Sea Watch has arrived first at the site of the event and therefore immediately started operations of recovery of shipwrecked people.

They are located on an inflatable boat in precarious conditions, without sufficient fuel to reach the mainland, and on board nobody wears a life jacket. Recovery operations concluded, the commander requests the assignment of a "place of safety" to different maritime authorities, receiving a response from Libyans who have indicated that they can head to the port of Tripoli. Carola replies that Libya cannot be qualified as a “safe harbour”, and she requires another one. In the meantime, she heads north, repeating the request for mooring. Carola then asks for permission to enter an Italian port, but on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June the Minister of the Interior (at the time of the events, Matteo Salvini) orders the first entry ban against the Sea Watch 3, in implementation of the so-called “security decree two”, as soon as it enters into force, in accordance with the provisions of Article 1<sup>416</sup>.

In the following days, while the ship is stationed in front of Italian territorial waters, repeating the request for the allocation of a harbour where to dock, the authorities will evacuate some migrants in need of urgent medical care. On 26<sup>th</sup> of June, the Sea Watch

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<sup>415</sup> German, 31 years old, a bachelor's degree in nautical sciences, a master's degree in environmental conservation, 5 languages spoken (German, English, Spanish, French, Russian), she drove an icebreaker ship to the North Pole, she spent eight months in the Kamchatka Natural Park (Eastern Russia) as tour guide and equipment maintainer, she was second officer on the Arctic Sunrise of Greenpeace, she has conducted research for the British Antarctic Survey.

<sup>416</sup> Decree-Law no. 53, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2019, containing "Urgent provisions on order and public security. (19G00063) (G.U. General Series no. 138 of 14-06-2019)", entered into force on 15th June 2019, available here: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2019/06/14/19G00063/> sg. The Decree Law will be converted into Law no. 77 of 8 August 2019 (in G.U. 9/08/2019, no. 186).



enters the Italian waters and heads towards Lampedusa, disregarding the stop of the Guardia di Finanza patrol boats and invoking the “state of necessity”. It stops, therefore, near the port, waiting for instructions.

On the night of 29<sup>th</sup> of June (after 17 days) -found that a political solution is late in coming, and the appeals filed with the Administrative Court of Lazio<sup>417</sup> and the European Court of Human Rights<sup>418</sup> failed- the Commander starts the engines and heads towards the quay of the port of Lampedusa, where, finally, it docks, accidentally bumping into a Guardia di Finanza patrol boat during the manoeuvre. Carola Rackete is arrested in flagrante delicto and placed in Lampedusa, accused of violation of article 1100 of the Navigation Code (resistance or violence against warships) and attempted shipwreck (provided for by articles 110 and 428 of the Penal Code). The ship of the German NGO is placed under administrative precautionary confiscation<sup>419</sup>. The prosecutor of Agrigento, Luigi Patronaggio, who also entered into a collision course with Minister Salvini in the previous months, on this occasion he uses very harsh words towards the “captain's” behaviour. “Humanitarian reasons - he commented - cannot

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<sup>417</sup> Against the entry ban, the Sea Watch 3 appealed to the Regional Administrative Court of Lazio, asking the President to suspend as a precautionary measure the effectiveness of the ministerial order prohibiting the ship from entering Italian territorial waters. On 19 June 2019, the Lazio Regional Administrative Court, without pronouncing on the legitimacy of the measure, simply rejected the request for temporary suspension of the effects of the measure itself, considering that there were “no exceptionally serious and urgent reasons such as to justify the suspension”, since the vulnerable people had already been landed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, and that the Sea Watch 3 did not indicate any other vulnerable individuals on the ship.

<sup>418</sup> On 25 June 2019, the European Court of Human Rights rejects the request made by Sea Watch 3 for the adoption of “interim measures” allowing the landing on land of the 42 migrants on board the ship for 13 days. The ECHR has decided that there were insufficient grounds to ask the Italian Government to apply a measure provisional disembarkation. Such a measure is, in fact, granted, the Court states, “in exceptional cases where applicants would be exposed - in the absence of such measures - to a real risk of irreparable damage”. In essence, as there is no immediate danger of death (even because the most fragile people have already been transhipped), there is not even an order for a landing immediate. See “Rackete and Others v. Italy - request for interim measure refused in the case of Sea Watch 3”, available here: <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-6443361-8477507>.

<sup>419</sup> On September 25, 2019, the evidential release is notified, but the ship remains under seizure administrative. On 19<sup>th</sup> of December, then, the Court of Palermo upheld the appeal filed by the German NGO and ordered the release of the vessel. The boat was stranded for over five months in the port of Licata.



justify acts of inadmissible violence against those in uniform who work at sea for the safety of everyone”.

So far the mere chronicle of what happened. From this moment on, there will be a long series of violent racist and sexist attacks against Captain Rackete. It's an exemplary story that passes very quickly from everyday life to social networks to courtrooms. Carola's entire path is marked by a series of legal measures which, once issued, become a pretext to justify even public denigration.

The Sea Watch 3 story first, and the one linked to the fate of its captain then, succeed in showing the worst of the hate speech and fake news of the in recent years, intertwining hate and content in an “impeccable” way<sup>420</sup>. And this happens both with statements, declarations and postings by politicians (also in government), and by ordinary people, the same people who then habitually frequent social networks, where, passing from real life to virtual life, they end up transforming ancient frustrations into violent messages, hidden by a screen and a not-so-anonymous keyboard. Obviously, it did not come to this from one day to the next, but there has been a broad preparatory scenario of growing media coverage. From the “boast” of the Minister of the Interior<sup>421</sup>, to the insistence with which the right-wing newspapers (and not only them) have stressed that Carola would be nothing more than a “daddy's girl” or “a pirate”<sup>422</sup>. To reach Valentina Mazzacurati, 29 years old from Rwanda, a sympathizer of the Northern League, who writes on Instagram a post against the “aesthetic features” by Carola<sup>423</sup>. And at the microphones of the show La Zanzara, she also reiterates that Carola “does

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<sup>420</sup> A similar and even more recent case is the return to Italy of the young Silvia Romano. See L. Melandri, “Power, Sexism and Racism”, 22 May 2020, <https://comune-info.net/power-sexism-and-racism/>.

<sup>421</sup> Here the video of Salvini's statements: <https://video.huffingtonpost.it/35ae0b04-5194-4c78-aa14-973a3ee21a0b>. The reaction of Giorgia Meloni from Fratelli d'Italia is also tough: “And, according to international law, this means that the Sea Watch is a ship that must be seized, that the crew must be arrested, that the immigrants on board must be disembarked and repatriated immediately and that the ship must be sunk in the same way as ships that do not comply with international law”.

<sup>422</sup> For example, “masterful” synthesis in: “Carola Rackete, left-wing heroine pirate who plays at making the captain thanks to daddy”, *Il Messaggero*, 27 June, available here: [https://www.ilmessaggero.it/italy/capitana\\_carola\\_rackete\\_sea\\_watch\\_last\\_news-4582766.html](https://www.ilmessaggero.it/italy/capitana_carola_rackete_sea_watch_last_news-4582766.html).

<sup>423</sup> She would have written: “Can we do something to make her look like a woman? If I looked like that, maybe I'd be a smuggler, too”.



not look like a woman”, because “she has dreadlocks, she dresses in a certain way, so she is not decent”<sup>424</sup>.

