The Holy Gram: Governmentality and Resistance in the Primary School Canteen

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Introduction

Over the last two decades children's nutrition has gained increasing public attention. In attempting to tackle the worldwide obesity epidemic among children, global institutions such as the World Health Organization have urged national governments to intervene through school food policies aimed to improve parents' and children's dietary compliance and health (WHO, 2008). Schools have thus become both targets and carriers of new policies of intervention for the enhancement of children's 'food literacy' all over Europe (Benn and Carlsson, 2014). Despite national and regional variation, the implementation of school food policies can be generally considered as part of the social investment turn, and in particular one of the so-called child-centred investment strategies designed for mitigating social and health inequalities in childhood and consequently in later life (Esping-Andersen, 2002). As a matter of fact, two years ago The Guardian saluted Micheal Gove's plan for restoring free school canteens in the UK as a 'socialist masterplan' in defence of universal public service provision, coming in a period of public spending cut-backs (Butler, 2013). In addition, considering that meal preparation is generally one of the home burdens carried by women, the procurement of lunch during school hours also coincides with the policy framework of the adult-worker model, which promotes female individual autonomy against the breadwinner model by shifting childcare from families to other providers (Daly, 2011).

This consciousness-raising is also at the base of the high-sounding 'Milan Charter' produced during last Universal Exposition by a panel of expert in food and nutritional policies. The document is a sort of manifesto which main goal is to fight both obesity and malnutrition, especially among the youths. As one of the points of the charter states: 'in signing this Milan Charter, we women and men, citizens of this planet, strongly urge governments, institutions and international organizations to commit to introducing or strengthening in schools and in school meal services, dietary, physical, and environmental education programmes as instruments of health and prevention' (Milan Charter, 2015: 25-26). Hence, getting children to eat at school is not just a fill-in moment, but an actual political action aimed to govern and regulate the collective body of citizens (Leahy and Wright, 2016).

Large part of the research, mainly employing quantitative methods and rooted in the medical and nutritional field, has attempted to evaluate the efficacy of school meals in improving children's eating habits. Yet emic approaches have been raising, studying the everyday practices embedded in the school context and the discourses surrounding children's nutrition and health. In this article I draw from the notions of biopower, strategy, and tactics (Certeau, 1984; Foucault, 1998) to show how the top-down production of healthy school meals in three Italian primary schools is subjected to several resistances by the subjects involved in its reception. First, I illustrate the steps through which the organization of children's meal takes place. The top-down medical model on nutrition (Crotty, 1995) initially stems from WHO's manuals and scientific evidence, for then being progressively deciphered and transformed by several institutions till being materialized in a healthy school meal. Hence, I move to illustrate how parents, teachers, cooks and children challenge the medical model and develop intentional tactics that withstand the scientific authority of the

school menu developed by nutrition experts. Differently from studies highlighting the undesirable and coercive outcomes of biopower, I argue that in these school canteens subjects are not trapped by biopedagogies, but actually deploy their agencies by questioning, contesting and even subverting the rationale of the school meal.

Politics of the School Meal

The school meal epitomises a collectivistic and universalistic form of state intervention: that is, a common good paid through citizens' taxes, equally accessed by all children and capable of flattening out social origins influences (Oncini and Guetto, forthcoming). The public provision of a nutritionally balanced meal, along with education efforts, is therefore intended to be a panacea for food-related diseases, obesity and more generally health inequalities (Pike and Colquhoun, 2009; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). It has been argued that sharing the same meal at school may also create cohesion and reduce tensions, smoothing over socio-economic differences and their material display (Andersen et. al, 2015; Gullberg, 2006). Studies on the efficacy of the school canteen show that it enhances children's dietary compliance - as for instance by increasing the intake of fruit and vegetables – although it does not seem to contrast or prevent childhood obesity (Jaime and Lock, 2009). However, Fletcher et al. (2014) brought evidence that unintended consequences can stem despite the overly optimistic premises of such a welfare intervention. Drawing on a qualitative study in several UK secondary schools, the authors bring evidence of an emerging underground business counteracting and resisting the new healthy standards of the school cafeteria, among which the removal of vending machines. Thus, by transmuting nearby supermarkets into personal wholesalers, students were able to make some profits out of an impromptu black market for junk food and energy drinks.

