

The death of (representative) politics

By **Nina Trige Andersen** - October 29, 2018



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Two Italian women look back at a decade of representative politics fighting for women's rights in the (post) Berlusconi era. Amused, dispirited, annoyed, and anguished they assess how much – or how little – they managed to change.

I Had a Dream

Director(s)

Claudia Tosi

Producer(s) Nathalie
Combe (Cosmographe)

A total disinterest in others. Extreme opportunism. Superficiality. Extreme consumerism. The contrary of ecologism. The opposite of altruism. A series of disvalues that have ruined this country. Such is the character of Berlusconiism as diagnosed by Daniela de Pietri, a local politician in Italy, who is one of two protagonists in the documentary *I Had a Dream*. Along with her friend and comrade in representative politics, Manuela Ghizzoni, she interprets a struggle for change in an Italy in crisis, both while the struggle is ongoing and after the dreams have been shattered.

Reflecting on a career

We meet the two women in a theatre, watching clips from the documentary about themselves, and thus the perspective shifts back and forth: From the camera following their political lives as they happen to requesting their assessments with hindsight.

«We meet the two women in a theatre, watching clips from the documentary about themselves.»

Daniela de Pietri and Manuela Ghizzoni have both been elected for Partito Democratico – Daniela for the local municipal council in Carpi, Modena, near Bologna, and Manuela for the national Parliament. We do not get to know where they come from politically and running for the relatively new PD could mean anything from the Social Christian movement or the former Communist Party to the social-liberal Italian Renewal fraction. Judging from their statements throughout the film it is, however, probably more the leftist parts of the PD than the centrist ones that the two women are shaped by, but leftist in the system-believer sense.

They were central, the documentary suggests, in forming *Se non ora quando?* [if not now, when?] in 2011, a women's campaign that erupted in protest against the grotesque sexism of the then prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. The fact that women had – and still have – a long way to go before obtaining just some minimum respect in Italy becomes crystal clear in a scene where Daniela de Pietri is proposing to establish a shelter for women in her local municipality in northern Italy.

Small inconveniences



Every third day a woman is murdered by her husband, partner, ex-partner, or brother, de Pietri argues, to which a male politician in the council replies: «I don't think this proposal is worthy of consideration. You make it seem like the end of the world is near. This is a normal thing. From time to time some woman has some small inconveniences.»

His male colleagues around the council table smile inscrutably (either amused or appalled; in approval or in disbelief), while de Pietri struggles to keep her composure, replying: «Small inconveniences? 70 women have been murdered just this last half-year!» The man retorts: «Since ever some quarrels can end like this ... », until he finally starts backtracking a bit, saying that if there is money in the municipal budget for a women's shelter «then let's do it.»

Daniela de Pietri and Manuela Ghizzoni are fighting both their party leadership, who do not pay adequate attention to the protests of the people, and the citizens who cannot understand why the two women insist that the system can be changed from within.

Belief, struggle, defeat

The film portrays their political struggle as well as their friendship. A touching scene is when the two badass women are sitting in the theatre watching a clip from the film that was shot during the chemotherapy sessions Daniela was undergoing while fighting for political representation – Manuela discreetly wipes away a tear so Daniela will not see it. Manuela appears as the hopeful one, who still tries to find some sense in everything; Daniela as the realist who does not shy away from saying that what they accomplished with all their hard work was the same as the protesters against Trump: absolutely nothing.

»What emerges from the widening gap between traditional politicians and citizens is populism.«

The women's movement *Se non ora quando* disintegrates through in-fighting after the common «enemy» Berlusconi is gone but Berlusconism prevails. Limited by their own world as the two politicians are, they fear no one will take over the torch from their generation. Lamenting the death of politics makes sense from where they stand but not from every vantage point, something *I Had a Dream* does not reflect directly upon.

While the portrait of a friendship between two strong believers and strong women characters is moving, the universe revolves – rather archaically – around representative democracy, and the film thus reiterates the diagnosis that Manuela Ghizzoni and Daniela de Pietri make: What emerges from the widening gap between traditional politicians and citizens is populism. That does indeed seem to be one of the striking phenomena of our time, but is populism really the only political force that seeks to challenge the hegemony of representative democracy today?

That another generation – also in Italy – has started to reinvent forms of women’s struggle and forms of politics that do not centre on representative parliamentary logic seems to escape both the attention of Daniela and Manuela and of the documentary itself.

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