One of the worst scenes the whole world has witnessed was undoubtedly Carola's descent from the ship. In addition to the Guardia di Finanza and the Police, there is also a group of men who shout terrible insults, filmed in a live broadcast (now removed) on the Lampedusa Northern League's Facebook page. These insults are also documented in a video published<sup>425</sup> by the Senator of the Democratic Party, Davide Faraone. “I hope these niggers will rape you. Gipsy. Sold. Toxic. Criminal. Arrest her”, and other unrepeatable phrases. And then, to the DP deputies present: “They have to rape your wives, these illegal immigrants”.

Carola Rackete is insulted with epithets that are generally “reserved” for “certain” women, as Laura Boldrini, Samantha Cristoforetti and Michela Murgia well know, just to mention a few of them. Even the singer Emma Marrone, “guilty” of having shown solidarity with Carola (and previously also with the campaign for “open harbours”), is subjected to a similar media pillory of racism mixed with sexism, together with Paola Turci and Fiorella Mannoia who have supported her. Finally, Alessandra Vella, the judge who did not consider validating Carola's arrest<sup>426</sup>, for having made a decision concerning her work, is forced to abandon her social network profiles due to heavy insults and death threats. The fact that Carola has been threatened with “rape”<sup>427</sup> (a horrible term that even though it continues to be used in the common language) is neither a random fact nor an exceptional event<sup>428</sup>. Added to this is the recurring

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<sup>424</sup> Here the audio of the interview: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2019/06/29/carola-rackete-la-filoleghista-banger-criminal-borderline-skating-brawler-streaking-skinny-fa-schifo/5290668/>.

<sup>425</sup> The video is available here: <https://www.facebook.com/a8ebb307-5012-4507-af10-cb87143b8988>.

<sup>426</sup> After several days of house arrest, on 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, Carola's arrest is not validated because “she was doing her duty by saving lives at sea” and no precautionary measures are taken.

<sup>427</sup> What Carola suffered is a sort of virtual “rape” or perhaps a new form of “social stoning”, the result of the infliction of a punishment typical of male chauvinist ideology, and a sign of a perseverance of a real “culture of rape”. It is the one that then legitimizes and normalizes abuse in our society. “Rape” should not only be understood as an aggression of a man against a woman, but it is also in words, gestures, threats, daily relationships.

<sup>428</sup> Suffice it to say that, only a few months earlier, a Roma woman had been intimidated in the same way by a CasaPound militant during the clashes over the allocation of social housing in Casal Bruciato,



obsession with sexual intercourse of a white woman with one or more black men, which condenses sexist insults with a good dose of racism.

But if there had been a man driving Sea-Watch 3, would he have suffered the same lynching and insults? Most likely not: a male captain does not would have received the same unacceptable indecent treatment. In addition to the insults, Carola's public and private life is being probed up to the minimum detail. A fake news factory is good for guiding public opinion and to fuel aggressive speech. Together with her, anyone who has tried to support her is muddy. Numerous posts (up to real viral meme) that show by immortalizing, at the moment of arrest, "an unshaved armpit"<sup>429</sup> of the woman. This is enough to unleash a real wave of insults (from the generalisations on hygiene and the class of German women, up to the suggestion to use an anti-flea product).

Then there are the Libero<sup>430</sup> journalists who "discover" that Carola Rackete is not wearing a brassiere under her black t-shirt during the press conference following the deposition in the public prosecutor's office in Agrigento. Or the post of Venetian deputy of the Northern League, Alex Bazzaro, who publishes on his Facebook profile<sup>431</sup> a retouched photo, so that in the centre of the raft you can see a sumptuously laid table, depicting the parliamentarians of the centre-left during the transfer from the port of Lampedusa to the Sea Watch. Then it's also the turn of the missionary father Alex Zanotelli, who supported Carola's nomination for a Nobel Prize<sup>432</sup>, who claimed that all the news stories about Lampedusa had been altered by the press, including the spur. Obviously, a fake news too. While Carola is still under house arrest, many fake news

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Rome. See: "'Bitch, I'll rape you". Fascists against the Roma in Casal Bruciato", il manifesto, 8 May 2019, available here: <https://ilmanifesto.it/troia-ti-stupro-fascisti-contro-irom-a-casal-burned/>. See also Elisa Pini's sheet on the subject.

<sup>429</sup> See: <https://www.giornalettismo.com/carola-rackete-igiene-personale/>.

<sup>430</sup> See here: <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/gallery/personaggi/13485460/sea-watchcarola-racketeers-without-breast-patronage-g.html>. At a distance of a few days, the "Free Nipple Day" initiative starts in Turin, literally "nipple day "free", scheduled for July 27th.

<sup>431</sup> See: [https://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/venezia-mestre/politica/19\\_luglio\\_02/leghistaritocca-foto-gommone-pdma-era-scherzo-4144964a-9c8f-11e9-a0ee-05ea37d418a0.shtml](https://corrieredelveneto.corriere.it/venezia-mestre/politica/19_luglio_02/leghistaritocca-foto-gommone-pdma-era-scherzo-4144964a-9c8f-11e9-a0ee-05ea37d418a0.shtml).

<sup>432</sup> See: <https://www.bufale.net/invenzioni-su-padre-alex-zanotelli-sea-watch-3-e-carolarackete-tg-falsi-non-ha-speronato/>.



about her private life circulate, then easily “debunked”. Like the news according to which Carola's dad would be an arms dealer<sup>433</sup>, and that the whole family would gain economic benefit from the destabilisation of the international context. And more. The other news according to which the captain would be deprived of the titles to be able to lead a ship<sup>434</sup>. Or the “fake” interview of 30<sup>th</sup> of June in the daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera* (both on paper and online), while Carola is under house arrest<sup>435</sup>. The situation is, then, partially clarified by the *Corriere* itself, which in the article specifies that “*the 31-year-old captain is under house arrest and cannot make statements, but through her lawyers she clarifies the doubts raised by several parties about her behaviour*”. Therefore, the newspaper published a conversation that never happened. And then, the diffusion of Carola's photo-signage, bounced on sites and social networks, taken at the Lampedusa hotspot at the time of validation of the arrest<sup>436</sup>, with the intention of showing Carola Rackete as a criminal, convicted before any trial.

Carola, in spite of many, returns free, and even “free”, she is the object of mockery, hatred and insults. Among the many haters, the Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini, who, from the beginning of the affair, seems to have engaged in a sort of personal “duel” against the woman<sup>437</sup>: “For the Italian judiciary to ignore the laws and to spur a patrol boat of the Guardia di Finanza are not sufficient reasons to go to jail. No

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<sup>433</sup> Si veda: <https://www.bufale.net/la-grande-disinformazione-su-ekkehart-rackete-il-padre-dicarola-spacciato-per-mercante-darmi/>.

<sup>434</sup> See: <https://www.bufale.net/carola-rackete-non-ha-la-patente-nautica/>.

<sup>435</sup> See: V. Piccolillo, “Sea Watch, Carola Rackete speaks: ‘I had to get into port, I was afraid that some migrants could commit suicide’”, 30 June 2019, available here: [https://www.corriere.it/Politics/19\\_June\\_30/I\\_had\\_to\\_go\\_in\\_port-migrant-power-to-suicide-2a0a6448-9aad-11e9-8fdd-d4f7eb4bd62c.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/Politics/19_June_30/I_had_to_go_in_port-migrant-power-to-suicide-2a0a6448-9aad-11e9-8fdd-d4f7eb4bd62c.shtml).

<sup>436</sup> Here a tweet with the incriminated photo: <https://twitter.com/annalisacamilli/status/1145601180258787329?s=12&fbclid=IwAR3F-9G1W76sdRc43HEt-C5hj9TVj1YVIDNrx9vLDjOJdzrIk-TWEZFzgW4w>.