Recently, a number of studies delved deeper into the practical realization and implementation of food pedagogies by explicitly adopting a Foucauldian framework, especially with reference to the concepts of governmentality and biopower (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 2009). Generally speaking, govermentality refers to all the procedures, techniques and forms of rational knowledge enacted by a more or less heterogeneous corpus of agencies and authorities that aim to control the whole of human conduct, such as customs, habits, ways of thinking and acting (Foucault, 2009). Biopower is then better understood as a peculiar conformation of governmentality which develops during the 18th century and that responds to the exigencies of governing a new 'statistical' object in a scientific fashion.

> [P]opulation comes to appear as the ultimate end of government. In contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc. (Foucault, 1991)

Stemming from the management and rationing of diets in prisons and workhouses, biopower is strictly connected to the dawn of scientific studies on people's nourishment (Coveney, 2006). The institutionalization of the concern regarding the relation between children's dietary intakes and public health well exemplifies this conceptual legacy. On the one hand, scientific studies produce a statistical truth which

highlights the growth in obesity rates among a particular layer of the population, and posits that it might constitute a health hazard as well as an economic burden for the social system ('species body'). On the other, measures of intervention are introduced in order to discipline and normalize the individual bodies 'contained' in the population aggregate ('anatomo-politics') (Nadesan, 2008). Following Harwood's (2009) theorization, it is important to underline that these pedagogies directed towards bodies may work as strategies for direct intervention (such as removing vending machines from schools or applying a sugar tax) as well as modes of subjectification. The latter term suggests that they do not solely functions as coercive or persuasive forces placed outside the individual, but also as a 'technology of the self', namely as an inner pulse to which subjects are socialized in order to apply principles of self-regulation and self-control (Leahy and Wright, 2016). Awareness campaigns on health risks linked to obesity, drinking behaviour or junk food consumption take precisely advantage of these modes of subjectification.

Especially after the 50s, nourishment at home and school has become increasingly influenced by the scientific knowledge produced by nutritionists and home economist, thus reinforcing a discourse rational in tones but moralistic in contents.[1] In the 'homescape', being a good parent intertwines with a new disciplinatory role on how to eat and feed properly. In fact, when preparing lunchboxes for their children, middle-class mothers 'feel on display' and under examination because of the content of the meal (Harman and Cappellini, 2015). But also, the home-packed lunch functions as an objectified marker of children's ethnic, socioeconomic and gender cleavages that hold them accountable for familial feeding choices (Karrebaek, 2012; Salazar, 2007). At the same time, nutritional advices are more and more codified by governments into school lunch programmes, with the explicit aim to forge a healthier citizenship and to fight health inequalities by teaching children to prefer healthy options and to eat salubrious food.[2]

Several critical voices have upraised against the ostensible neutrality of these health interventions, which are instead "saturated with moral meanings and judgments about acceptable citizens, bodies, foods and ways of eating" (Leahy and Wright, 2016). Teachers, for instance, can find themselves stretched between the promotion of body acceptance, and the simultaneous proposal of a fit and lean body shape (Gard and Wright, 2005). Accordingly, Leahy (2009) identifies three major biopedagogical devices that exploit children's feelings of 'shame, guilt, pride and disgust' for the government of their bodies: *self-regulation*, which is enacted by asking pupils to work upon themselves by comparing their actual food intake with dietary guidelines; *mobilization of disgust*, that emerges from classroom discussion on the drawbacks of being unfit; *active surveillance* of the packed lunchbox, which is accompanied by teachers praise for compliant foods. These strategies, according to the author, are disgusting indeed, because of the feelings of inadequacy and guilt they might elicit on those pupils who are not compliant with those norms.

[1] The inextricable link between nutritional science and moral is well illustrated by political usage made by American conservatives of the discovery of the calories at the end of the 19th century: "[w]here British trade unionists and socialist, for example, claimed that low wages were at the root of hunger and poverty, conservative and politicians used nutrition science to argue that worker simply were not managing their money properly" (Levine, 2010: 17).

[2] Paradoxically, school lunch interventions initially found their *raison d'etre* in the fight of malnourishment among less advantaged children (Gullberg, 2006; Helstosky, 2004; Levine, 2010). Today the same welfare programme is trying to fight exactly the opposite plague among the same social group.

However, far less attention has been paid to tactics of resistance against these policies of health intervention. In fact, despite the ubiquitous and pervasive nature of these messages, room for contention emerges (Fletcher et al., 2014; Leahy and Wright, 2016). The dining room can be pictured as an arena where governmental efforts are at once deployed and resisted, and even a 'battleground in which particular types of knowledges and understandings of food, health, childhood and youth become accepted and function as 'truths' (Pike and Kelly, 2014: 6).

In this light, de Certau's and Foucault's works can be helpful to pinpoint the hiatus between state intervention on health and the reactions of its targets. School meal policies are to all intents and purposes a biopolitical *strategy*, that is 'actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power [...] elaborate theoretical places [...] capable of articulating and ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed' (Certeau, 1984: 38). The school, and its canteen in particular, is one of those places where scientific knowledge on nutrition and power intertwine and so to affect cooking and eating practices. But at the same time *tactics* oppose strategy inasmuch they are 'an art of the weak' (*ivi*), the space of autonomy and agency that individuals gather within the imposed strategy. Therefore, if the top-down model gives shape to a strategy by means of nutritional science, tactics are forms of strategic reversibility (Foucault, 1991) and the "unpredictable outcome of, the exercise of power" (Flohr, 2016: 11).

Methods

This article draws on the ethnographic fieldwork I have personally conducted in three public Italian primary schools during the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years. These primary schools provide a full-time education program, and nearly all the children eat at the school canteen. Importantly, in these schools it is not possible to bring a home-packed lunch. Following Fletcher et al. (2014) I first started my fieldwork through a short pilot trial of a month in a school in Fedrata, a mid-size town in the centre of Italy. I hence moved to Poversano and Goldazzo primary schools, two small towns in a northern Italian region somewhat opposed with regard to the average socio-economic origins of children. spent around 4 consecutive months in each school. Moreover, in Goldazzo the high number of children required two 'eating' turns. In total I spent around 130 lunches with children. In the three schools the organization of the canteen is basically the same, with the only difference that Poversano and Goldazzo school canteens are managed by the same cooperative, whereas in Fedrata the municipality takes care of children's meal through a public company. Importantly, according to a recent evaluation of Italian school canteens, they all ranked in the top ten on the rating given by the national network of canteen committee.

In all schools I spent the interval observing children and having small chats with teachers and janitors. More importantly, I had lunch every day sitting at different tables with children, talking with them about food likes and dislikes, girth and health, while taking notes of their statements and behaviours. I also had formal interviews and occasional conversations with the actors involved in the implementation and reception of the top-down model: nutritionists and doctors involved in the construction and control of the school menu,

public administrators of the service and the canteen committee in charge of the food quality control. In all cases I asked to explain me how the canteen is organized, which principles drive their choices and which problems they meet in the implementation of the school lunch. On top of that, I helped the canteen personnel to set the tables and to clean before and after each lunch, thus gaining an additional and probably most penetrating insight on the organization of the school meal. Finally, I conducted focus groups with the teachers of each school so to openly discuss their idea on the menu and more generally school policies.

Simultaneously, in order to describe the governmental top-down process, I collected and analysed official documents produced by the agencies involved in the development and implementation of school nutritional policies, and particularly those referring to the school meal. All these documents are freely accessible online, and I cite them only when this does not reveal the schools where I did my fieldwork. Table 1 below summarizes methods and techniques adopted in the study.

TABLE 1 HERE

From Global Guidelines to School Meals

Discourses on health imperatives targeted on children are produced and promulgated by several sources: in classrooms or at the school canteen by teachers, in television by cartoons or celebrity chefs, even in digital devices by videogames.[3] This is why some authors prefer the notion of biopedagogical assemblage, which points the attention to the multi-sited and disseminated nature of discourses and techniques on food and health (Wright and Halse, 2014; Wright and Harwood, 2009). At the same time, this strategy also follow a rather precise hierarchy when entering the school canteen. Taking a cue from Crotty's critique of the top-down model on nutrition, (1995) the realization of the school meal can be seen as a concatenation of governmental steps that starting from general guidelines arrives to the actual food preparation. In a sense, the process also resembles a regulatory bureaucracy, namely a form of hierarchical organization which employs rational knowledge as a form of domination (Swedberg and Agevall, 2005). The final product is thus much more than a simple dish for children, and it is surrounded by a series of complementary pedagogies on the importance of healthy eating for a normal developmental path.