<sup>437</sup> To the point that many newspaper titles have long played on this. For example, see: “The Captain against the Captain: arm wrestling Rackete-Salvini”, 26 June, [ilgiornale.it](http://ilgiornale.it); “Captain and captain in comparison: who has offended the Italians or circumvented the laws?”, 1 July, [lavocedinyork.com](http://lavocedinyork.com); “Sea Watch, the Captain beats the Captain, the judge does not validate the arrest, Carola free”, 3 July, [qds.it](http://qds.it).





problem: a measure is ready for the criminal commander Carola Rackete to send her back to his country, because she is dangerous for national security”<sup>438</sup>.

Numerous reactions, including that of the National Association of Magistrates pointing his finger right at Salvini's declarations: “One again, he has made contemptuous comments towards a judicial decision, detached from any reference to its technical-juridical contents, which risk to feed a climate of hatred and aversion”, we read in a press note<sup>439</sup>. “When a measure is unwelcomed to the Minister of the Interior,” continues the NAM, “the magistrate is immediately accused of being in politics”.

Always a few days after Carola's liberation, on a Facebook group called “Il Finanziere”<sup>440</sup>, 16 thousand users managed by a brigadier of the Guardia di Finanza on leave since 1996, numerous racist and sexist insults have been posted. A crescendo of violent phrases and thoughts, accompanied by unrepeatable insults against the German commander, which ends with the hope of a “nice military coup to restore order and discipline”. Some people invoke “hanging” and others, referring to migrants, say: “throw them overboard with a block around their neck”, “sink the ship”, “put a bomb”. On 12<sup>th</sup> of July<sup>441</sup>, Carola decided to sue, in fourteen pages, the Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini for aggravated defamation and incitement to crime. In the complaint<sup>442</sup>, Carola refers to the statements made in recent weeks by the Minister, which she finds offensive, as well as the posts published on social networks and the comments made by users to them. Carola asks, therefore, the magistrates to seize the minister's Facebook

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<sup>438</sup> See his tweet: <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1146127748194340864>.

<sup>439</sup> See: [https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/politica/2019/07/03/anm-salvini-rischia-alimentare-climate-hate\\_xQ6zLX9tJotx9ihB5ogiCL.html](https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/politica/2019/07/03/anm-salvini-rischia-alimentare-climate-hate_xQ6zLX9tJotx9ihB5ogiCL.html).

<sup>440</sup> The complaint was based on an article published on The Vision website, available here: <https://www.thevision.com/current-events/group-Facebook-financiers/>.

<sup>441</sup> “Matteo Salvini – we can read the document reported by Repubblica on 11 July (<https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/07/11/news/carola-230955102/>) - has publicly and repeatedly called me boastful, outlaw, accomplice of traffickers, potential murderer, delinquent, criminal, pirate, one who tried to kill financiers and kill five Italian soldiers, who made an attempt on the lives of soldiers on duty, who deliberately risked killing five young men and who takes his time to break Italian laws and makes politics on the skin of the wretched: the seriousness of the injury to my honour is evident in itself”.

<sup>442</sup> The full text of the complaint is available here: [https://www.meteoweb.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Querela-Carola-Rackete\\_definitiva.pdf](https://www.meteoweb.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Querela-Carola-Rackete_definitiva.pdf).





and Twitter accounts to investigate them. “In the words of Matteo Salvini are conveyed visceral feelings of hatred, denigration, delegitimization and even real de-humanisation”, we read in the text of the lawsuit, full of links to the “sources” (online videos on Facebook made by Salvini, tweets, articles online, live tv). It is also worth noting that the reported outrageous statements do not take place within the functions performed by Matteo Salvini in his “quality” as a minister, but he makes himself strong with “this quality” in order to strengthen his hostile messages to the highest degree possible: “an ordinary crime, therefore, for which they should not nor can the parameters against which ministerial offences are measured, nor the resulting procedural specialties be applied”, the lawsuit continues. A picture that, we read in the lawsuit, “measures, in terms of greater gravity, the hate speech of a subject who plays a top executive role in the Italian Government”. Interventions that are, “a pure propaganda and an inciting instrument of a 'hate speech', which overwhelms every recall to the institutional function”. Claims that have also put Carola's own safety at serious risk, “ending up inciting the audience of her readers to commit further offences” against her<sup>443</sup>.

But Carola's story does not end here. Every time she re-appears in public, the initial acrimony resurfaces with force. Like when, few months later, in November 2019, she is hosted in the RAI tv programme “Che tempo che fa”<sup>444</sup>.

On January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the third Criminal Section of the Supreme Court<sup>445</sup> rejected the appeal by the Agrigento Public Prosecutor's Office, filed on 16 July 2019, against the order by which the judge for preliminary investigations, at the same Court, had decided not to validate Carola's arrest. The Supreme Court confirms the setting of Agrigento's judge: because the commander had acted in the fulfilment of a duty, that is to save human lives, establishing the primacy of law over that of force. And also, an important

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<sup>443</sup> In February 2020, the Milan Public Prosecutor's Office closed the investigation.

<sup>444</sup> See here for example: <https://it.blastingnews.com/politica/2019/11/carola-rackete-dafazio-reactions-social-heavy-critical-from-melons-and-calendar-003022942.html>.

<sup>445</sup> Criminal Court of Cassation, Section III, Judgment no. 6626 of 20 February 2020 (hearing 16 January 2020), available here: <https://www.giurisprudenzapenale.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Cass-6626-2020.pdf>.



decision of high jurisprudence, which frees Carola once again, becomes a reason for spreading hate messages. As in the case of Silvia Bocci, deputy inspector of the State Police of the Grosseto Police Headquarters, who, after learning the reasons for the Supreme Court's ruling, defines Carola Rackete as a "dirty left-wing mint" on Facebook. "She's just a terrorist who's going to end up like it deserves", while those who defend it are "a plethora of decontextualised mummies from real life so adept at splitting hairs into 4 that you forget what you are talking about". Bocci uses very offensive words also for the migrants landed in Lampedusa<sup>446</sup>. A post removed with clumsy excuses almost immediately. Carola's judicial affair seems to have ended and also the insults towards her.

A thank you to Carola is due. Because despite the heavy insults received, she has been able to face it all with enormous dignity. After all, those who attacked and continue to attack Carola Rackete, hates and loathes her not only for her choices, political or otherwise, but also because of her choice not to be homologated and influenceable. And, above all, for her being "free".

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<sup>446</sup> See here: <https://www.nextquotidiano.it/la-fantastica-retromarcia-della-poliziotta-che-dadella-terrorist-a-carola-rackete/>.



## The twelfth man on the field: the Balotelli case and racism in the football

*Paola Andrisani*

On January 5, 2020, Mario Balotelli<sup>447</sup>, a well-known black Italian football player, scored at 18' the goal of Brescia's lead, in the match then lost 2-1 against Lazio. A few minutes later, the match was interrupted (at the request of the striker himself) by the referee, who asked the Rigamonti stadium's speaker to invite the public (specifically, some Lazio<sup>448</sup> fans) to stop the racist choruses against Balotelli. Just after the beginning of the game, it was heard some "buuuu" against the player, and then offensive choirs were spoken against his mother. The first goal in 2020, therefore, is tainted by racism, just as it was ten years earlier. A strange coincidence, this one, for Mario. On January 6, 2010, in fact, Balotelli (at the time, in force at Inter and just nineteen years old) scored Chievo's first goal of the new year and followed the classic racist "buu" against him by the Chievo Verona fans. But ten years ago, it was Balotelli who was fined for saying that the public in Verona was "increasingly disgusting". A generic and unjust phrase for which he then apologised.

Mario, throughout his football career, in Italy and abroad, as well as wearing the Italian national team's blue jersey, has been the target of numerous racist insults. However, there have been some particularly serious ones, such as that of 3 November 2019<sup>449</sup>. "Super Mario", as his fans affectionately call him, finds himself, this time against Hellas

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<sup>447</sup> The striker was born in Palermo from Ghanaian parents, Thomas and Rose Baruwah. At the age of two, the player underwent an operation. Balotelli's biological parents were pushed by the social services to entrust the child to a family that had an economic stability adequate for his medical care. Mario thus became part of the Balotelli family, living in the province of Brescia, in Concesio, where Paolo and Silvia raised him as their own son.

<sup>448</sup> The sports judge ordered Lazio to pay a fine of 20,000 euros, and then asked the FIGC Public Prosecutor's Office for an additional investigation into the choirs, in order to investigate the sector from which they came and Lazio's active collaboration in identifying the individuals involved with a view to the possible adoption of further measures and in relation to the assessment of any recidivism.

<sup>449</sup> We discussed it here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/verona-razzismo-curve-balotelli-neofascists/>.



Verona, with the usual and repeated script. In the eleventh minute of the second half, the Serie A match Verona-Brescia is suspended for “racial discrimination”.

Mario Balotelli, at the umpteenth howls and racist insults against him from the home fans, takes the ball and kicks it with force towards the curve of the Hellas Verona's supporters. The "buuuu" and insults are filmed by the cameras and even the federal inspectors hear them: certainly, Balotelli did not invent them.

The ball arrives in the stands at the height of a long series of manifestations of intolerance and aggression against him and produces an international echo that shakes the top of the major league.

The main football clubs, urged by the situation that threatens to get out of hand, meet by signing a commitment to step up the fight against racism<sup>450</sup>. The FIGC also intervenes by urging the Lega Serie A to make a greater contribution to the fight against racism. The Lega Serie A promptly announces a campaign to fight racism, but it has a limp beginning<sup>451</sup>.

But the real question is: would it have been the same if he hadn't stopped, threatening to leave the field, and thrown that ball into the curve of supporters of the other team? This was nothing more than the umpteenth shame of the Hellas Verona fans, not by chance captained by local representatives of extreme right-wing parties such as Forza Nuova. But what happened in the stadium is only a prelude to what would have happened in the following hours.

“Today there was no racist howling, just big whistles, mocking a great player and nothing else,” says Ivan Juric, coach of Hellas, after the match. “All of us at the Bentegodi today have heard nothing. I can only say that the Verona fans are particular. They have a way of mocking their opponents full of irony, but racism doesn't exist

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<sup>450</sup> See: [https://www.corrieredellosport.it/news/calcio/serie-a/2019/11/2963951879/letter\\_opened\\_of\\_the\\_series\\_club\\_to\\_contro\\_racism\\_and\\_a\\_problem\\_series\\_of\\_29\\_November2019](https://www.corrieredellosport.it/news/calcio/serie-a/2019/11/2963951879/letter_opened_of_the_series_club_to_contro_racism_and_a_problem_series_of_29_November2019).

<sup>451</sup> The Ad of the Lega Calcio was forced to apologise twice for Balotelli's 'case'. Firstly, for having declared to silence the racist choruses by simply turning off the microphones oriented towards the curves, and secondly, for having chosen the symbolic image of the campaign against racism: a painting depicting three monkeys.



here”, chuckles Maurizio Setti, president of the club. The Arena, the main city newspaper, writes that “racist choirs were not there when Balotelli had the angry reaction”. The centre-right mayor Federico Sboarina states that “I was there at the stadium and I did not hear any racist insults. What Balotelli did is inexplicable because without any reason he started a media pillory about a fan base and a city”.

Three Northern League municipal councillors speak of a “folkloric scene” and even announce a municipal motion to “ask for image damage to those who seek to advertise themselves to the detriment of a city”. In short, the city denies everything. The madman on duty is Mario Balotelli. Yet Forza Nuova's coordinator for Northern Italy, as well as one of the Verona "ultràs chiefs" of the Curva Sud, Luca Castellini<sup>452</sup>, claims those racist choirs against Balotelli and he is denounced. The football club banned him from entering the Veneto stadium with a Daspo until 2030.

What happened, from yet another case of racism in the stadiums, turns into a great city shame. Because, if one usually tends to distance oneself from those who commit these gestures, in the case of Verona a compact block has been created between society, politics and the media to belittle what is not only a city problem, but a national one: racism in the world of football. But the story does not end here.

A few days after the event, a banner was posted outside the Allianz Stadium in Turin: “Mario you are right, you are an African”, claimed on the Forza Nuova<sup>453</sup> Facebook profile and with a press release. Three people belonging to the extreme right group are denounced for “propaganda of ideas based on racial hatred”. The three were identified

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<sup>452</sup> “Balotelli is Italian because he has Italian citizenship, but he can never be completely Italian” says Luca Castellini interviewed by Radio Cafè. When asked if the Verona’s fans are racist, Castellini recalls that “we also have a nigger in the team, who scored yesterday and all Verona applauded him”. “Are there any problems saying the word nigger? - he pushes- Is the Segre Commission picking me up because I call someone ‘nigger’? They come to play me the doorbell?”.

<sup>453</sup> In June 2018, Forza Nuova again offended the attacker with a banner that appeared in Brescia: “Balotelli you are more stupid than black”, a phrase translated from the Brescia dialect. What provoked Forza Nuova's harsh reaction, it was the statements made by Balotelli on the subject of immigration. “It's time for Italy to be more open like so many countries and to start integrating people coming from outside,” Balotelli said at a press conference on the eve of Italy's friendly match with the Netherlands. “Being captain of the National Team - he added - could be a good sign, especially for African immigrants living in Italy”.



by Digos thanks to the video footage from the stadium's surveillance cameras, and the Daspo is also placed on them. In fact, Verona and its fans already have an "illustrious" precedent. It was April 26, 1996. During the derby, the Hellas<sup>454</sup> fans hang a black puppet with a noose around his neck and dangle it down from the stands, accompanied by a couple of fans wearing white Ku Klux Klan-style hoods, and a banner saying: "The nigger gave it to you, let him clean the stadium", and another one, in English: "Negro go away". The protest of the neo-Nazi Verona's fringe is against the Verona's club, "guilty" of being about to buy the Dutch Maickel Ferrier, the first black player in the team's history. The hanging puppet, banners and choirs last at least 38 minutes, while on the pitch the match continues quietly. Everyone sees that shame: the spectators, the players, the coaches, the referee, the managers of the two teams, but nobody does anything<sup>455</sup>. From this moment on, the Verona curve becomes the symbol of an unhealthy fan base with clear neo-Nazi connotations. But the problem is not only limited to the Verona curve. In the history of recent football, the "Balotelli" have unfortunately been many. We remember some of them.

On 27th May 2001, the ultras of Treviso left the stadium when the Nigerian Akeem Omolade joined their team. The rival Ternana fans whistled at them, and the following Sunday all the Treviso players took to the pitch showing solidarity with their teammate, painting their faces black.

On November 27th 2005, during a home match against Inter, the Ivorian player from Messina, Marco André Zoro, tired of the choruses and racist insults of the opposing fans, takes the ball in his hand and starts heading off the pitch. He is stopped by the intervention of his teammates and opponents who try to calm him down and convince him to resume the game. Zoro returns to the pitch and the game begins again. The next

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<sup>454</sup> These were the years of the Gialloblu Brigades, a hegemonic group of the Hellas supporters who were disbanded following investigations by the judiciary "for discrimination and racial hatred".