The top of the hierarchy is formed by those agencies that arrange global schemes for population-based health intervention or prevention. These regulatory practices can be seen as sound examples of global biopolitics, namely the administration of health on a planetary scale (Bashford, 2006). For instance, the WHO (1996, 2006) jointly with FAO developed science-driven dietary guidelines to be applied throughout the world on a regional (e.g. East Mediterranean region) or national level, with the explicit aim of promoting appropriate diets and nutritional wellbeing using the available food in each area. With regard to school and food policies, the WHO has produced several documents as part of the 'Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health' indicating how and where to intervene in order to contrast unhealthy food habits among children. For

[3] The department of Education in Victoria distributed in schools a teaching resource called '*The Gobbiliser*' which was supposed to help pupils learning how to be dietary compliant. A critical discussion of this video game can be found in (Leahy and Wright, 2016).

instance, one of the global initiatives indicates to member states how to increase the number of nutritionally friendly schools, specifying the correct procedure for implementing the policy. Also, the document suggests 'some general guidelines for healthy eating that, after adjusting for cultural specificities, could be considered for the development of national nutritional standards for schools' (WHO, 2008).

Secondly, the model is constituted by those standards which altogether provide the legal and cultural boundaries for the implementation of the school meal and its related policies. In Italy, as Morgan and Sonnino (2008) argue, the constitutional framework provides a sound basis for educating children both to a 'sense of taste' for their development and to the valorisation of local cuisines. Concurrently however, the conjoint role of the Health and Education Ministers should not be neglected. The latter produces guidelines for nutrition education within the school context that indicate general contexts, methodologies and didactics to be used by teachers (MIUR, 2015). The former monitors obesity rates and eating behaviour of children (MIS, 2015), provides schools with initiatives on healthy practices [4] and, most importantly, carry out a very detailed protocol for a correct management of the school meal. This document (MIS, 2010) defines roles and responsibilities of all the operators, criteria and technical indications to set up the contract with the service provider, and even best practices for transmitting children good nutritional practices (e.g. do not serve second helping). On top of that, it also identifies the recommended intake of "energy, nutrients and fibers" (MIS, 2010) for lunch and sets the ideal range of grams for each nutrient (e.g. between 18 and 27 grams of fats per lunch).

At this point, the Health Minister indications are taken up by Health Authorities (ASL) located in various geographical areas for the development of technical documents to be used in purchasing contracts. Using the recommended grams as a starting point, medical doctors in the prevention department of each ASL develop their own precise standards as a basis for the call for tenders through which the service provider is selected. This document, called "*capitolato*", contains details for the school meal organization: prices, venues and equipments, row materials, cooking methods, hygienic conduct and modes of supervision. Inevitably, the document also sets a rather precise indication of the grams for each food type (e.g. bread: 60-70 grams). In this way, each pupil receives an almost perfectly balanced portion of nutrients containing around 30% of the daily recommended intake of kilocalories, wisely distributed among fats, carbohydrates, sugars, meat and vegetable proteins, iron and fibres. These nutrients are then transformed into a seasonal menu by nutritional experts within the ASL or the service provides, in an attempt to provide a palatable and flavourful meal which respects the recommended weight in grams.

Once the yearly menu is set, cooks are provided with equipment and foodstuff for the daily preparation of the meal. Depending on the organization, the meal can be produced in a school venue or in a specialized production site. In this latter scenario, the exact weight and the food's preservation period are superposed on each wrap. In any case, before starting to prepare lunch, the exact number of pupils attending the school meal

[4] For instance, the project "Fruits in schools" which provides primary schools with readymade seasonal fruit in pieces (MIPAAF, 2014) or "Your favorite athlete", an informational campaign on healthy lifestyles (CONI, 2016).

is conveyed to the diner personnel. Cooks have to follow almost slavishly a pre-set procedure for each course. In this way the service provider can keep dietary principles intact, while controlling costs. Also in the case of basic cuisine preparations (such as broth or sauté) and dressings, their margin of manoeuvre is limited by a list of prearranged ingredients.

Eating lunch at the school canteen thus appears as an integrated 'nutritional panopticon' (Coveney, 1999). A perfectly balanced meal, surrounded by strategies for moulding children's dietary conduct, is served under the auspices of nutrition science and education.

At the Edge of the Canteen: Parents and Nutritionists

Every time I asked doctors and nutritionists to explain me the steps that eventually lead to the school meal, I could not help but notice the internal coherency and functionality of the top-down model. Despite small variations in the menu due to nutritionists personal –yet scientific based– views, its rationale seems actually capable of monitoring and guaranteeing an almost perfect intake for all children. Yet, as I soon realized, this 'nutritional panopticon' (Coveney, 1999) remains largely uncontested and unquestioned provided that no one is in custody. That is, as long as it is not materialized as a warm meal in the plate of the children.