<sup>455</sup> In addition to this, there are many other episodes: the racist insults to Ferdinand Coly during a 2005 Perugia-Verona; the cars parked in the shape of a swastika; the choirs "We are a fantastic team... made in the shape of a swastika... how nice it is... Rudolf Hess trains" during the promotion party in June 2019.



day, all the newspapers talk about his protest: in Italy, it had never happened before that a black player reacted like that to racist choruses and insults.

On 17 October 2010, immediately after the start of the match between Cagliari and Inter, a part of the Sardinian fans targeted the Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o<sup>456</sup> with racist "buu". The referee stops the game for a few minutes, inviting the stadium speaker to spread the message against racism. The match then ends regularly, Eto'o scores and cheers, imitating a monkey under the opponent's curve.

During the Pro Patria-Milan friendly match, on 3rd January 2013, at the 27th minute of the first half, Kevin Prince Boateng, a naturalized Ghanaian German footballer, repeatedly insulted from the stands, angrily kicks the ball towards the curve (like Balotelli), takes off his shirt and leaves the field together with the rest of his team mates.

On 30th April 2017, at the 44th minute of the match played between Cagliari and Pescara, the Ghanaian Sulley Muntari<sup>457</sup> complained to the referee about some racist choirs coming from the home curve. The match director does not intervene and then admonishes the midfielder for the hard protests. At that point Muntari, in the recovery minutes, leaves the pitch alone.

In December 2018, Kalidou Koulibaly, a Senegalese footballer with French citizenship, gives an ironic applause to the referee who ignores the racist chants against him and he is expelled. In April 2019, Moise Kean, a black Italian son of Ivorian immigrants, reacts by extending his arms to the Cagliari fans who howl at every touch of the ball, and is first publicly reprimanded by his captain, then verbally attacked by the president of Cagliari "for disrespecting his opponents".

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<sup>456</sup> On 25 May 2011, the footballer himself was the victim of racist insults from fans outside the stadium, in Milan, in an area not far from his home. A group of *ultra* milanists, who celebrated a birthday in the same club where Eto'o had a drink with friends, met the interist on his way to home. The choir was also clearly heard on the evening of the derby, the authentic soundtrack of the milanist celebrations for the victory of the Scudetto: "Eto'o eto'o saw him with roses in the metro, Mariga mariga saw him on the beach who said *vu cumpra*, Biabiany biabiany saw him with the CD bag", officially transcribed among the Milan choirs at the link: <https://www.coridastadio.com/6348/Milan>.

<sup>457</sup> We also discussed it here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/calcio-razzismo-canceled-qualification-muntari/>.





And finally, during the Cagliari-Inter match on 1 September 2019<sup>458</sup>, the Inter footballer Romelu Lukaku, Belgian son of Congolese immigrants, is also the victim of racist choruses. The images and the audio of the choirs immediately make the web, having wide acclaim especially in the English press (Lukaku was previously a Manchester United player). According to the sports judge, “choirs, shouts and whistles” against Lukaku were indeed there (some verses were also heard), but only by “individual spectators”, and were not “understood as discriminatory because of the whistles and shouts mentioned above”.

While a press release “in defence” of Lukaku by the Inter club clumsily tries to explain to the footballer that “that” is not racism, but only “sports cheer”.

This small and non-exhaustive list tells us one clear thing: over the years, the situation has worsened, despite the proclamations. There is no point in going around it. If there was a weak reaction about 20 years ago, it is no longer there today. The sick relationship of Italian football with racism is based on a continuous and stubborn self-absolution. Whistles, choruses and howls are there, but nobody hears them; and if anyone hears them, they call them “minority”, minimizing them. And what makes the picture truly disturbing is not so much the increase in cases (which is real)<sup>459</sup> but rather the decrease in reactions.

Almost as if to confirm the lack of sensitivity on the subject and the tendency of Italian institutions to minimize it, there have been some “exemplary” statements, such as that

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<sup>458</sup> We also discussed it here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/lukakufa-Well-to-protest/>.

<sup>459</sup> The fifth edition of “Footballers under fire”, published in March 2019 (available here: <https://www.assocalciatori.it/sites/default/files/attachment/news/Calciatori%20sotto%20tiro%20-%20Associazione%20Italiana%20Calciatori%20ABSTRACT%20STAMPA.pdf>), edited by the Italian Footballers’ Association, in the 2017/18 season, highlights 478 documented cases of violence and intimidation, of which 41% are racist (they were 21% in the 2015/2016 season and 36% in the 2016/2017 season). Episodes on youth team camps peaked in 2018, and as the number of incidents of racism increases, the area of the country where the number of incidents occurs changes. The type of aggression/insult also changes. 2018 is the record year for choirs and is the year in which episodes in the North clearly exceed those in the South and the Centre. The following report, “Footballers at gunpoint: racism focus season 2018/19”, published in December 2019 (available here: <https://www.assocalciatori.it/sites/default/files/attachment/news/Calciatori%20sotto%20tiro%2020182019.pdf>), dedicated exclusively to the analysis of episodes of racism against players in each category, shows us how racist episodes in amateur football have been increasing steadily for six years now and professional and at all levels, inside and outside the sports facilities.



of the CONI president, Giovanni Malagò, who told Radio24, that “the fan who makes racist buu noises to a black player is wrong, but it is even more wrong when someone who earns 3 million euros lets himself fall in the area and is perhaps even happy to take a penalty kick”<sup>460</sup>.

Or the one issued by the President of Lazio, Claudio Lotito, who wanted to explain that: “not always the ‘buu’ vocation actually corresponds to a discriminatory or racist act, but it should be interpreted. I remember that when I was a child, often those who were not black, who had normal white skin, would be booed to discourage them from scoring the goal in front of the goalkeeper”<sup>461</sup>.

The situation, in essence, is this: some fans insult, clubs tend to deny the incriminated episodes and do nothing to oppose them (with a few praiseworthy exceptions, such as that of AS Roma, which expelled for life from the Olimpico, with a Daspo, a fan who had addressed racist insults to Juan Jesus<sup>462</sup>), the sports judges acquit.

The denial of the fact, even in the presence of unequivocal videos, is now the basis of the dialectic of the racist at the stadium, and often even outside. At the limit, if necessary, it is reduced to “countermeasures” (completely ineffective) such as postponement of matches or matches behind closed doors, which only increase the blackmailing power of the fans towards the clubs.

To sum up, it seems as if we have been irreparably stuck in the same place for years now. We have not moved an inch, compared to when the vice-president of Milan, Paolo Berlusconi, called Mario Balotelli “the family little nigger”<sup>463</sup>; or when Arrigo Sacchi said that there were “too many blacks” in the Italian youth<sup>464</sup>, while the then candidate

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<sup>460</sup> See: <https://www.calcionews24.com/malago-choc-peggio-uno-che-simula-che-uno-chefa-buu-a-un-giocatore-di-colore/> del 25 settembre 2019.

<sup>461</sup> See: [https://www.repubblica.it/sport/calcio/2019/10/01/news/lotito\\_razzismo\\_consiglio\\_federale-237440348/](https://www.repubblica.it/sport/calcio/2019/10/01/news/lotito_razzismo_consiglio_federale-237440348/), of 1 October 2019.