Nutritionists and mothers, despite being at the edge of the school canteen, unwittingly face each other in their respective roles of 'feeders': the former as a guarantor of the diet for an anonymous collective, the latter as a procurer of vital care for her child. Both of them are concerned with pupils' wellbeing, but their perspectives on food substantially differ. The meal envisioned by the nutritionist materializes at once scientific principles and collective needs. Although their efforts towards palatability aim to transform 'grams' into taste, in the end dietary standards must drive choices, even if that implies throwing food away. In fact, according to a recent study, 23% of all food prepared usually gets wasted (Boni et al., 2014). Marco, the nutritionist that develops the menu in Goldazzo and Poversano states this clearly:

> Dr Marco: We are educating children to taste, not to avoid waste. Otherwise we'd cook schnitzel and French fries every day.

Conversely, mothers attach to feeding practices meanings related to protection, love and motherhood (). Especially during infancy, food is a realm where production is mostly controlled by parents: children can only ask in the hope of being pleased, or at most they can steal food from the kitchen's pantry. Taste and salubriousness often stand in antinomy or in a precarious balance, leaving room to anxieties, conflicts and adult-child negotiations (Gram, 2015). Rather often indeed, nutritional convictions are related to familial socioeconomic background (), and campaigns for changing children's diet for the better can be seen as an intrusion in familial eating choices – as in the case, for instance, of the infamous 'Battle of Rawmarsh' (cfr Pike and Leahy, 2012).

Feeding at school thus becomes a sensitive topic which unwittingly calls for discussion and objection. During the school year, nutritionists organize meetings with parents in order to explain how the meal is

planned, which nutritional principles guide choices, and more generally how parents themselves should feed their children. And inevitably, as these excerpts testify, the encounters reveal the opposition.

> Dr. Marta: Parents drop jaws when we tell them that they don't have to cook "bed sheet" of meat, but just small portions like this [makes an oval-shape using thumbs and indexes of both hands]. They think it's not enough.

> Dr. Marco: Often meetings are surreal. You would like to discuss other things than "the pasta is overcooked or not" [...]. But adults, when they go checking how their children eat…they are not objective. The teacher is an adult as well, but they also hold a point of view which is not objective. And often during these meetings they discuss whether the pasta is overcooked or not, so the discussion lowers to a very basic profile.

Through the meal nutritionists engage a 'battle' on behalf of the state for correcting or improving children's taste and mothers' feeding practices for the better. Yet, despite mothers may agree on the final objective of the intervention, their actual confidence in the school meal is much fuzzier. Many of them just do not care, considering the canteen as a 'mouth filler' for their children while they are at work: all in all, a 'proper' meal (Murcott, 1986) is what a child eats at home, not a school. In some occasions parents even ask for fake certificates of intolerance to paediatricians in order to make sure that their children avoid their most disliked foods. Interestingly, despite everyone knows that is not a real intolerance, nothing can be changed, since parents have the last word in this matter. Dr. Silvana, who manages the security control of the local ASL of Poversano and Goldazzo well expresses her frustration:

> Dr. Silvana: Parents ask to paediatricians fake certificates, there is a tendency by parents to equalize distastes and intolerances. We are fighting a battle with blunt weapons.

But that is just the tip of an iceberg composed by small pieces of resistance. Other parents just require alternatives for respecting personal convictions, such as religious precepts, vegetarianism or veganism. In Italy, parents' pressure has become so intense that the Ministry of Health had to spread out a legal note in order to assure that parents food beliefs are respected when children eat at school (). Moreover, a very recent verdict of the Court of Cassation will allow from next year children to eat the home-packed lunch even in those schools where this is not allowed (). Often indeed, junk food and candies sneaks through the school inside pupils' bags, even when teachers make rules regarding the type of food that can be brought from home. Paradoxically, the special status of nutrition as an in-between subject mostly learnt in tacit practices between home and school, makes it much more difficult to pigeonhole and control. Whilst the top-down process appears as a perfectly integrated panopticon, its practical application makes the government of nutrition and bodies much more loose and subjected to resistance. And the closer one gets to dining room, the easier resistances become visible.