<sup>462</sup> See: [https://www.adnkronos.com/sport/2019/09/26/insulti-razzisti-juan-jesus-lui-pubblica-screenshot-sui-social\\_G307F8c9ERoDpFLL5ueOgL.html](https://www.adnkronos.com/sport/2019/09/26/insulti-razzisti-juan-jesus-lui-pubblica-screenshot-sui-social_G307F8c9ERoDpFLL5ueOgL.html), dated 26 September 2019.

<sup>463</sup> The episode comes a month after the one of January 8th 2013, when Silvio Berlusconi in person denied Milan's interest in Balotelli, defined as “a rotten apple that would infect our locker room, a person that I would never accept as part of it”.

<sup>464</sup> “I am ashamed to be Italian. To succeed we are willing to sell our souls to the devil. We have no dignity, we have no Italian pride. There are teams with 15 foreigners, this is because you put business



for the presidency of the FIGC, Carlo Tavecchio, talked about a phantom Opti Pobà “who came here, who used to eat bananas and now plays first in Lazio and that's fine”<sup>465</sup>.

With a methodical work of blaming the victim, the roles are reversed: now the racism of the fan is not his fault, but It's the black player's fault. We have gone from condemnation to justification, through denial, to undisturbed legitimacy.

There is a lot of racism in Italian football. We certainly don't find that out today: the problem is that too often we forget about it. What about our Mario? “Balotelli brings out the worst aspects of Italy”, Mauro Valeri said in 2014<sup>466</sup>.

And Balotelli, in his exceptional career, has been charged with a double "responsibility": that of being a black footballer in the championship and that of being a black footballer in the Italian national team<sup>467</sup>. The banner "There are no Italian Negroes" displayed during a series of football matches in which he was present, represents the synthesis of what has been told so far and explicitly recalls that idea of “Italianness” which, fully constructed during Fascism, represents Italians as "Mediterraneans" (but not as "blacks"), rejecting a fact: Balotelli is an Italian citizen even if he is “black”.

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first: and when you put business first, football cannot succeed [...] Today I was watching the Viareggio tournament: I am not a racist - I had Rijkaard - but to see so many black players, to see so many foreigners, is an offence for Italian football", February 2015.

<sup>465</sup> We also discussed this here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/banane-calcioallitaliana/>.

<sup>466</sup> M. Valeri, *Mario Balotelli winner in the ball*, Fazi Editore, Roma 2014. Mauro Valeri, who died prematurely in 2019, was a sociologist, former director of the National Observatory on Xenophobia and since 2005 head of the Observatory on Racism and Antiracism in Football.

<sup>467</sup> There has never been a shortage of controversy about the summoning of the so-called "oriundi" (black and not) to the national team. In 2011, Osvaldo was summoned to the national team and the deputy of the Lega Nord Davide Cavallotto attacked: "Our national team has become a "pension of oriundi" and our football is now a "branch of emerging countries". In 2014, Salvini instead hurls himself against Thiago Motta: "What does this have to do with Italy? A fig tree", and protests against the presence of "too many oriundi" on the national team. In 2015, it was Roberto Mancini who rejected the opening to gold medals: "Only Italians in blue. Those who are not born in Italy, even if they have relatives, do not play for the national team". Statements supported by Salvini on Twitter. On the occasion of the 2016 European Championships, then, the secretary of the League reiterated: "I would like players with a little more roots to play", responding to those who asked him about the summons of Eder and the Argentinean naturalized Italian Franco Vazquez by Ct Antonio Conte.



**From "yellow alarm" to closed ports.  
Racism and xenophobia in the days of Covid-19  
Grazia Naletto**

“COVID-19 does not care who we are, where we live, what we believe or any other criterion of distinction. We need all our solidarity to face it together. Yet, the pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hatred and xenophobia, guilt and witch-hunting. The feeling of hostility against foreigners has grown in the net and in the streets. Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have proliferated and there have been anti-Muslim attacks linked to COVID-19. Migrants and refugees have been mocked as the origin of the virus, denying them access to medical care as a result”<sup>468</sup>.

On May 8, 2020, the General Secretary of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, felt the need to launch a specific appeal to counter the spread of hostile, discriminatory and violent rhetoric that, even in the extraordinary state of exception linked to the spread of Covid-19, continued to cross the public debate. The messages of an anti-Chinese and more generally anti-Asian, character, which have related the spread of the virus with the belonging to a specific national group or have attributed it to foreign citizens tout-court, are in fact proliferated throughout the globe.

Some academic studies and independent reports have attempted to analyze how the spread of the virus has guided public debate and vocabulary, and whether it has fostered the consolidation/return of stigmas based on national, religious, ethnic and even somatic characteristics<sup>469</sup>.

The use of binary lexical universes already very deeply rooted in the public debate in our country, with the pandemic, if possible, seems to have increased globally. The representation of the Covid-19 emergency as a “war” against an “invisible

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<sup>468</sup> The full text of the appeal is available here: <https://unric.org/it/covid-19-appello-globale-del-segretario-generale-antonio-guterres-per-affrontare-e-contrastare-i-discorsi-di-odio-legati-alla-pandemia/>.

<sup>469</sup> Among the many, we mention the following: M. S. Rafi, *Language of COVID-19: Discourse of Fear and Sinophobia*, University of Management and Technology, Lahore-Pakistan, 18 Maggio 2020; Human Rights Watch, *Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia*, 12 Maggio 2020.



enemy”<sup>470</sup> , the detailed media description of our deserted cities, the radio and television networks dedicated 24 hours a day for weeks to news and comments on the evolution of contagion, together with the rules on “social distancing” and measures aimed at safeguarding “national health security”, have proposed a new declination of the discourse of fear and offered new arguments in support of nationalism.

The use of war metaphors has shaped public debate at all levels, and where war is declared, an enemy must also be identified.

But, as Federico Faloppa observes, an invisible enemy is an undefined enemy. Nothing is easier, then, than to identify it from time to time as best it suits.

In Italy, especially before the lockdown phase, the search for a scapegoat on which to channel the growing and yet understandable social panic, has once again privileged the foreigner, especially Asian, and in particular Chinese.

But also, at the international level there are some examples.

It is well known the neologism created by Trump, when he baptized the virus “Chinese”. Perhaps the choices made by some foreign newspapers are less well known in Italy. The Jutland Post published a cartoon that replaced the five stars of the Chinese national flag with coronavirus pictograms. The Courrier Picard has chosen “Alerte jaune” as the front-page headline of January 26th (it was followed by an apology editorial published on its website). The Wall Street Journal, on February 3, titled one of his pieces as follows: “China is the real sickness of Asia”. Several Italian and foreign newspapers have published articles that have given space to the hypothesis, although repeatedly denied by academic experts until today, of the artificial creation of the virus in a Chinese laboratory. This has favoured the viral circulation of this false news in the net, which has brought with it a trail of anti-Chinese messages and comments. The Daily Mail and The Sun have come to blame the spread of the virus on the Chinese “eaters of bats, snakes and dogs”.

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<sup>470</sup> Interesting considerations about the recurrence of warlike metaphors in the Covid-19 era are carried out by F. Faloppa. See “Sul «nemico invisibile» e altre metafore di guerra. La cura delle parole”, 25 marzo 2020, here: [http://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua\\_italiana/articoli/parole/cura\\_parole\\_2.html](http://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/articoli/parole/cura_parole_2.html).



The President of the Veneto Region must have been inspired by the latter when, on March 1st, during an interview on Antenna 3, a regional TV channel, referring to Chinese citizens, he said the following words: “We have all seen them eating live mice or this kind of thing”. The interview was given to a TV that has a limited circulation, but the liquid world of social media has greatly amplified the echo, contributing to fuel the “hunt for the anointing” that had already been unleashed for days against Asian citizens. The Veneto President’s public apology came when the damage had already been done.