Entering the Canteen: Teachers, Cooks and Children

Since the top-down model proposes an almost uniform system of education and thought (Bourdieu, 1967) on nutritional conduct, physical and social spaces tend to be very similar. In all schools dietary principles echoes in poster and drawings hanging down the walls. Children are thus invited to learn bodily posture and

dietary advices, from basic bon-ton to the categorisation of unhealthy meals. Pencilled and coloured food pyramids are often displayed in dining rooms or classrooms, and throughout the year many school activities are organized with the purpose of teaching how and what to eat. As already mentioned, Nutritional education is part of the National didactic program, and follows precise guidelines of the Ministry of Education (MIUR, 2015). Hence, apart from classroom lessons, the lunch break is to be considered as a didactic moment where children learn to appreciate the 'taste of health' in practice: appropriate portions size, predilections for vegetables, constant diversification of the diet, etc. And yet, teachers, cooks and children are not passively affected by the top-down model, since their personal believes and appetites inevitably interlace with the biopolitics of the school meal.

Teachers

On paper, teachers' role is clear when it comes to nutrition education: their duty throughout the primary school is to make children interiorize the right nutritional conduct every time this is possible. Several didactic modules outline indeed how: for instance, science teachers are supposed to explain the benefits of vegetables for the digestive system when teaching human anatomy. Yet, when scientific principles are transformed into eating practices, nutrition becomes a much more contested field of knowledge. Under no circumstances parents would question Italian grammar or maths principles. But unlike ordinary school subjects, eating is a discipline inevitably imbricated in the household: family eating habits cannot be estranged from the school context. Marta, a teacher in Poversano, aptly admitted this ambivalence:

> Marta: Didactic is unquestionable. Parents wouldn't dare to discuss vowels, or history or geography. But when it comes to nutrition, especially in the canteen, the entanglement with school represents a residual area, a borderland of didactic […]. Parents don't teach language, history or geography. They are not educators, so that in most of the cases they keep quiet. But not with food: it's a daily routine of the family, and they can have their opinion and their competence.

Whilst with common school subjects parents would not even think to contest the arbitrary nature of the teaching content, eating practices can be disputed. This contradiction is then revealed in the canteen, where parents treat distastes as intolerances, sneak junk food in children's bags, and ask teachers not to push children when they do not want to eat a particular food. And teachers, as this conversation during a focus group in Goldazzo testifies, cannot help but respecting parents' requests:

> Lucia: Beyond a trivial solicitation, there is not much you can do.
>
> Giovanna: Of course I always tell them to try it. But if you have parents that work against you, that tell you "my child doesn't eat that"…you just take note of that.
>
> Lucia: Yes, if they tell you "he doesn't eat fruit and vegetables, it's not appropriate to insist", you accept that.

Teachers can transmit theoretical knowledge on nutrition, but the practice is contradictory even for them. They find themselves in a didactical limbo. On the one hand, they are formally appointed to teach nutrition

education in the school canteen. On the other, they lack will or power to actually do that when real food comes into school. Eating with children should be an educational moment, but *de facto* is not lived as such by many teachers. In theory, they should invite them to have a taste of everything while setting a good example by eating all courses. In practice, most of them just want to get at the end of the lunch as soon as possible, since dozens of children chatting yield noise and turmoil. They can have preferences, dislikes and food *neophobia* similarly to children, with the difference that they can ask waitresses no to fill the plate. According to their habits, they might have just yogurt or fruit for lunch. They can hold contrasting eating values with the ones the school proposes (e.g. vegan or vegetarian), hence selecting what to eat on this basis. Or conversely, they can leave food on the plate if they realize it is not palatable enough. Moreover, since they eat at school for the whole didactic year, they gain an insight that allow them to contest and criticise nutritionists' choices or cooks' cuisine. Teachers of the three schools confessed me several times their doubts on the school menu.

> Rosa: These nutritionists bigwigs…I don't understand them, they seem out of the world. On Mondays, teachers eating at school say food it's not enough, and that they need to go back home to finish their lunch […]. Last year these bigwigs tried to put millet in the menu, it went all wasted. As for the salads, we know that salt is bad, but I always need to put more dressing, because it seems I am eating air. […]. Yes, they control grams, they keep everything under control, but then there are days in which children waste everything, days in which they just eat bread, and days in which they eat too much.

In this excerpt Rosa, a teacher in Goldazzo, expresses her frustration regarding the menu. Millet, which is a very rare meal, was inserted in order to get children used, namely to educate them, to a very uncommon taste. Paradoxically, Rosa makes the case to contests the authority of the nutritionists ('bigwigs') and their methods ('controlling grams'). Interestingly indeed, she locates teachers and children on the same side. Despite they should be one of the mechanism of the top-down model, they unwillingly end up being subjected to it.