Moreover, only between January 20 and March 8, 2020, Lunaria documented 61 episodes of insults, discrimination, arson attacks and aggression that affected foreign citizens in connection with the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The vast majority are Chinese and Asian citizens, but not only. All insults have the same tenor and mostly refer to the poor hygiene that would “characterize” certain groups or populations<sup>471</sup>.

There was no lack of physical violence either. As happened in Cagliari on February 8th, where a Filipino waiter, resident in Assemini, was insulted and beaten on the bus because he was mistaken for a “Chinese carrier of the Coronavirus”. He was hospitalized and received a 30-day prognosis for facial trauma. In Agrigento, on the other hand, it has come to announce to customers from the microphone of a supermarket the entrance of a “Chinese”.

Of course, there was no shortage of those who tried to cynically feed and ride fear, contributing to the perverse interweaving of collective panic, xenophobia and racism. In Brescia, for example, on February 2, the militants of Forza Nuova posted flyers on the windows of some stores run by Asian citizens, inviting to buy only Italian goods. On March 8, a fire damaged the premises of a Chinese restaurant in Rivoli. It

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<sup>471</sup> Among the insults documented in detail in the database of Chronicles of Ordinary Racism: “We kicked you out of Italy, Chinese of m...”. (Milan); “The Chinese “onti”(dirty, in Venetian dialect, ed) were missing to impet us2. (Casier, Treviso); “I hope you get the virus like in the markets in China” (Cesano Boscone, Milanese); “Let’s go that these bring the Sars” (Turin); “Filthy scum, go cough at home” (Florence); “Go away, damn Chinese. You infect all of us” (Venice).





had even been announced a few days earlier by a group of young people fleeing the police called by the managers.

Among those that Valerio Cataldi called the "frighteners" by profession<sup>472</sup>, journalists from some newspapers tried to use any news related to the danger of contagion to continue their campaign against migrants. From the initial launch of an alarm on the spread of the virus in Africa, with the related request to close the ports<sup>473</sup>, it has been claimed that the money for health care was spent in reception<sup>474</sup>, only to announce the outbreak of a health bomb in reception centres (giving, for example, great visibility to the news related to some cases of contagion found in Milan)<sup>475</sup>. In the second half of April, a more traditional type of controversy returned, which contrasted the limits imposed on the movement of people in Italy with the "regularization" of migrants or proposed the idea that the "regularization encourages the invasion".<sup>476</sup>

The headline of the newspaper *Libero* of March 25th, at the limits of human contempt, "The virus scans immigrants" has contributed to spreading yet another "hoax" circulated on social and WhatsApp: the Covid would save foreigners (news, on the other hand, unfortunately denied by the data subsequently released by the National Institute of Health)<sup>477</sup>. It is a pity that Prof. Galli, head of Infectious Diseases at Sacco Hospital in Milan, of which a statement is reported in *Libero's* article, merely pointed out that at the time he was interviewed there were few foreigners affected by Covid in

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<sup>472</sup> See: V. Cataldi, "Dopo il lockdown ritornano gli spaventatori", *Carta di Roma*, here: <https://www.cartadiroma.org/editoriale/dopo-il-lock-down-ritornano-gli-spaventatori/>

<sup>473</sup> See: S. Di Meo, "Coronavirus è in africa: chiudete i porti", *La Verità*, 15 Febbraio 2020.

<sup>474</sup> See: G. Zulin, "I soldi per la sanità spesi in accoglienza", *Libero*, 15 febbraio 2020.

<sup>475</sup> The newspaper *La verità* has promoted a real campaign. See: A. Scianca, "Centri immigrati sovraffollati: bomba sanitaria", 12 Marzo 2020; F. Borgonovo, "Contagi nei centri, ecco la bomba migranti", 17 Marzo 2020; F. Borgonovo, "Il piano Lamorgese per la bomba migranti distribuirli ovunque", 31 Marzo 2020; Borgonovo F., "Milano, focolaio nel centro accoglienza migranti", 31 marzo 2020.

<sup>476</sup> See: M. Belpietro, "Caccia agli italiani, sanatoria ai migranti", *La verità*, 15 Aprile 2020; "La sanatoria incentiva l'invasione", *La verità*, 17 maggio 2020.

<sup>477</sup> On May 8, 2020, Giovanni Rezza, Director of Infectious Diseases at the Higher Institute of Health (Iss), said: "There has been much anecdote about Covid in immigrants. In Italy 5.1% of the cases diagnosed concern individuals of foreign nationality". See: "Rezza (Iss): "Molte fake news su stranieri e Covid", *Adnkronos*, 8 maggio 2020, here: [https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2020/05/08/rezza-iss-molte-fake-news-stranieri-covid\\_BauLLgk4tTID4XDNhHEZPJ.html?refresh\\_ce](https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/cronaca/2020/05/08/rezza-iss-molte-fake-news-stranieri-covid_BauLLgk4tTID4XDNhHEZPJ.html?refresh_ce).





his hospital, and that the younger average age of the foreign population could have helped to better protect it from contagion.

But among the pages destined to remain in the memory for the level of inhumanity and lack of respect even towards the thousands of people killed by the virus, there is certainly the first page of *Libero* of May 6, whose title reads: “In Italy thirty thousand dead replaced with 600 thousand migrants”, with an article written by its director Senaldi.

The state of health emergency does not seem to have induced the most xenophobic press to produce more correct information.

### **Rights are unequal, even in times of pandemic**

There were, however, not only insults, speeches and incorrect information. The institutional management of the emergency has shown on several occasions that, if Covid-19 does not know discrimination of any kind, who should offer protection, does not seem to behave in the same way.

First of all, it should be noted that undocumented foreign people, affected by the virus, have had difficulty in accessing treatment. The law recognizes, in fact, their right to urgent care, but not the right to enrol in the National Health Service. Without a family doctor (to whom the health safety regulations indicated to turn to in case of suspicious symptoms), many of them turned to doctors only in case of serious symptoms<sup>478</sup>.

Since the first days after March 9, the date of the lockdown in Italy, the antiracist and humanitarian organizations have highlighted the need to prepare specific protocols for emergency management within the reception system for asylum seekers and

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<sup>478</sup> As Rezza observed: “The risk of being notified as a case, for foreigners, tends to be lower compared to Italians - continued Rezza - but if we see instead the risk of hospitalization compared to an Italian we see that in foreigners is 1.4 times higher than in Italians. Also with respect to access to intensive care the figure is higher in foreigners. It means that a foreigner who has a less serious illness has a lower chance of being notified. Instead there is a greater recourse to hospitalization”. See. Adnkronos, mentioned before.



refugees and for the Returns Centres<sup>479</sup>. In fact, the first indications of the Ministry of the Interior came very late and they have discharged on the managing bodies and operators the responsibility to adopt the necessary measures to try to contain the spread of the virus among the people hosted in the reception system. The purchase of safety devices (masks, gloves, etc.) was put at their charge and the preparation of dedicated facilities, to be used to house people placed in quarantine, came only after some cases of contagion had occurred.

On the other hand, even the Municipalities have struggled to equip themselves to make the most vulnerable people safe: the problem that immediately arose is that of the thousands of homeless people living in our cities. In fact, even in this case, the information and security of these people, as well as the provision of some essential services (canteen, hostels, distribution of health care) was delegated to voluntary organizations and third sector, only later coordinated with the civil protection<sup>480</sup>.