Cooks

According to official documents, cooks do not have an active role in educating children to nutrition education. They should prepare the daily lunch respecting the recipe and the grams, serve the meal to children, and finally clear up the table. Doubtless, cooks move in a gastronomic field which may be rigorous and coercive. Although many parents and teachers like thinking that "the cook makes the difference", most often they conform to nutritionists' choices. In Fedrata and Poversano [5] cooks had barely a say in the choice of the menu. Caterina and Mario, who respectively prepare lunch in Fedrata and Poversano, several times questioned the meal they had to prepare.

[5] In Goldazzo, things work slightly differently. Meals are not prepared within the school venues, so that cooks just prepare portions on the base of the number of people attending the lunch and then is up to four diner ladies to season the meals and dispense portions to all children.

> Caterina: Did you taste the cake with rice flour? It sucks, right? Those guys that compose the menu are all graduated…but then it's up to us [cooks] deal with all the bullshit that they write.
>
> Mario: Today I cooked savoy cabbage, but even teachers don't eat that. How do you think you can feed children through that?

Caterina in particular highlights the hiatus between the formalization of the top-down model by experts (the 'graduated guys' that compose the menu) and her manual effort (it's up to us to cook). Cooks resentment raises because their only measure of evaluation is children's appreciation of their meal. And in turn, their knowledge on what children like or not end up in a substantial transgression of all the rules regarding grams. Despite Caterina and Mario do their best for making the food as palatable as possible, they also know in advance when a dish is going to be a complete success or a total failure. Thus, grams start to be based on considerations other than those contained in the *capitolato*, like fondness to children or simply reduction of waste. Vegetables portions, especially during days of the "difficult ones", (e.g. broccoli or eggplants), are reduced to a minimum. Conversely, when they know that a dish is going to be particularly appreciated, they increase portions so to allow everyone to have a second and even a third serving. This happens especially with children's favourite dishes like pasta or *canederli*[6]:

> Caterina: If I know that a dish of pasta "goes strong" I put in some more kilos, or I make more portions of *canederli*. Children tell me "put in more! [laughing in the meantime], and I put in more, shouldn't I?
>
> Mario: You saw it by yourself, they raise hands, and they are hungry. How can I give them just 60g of pasta…and also, if they get back home hungry then parents come here protesting.

Also when it comes to portioning in plates, cooks tend to listen children's requests. Especially when children ask for a supersize portion of an unsuccessful meal, the cook fills the plate up to the brim. Sometimes, parents concerned with their children's weight directly ask to teachers and cooks not to give a second helping. Even in that case, if the child begs for the second helping, it is likely that he secretly receives it. As Caterina confessed me, she often hurries along the tables and does not even realize to whom she is giving the second helping. However, it also happens that she perfectly realizes she is giving a smaller second helping to a children that should not get it, just to avoid feeling guilty.

Children

Children's lunch usually lasts less than 45 minutes. The ring bell around 12:30 ratifies the beginning of a daily ritual. First and second graders are guided by teachers to the bathroom, where they supposedly wash their hands before eating. Unsurprisingly, they start throwing each other water, until the teacher interrupts the fun. Older children usually ask permission and go on their own to the bathroom. In any case, the bathroom represents a moment of private detachment from school activities because very rarely teachers get in with them. In Macerata, Poversano and Goldazzo children are not allowed to bring the home packed

[6] Canederli is a tipical dish of German and North-Italian cuisine made with stale bread, milk, and eggs.

lunch, so the bathroom becomes the perfect place for eating "bad" food items like candies or crisps behind adults' back.

Lined up in pairs, children move to the dining room, where they are repeatedly, yet vainly, asked to be quiet. The room is akin to an arena where game and play intertwine (cfr Graeber, 2015). As for the game, the lunch is lead by rule-governed actions known by all participants, with teachers as referees. All children know and understand a set of shared rules[7]: bodily posture, table manners and voice volume, just to name a few. And of course, they know very well that they should eat –or at least give a try– to all the courses. From time to time a reward can be even gained for the after-lunch, such as a longer recess. But once creativity blends with game, rules give room to sheer creativity, and the individual play aims to subvert the rules. In a way, the lunch becomes a place of legitimate challenge to the authority of the teachers.

The easiest way children can exert their agency is by refusing to eat. Rather simply, they do not respond to teachers' reprimands or invitation. Alternatively, they can even trick them with guile, as these two field notes demonstrate.