Despite the substantial blockage of arrivals by sea, the presence of a limited number of people and the concrete impossibility to carry out the repatriation in the countries of origin, it was not considered appropriate to close the Returns Centres and issue a residence permit to all foreigners present in Italy. As stated by the National Guarantor of the rights of persons detained or deprived of personal liberty, still on May 28, "the overall legitimacy of a deprivation of liberty aimed at an objective that cannot be achieved, at least in a short time, remains doubtful"<sup>481</sup>. On April 7, 2020, with the Interministerial Decree n. 150, the Government has instead ordered the closure of Italian ports to ships flying foreign flags that have rescued people at sea outside the

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<sup>479</sup> See, for example, the document signed by more than 100 associations that was sent on March 22, 2020 to the Government, available here: [https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EMERGENZA-COVID-19\\_DIRITTI-STRANIERI-22-marzo-finale.pdf](https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EMERGENZA-COVID-19_DIRITTI-STRANIERI-22-marzo-finale.pdf).

<sup>480</sup> See, for example, the document sent by a network of Roman associations to the Major Raggi to urge the preparation of a plan of interventions aimed at making homeless citizens safe: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/roma-persone-senza-dimora-lettera-alle-istituzioni.pdf>.

<sup>481</sup> See: "Il Garante nazionale nei giorni dell'emergenza Covid-19", 29 maggio 2020, here: [http://www.garantenazionaleprivatiliberta.it/gnpl/it/dettaglio\\_contenuto.page?contentId=CNG8955&modelId=10021](http://www.garantenazionaleprivatiliberta.it/gnpl/it/dettaglio_contenuto.page?contentId=CNG8955&modelId=10021).



waters of Sar. By declaring the “unsafe ports”, it has thus failed to fulfill its mandatory duties of rescue to those in danger of death<sup>482</sup>.

The unequal treatment has also characterized the calls published by some regional administrations to recruit medical and nursing staff and the disbursement of extraordinary contributions prepared to support families in difficulty due to the state of health emergency.

At the height of the health emergency, i.e. when the need to recruit health personnel was most urgent, some discriminatory calls were published in Rome and Catania in order to recruit doctors, nurses and anesthetists<sup>483</sup>. Among the access requirements provided, more or less explicitly, there was the possession of Italian citizenship. Following the sending of a letter of recommendation, the Garibaldi Institute of Catania has modified the notice. No response was received from the Spallanzani Hospital in Rome<sup>484</sup>.

Similar forms of discrimination have been introduced by many Municipalities, on the occasion of the publication of calls for tenders to access the so-called "shopping vouchers" (vouchers useful for the purchase of essential goods including food) for which the Government has allocated 400 million euros. The Municipalities have in fact been able to define independently the criteria for access to the benefit; in some cases, they have excluded all foreign citizens, in others, foreigners without a permit to stay, in others, still, they have requested the possession of a long-term permit to stay or the residence certificate, excluding in the latter case also Italian homeless. A monitoring of Asgi members throughout the national territory has made it possible to identify dozens of discriminatory tenders, to urge the administrations to modify them and to act in some cases with anti-discrimination appeals. In Rome, for example, the Court ordered to extend the benefit also to foreign citizens without a permit to stay.

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<sup>482</sup> A legal analysis of the specific difficulties caused by Covid-19 to foreign citizens can be found in N. Zorzella, “Diario di un’avvocata del diritto dell’immigrazione al tempo del COVID-19”, 22 aprile 2020, disponibile qui: <https://www.asgi.it/notizie/diario-avvocata-diritto-immigrazione-covid-19/>.

<sup>483</sup> For more information, see here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/bandi-discriminatori-ai-tempi-della-pandemia/>.

<sup>484</sup> In both cases, the reports were sent with a joint letter from Asgi, Lunaria and italianisenzacittadinanza movement.



As the Antidiscrimination Service of Asgi has highlighted “The food emergency interventions, although merely monetary and often of modest entity, are in fact proposed in the new context as always essential, with the consequent need to respect a universalistic criterion, which looks only at the need by grading the support only in relation to income and asset conditions, without those distinctions by citizenship, residence permit or previous duration of residence, which are so heavy on our system of assistance”<sup>485</sup>.

Also, the opening of the platform dedicated to the Family Charter<sup>486</sup>, another support measure for families in difficulty, has maintained the presence of a discriminatory benefit access requirement (possession of Italian or EU citizenship), thus excluding all non-EU foreign families. A letter signed by some associations has unfortunately not yet received feedback.

Art. 103 of the Relaunch Decree, published on May 19, 2020, launched the long-discussed measure of regularization of foreign workers working in agriculture, domestic and family sector. An umpteenth selective measure whose limits are well known: instead of being inspired by the need to guarantee the universal right to health and health security for all, we looked especially at the arms considered indispensable to carry out some economic and welfare activities.

And just a few days after its launch, two cases of ordinary "mistreatment" of foreign workers have been reported highlighting, once again, the conditions of exploitation in which many of them live.

On May 19, a 33-year-old laborer of Indian origin, one of many working in the Agro Pontino area of Terracina (LT), would have dared to ask his employers for masks and personal protective equipment in the workplace, according to Covid-19 emergency protocols. The man, in response, received a letter of dismissal as a result of which he

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<sup>485</sup> See: Asgi, Newsletter del Servizio Supporto Giuridico contro le discriminazioni 3/2020, “La vicenda dei Buoni spesa”.

<sup>486</sup> Established in 2015, the card provides access to discounts and tariff reductions on goods and services offered by participating businesses, both in stores and online. Originally, it was reserved to Italian and foreign families with at least 3 children living together and under 26 years of age. With the Budget Law 2019, access was limited to Italian and EU families. Following the Covid emergency, it was made accessible to all Italian and EU families with one child, but the exclusion for families of non-EU citizens was maintained.



requested the salary due for the work done. Following the request, he was beaten and thrown into a gutter by his employers. The E.R. found head injuries caused by a blunt instrument, various fractures and injuries in different parts of the body.

Two days later, in Rozzano, Milan, a 41-year-old Sri Lankan woman working as a domestic helper for an elderly couple was beaten by her employer. She had dared to ask to be hired with a regular employment contract in order to be able to apply for regularization. A case that highlights how it is deeply unfair and risky for foreign workers who work illegally to entrust, as does the Relaunch Decree, the initiation of the procedure for the emergence of irregular employment relationships to employers only.

The exceptionality of the moment in which could led to a collective reflection on the ease with which, in the perverse game of discrimination, xenophobia and racism, the roles of victim and aggressor can be reversed, sparing no one. The insults received by some Italian citizens abroad, the closure of borders during lockdown, the extreme difficulties found by many people to return to Italy, could have at least encouraged a better understanding of the problems related to the status of “foreigner”.

But the political and bureaucratic obtuseness with which in recent weeks there has continued to be a distinction between those who have the right to be rescued at sea and those who do not, those who have the right to be guaranteed a meal and those who do not, those who have the right to come out of invisibility and those who do not, does not show great signs of change.

Even the rapid return of violence on the net, with the sexist and racist insults that hit the young co-operator Silvia Romano, freed after 18 months of imprisonment, seems to disprove those who, with a certain optimism, went so far as to assume the end of the fortune of the so-called racist haters. On the contrary, there is the risk that, in the absence of a more incisive public intervention aimed at reducing economic and social inequalities and alleviating the situation of unease of the most fragile population groups, the medium and long term effects of the COVID-19 emergency may give a new impulse to the most archaic forms of nationalism and new strength to the political entrepreneurs of racism.