> Goldazzo: The lunch is getting to an end. In the table nearby Francesca is eating with two children. She shouts out loud against Arianna "It's not possible that you don't eat anything. [Increasing volume, getting angry] TRY SOMETHING! IT'S INCREDIBLE. EAT!" Arianna lowers the glance and crosses mine, slightly embarrassed. Francesca looks at me and says: "She never eats, never, you should sit with her". Then she looks away, and does not notice (is she pretending?) that Arianna is secretly pouring her portion of meat and salad to his tablemate.

> Macerata: Today I sit with a group of fifth grader […]. They start explaining me that they don't like the food, so I ask: "But how do you get to 4 pm?". One of them starts explaining: "For instance, our parents give us two snacks, and we save one for lunch. Sometimes we bring crisps, that's why we sit at the end of the table". And then goes on: "Why don't they cook us a Carbonara? We eat better at home, mom is better at cooking". But what's fascinating is that some of them used to cut a couple of hair, place them in the dish so to have a perfect excuse for avoid eating it. Mario explained me that this situation is creating tension between him and their parents.

Most of the time, children are just selective about what to eat. Occasionally however, they can also organize food deals with other tablemates, trading or donating meals on the base of their preferences. And in extreme cases, they can even modify the same food they are eating, in order to make it tastier. In Palermo I assisted several time to the theft of oil, salt and vinegar from teachers' table for better dressing the meal. In Macerata, one girl even brought balsamic vinegar and oil from her parents' restaurant in order "to season the cook's tasteless cuisine".

[7] In Poversano, a very big poster titled "To stay well in the canteen" reminds the most important ones. During my fieldwork, teachers also invented a challenge, ranking the four tables were children used to sit from the most quiet to the loudest, promising a last-day muffin to the table with the most positive evaluation.

In every school however, a very small minority of children appreciate everything the menu proposes. These hearty eaters usually ask and receive very abundant portions of all the meals, and they endear themselves to the cooks. In a sense, their resistance is complementary to the one exerted by their peers: they take unwanted food from their tablemates, they claim for a third or a fourth helping, and when they elude the teachers they quickly ingurgitate left-over from other tables before leaving the room.

> Goldazzo: Today there is pizza. Francesco immediately finishes his slice, and goes quickly to the table nearby holding his empty plate. When he comes back he proudly shows four portions of the mozzarella that used to be on the top of the others' pizza. He eat them all. […]. The teacher asks children to stand up and follow her to the classroom. Francesco waits for her to be out of sight, then take from a plate on another table another untouched slice. He furiously bites four-five times, and runs away with the mouth full.

Discussion and Conclusions

As Morgan and Sonnino (2008) rightly argue, the Italian school system is to take as an example when it comes to children's school canteens. Over the last 15 years, many schools have improved the rationale of the school meal: organic products have been introduced, and often nutritionists have been looking for compromises between palatability and salubrity, thus reducing food waste. Despite the science of nutrition is very weak, and often much closer to religion than to physics (Levinovitz, 2015) it is nonetheless the best way for deciding the govern of children's nutrition, and most importantly for monitoring beneficial or counterproductive intervention. Whatever critique of the medical approach on nutrition cannot rule out its *scientific* truth. However, what we still can question is precisely its epistemological root: "What will we do with that nugget, be it small or large, of the truth?" (Veyne, 2010: 8). Studies on biopedagogies at school often respond this question showing the undesirable outcomes or the side-effects (e.g. Leahy and Wright, 2016). In this paper however I try do something different, by showing how resistances to the top-down medical model on nutrition actually pop up from various sides, and are indeed constitutive part of the model itself, since "resistance is not only possible, but is always already presupposed in the exercise of power" (Flohr, 2016: 11).

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Table 1. Research Methods

Location	Average Socio-Econ. Status	Length of Stay	Participant Observation	Interviews	Focus Groups
Fedrata (Centre)	Middle	November-December 2014	Recess, School Canteen, Cuisine	Mothers (5), Doctors (1), Admin. (1), Committee (2)	Teachers (1)
Poversano (North)	Middle – Low	January-April 2015	Recess, School Canteen, Cuisine	Mothers (15), Doctors (3), Admin. (1), Committee (2)	Teachers (2)
Goldazzo (North)	Middle – High	October-February 2016	Recess, School Canteen (two turns)	Mothers (30), Doctors (3), Admin (1), Committee (1)	Teachers (2)