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Title: Book Review: Omofobia, bullismo e linguaggio giovanile by Dario Accolla

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Dario Accolla. *Omofobia, bullismo e linguaggio giovanile*. Catania, Italy: Villaggio Maori Edizioni, 2015. Pp. 200. ISBN 9788898119516. € 15 (paperback). € 9.99 (ePub).

All Italians ever so slightly deviating from the heterosexual norm that imbues the national zeitgeist are aware of the negative undercurrent relentlessly directed against any perceived gender misfit. Such condemning attitude is so intrinsic to the Italian model of approved heterosexuality to be hardly recognizable as the poisonous source of ill-conceived behaviors it truly is – the deeds it originates designed to protect and/or reinforce one’s identification with the heterosexual majority through disparagement of the “diverse.” This modus operandi has long acquired a status of ordinariness that renders it morally invisible—its harmfulness simply ignored, denied or even worse looked at as rightfully inflicted. It is not surprising that the young, busy mediating the new reality brought about by their awakening hormones, are most vulnerable to this despicable mentality, both in the role of perpetrators and, most tragically, as its victims.

Author Dario Accolla provides in his book *Omofobia, bullismo e linguaggio giovanile* a detailed picture of such disparaging stance, as it manifests in a form and within a context to him familiar. A linguist by aspiration and a teacher by profession, Accolla collects sufficient data to portray homophobic tendencies linked to bullying behaviors in the use of language among students in the school environment. The author laudably attempts to raise awareness about the characteristically biting language adopted at a very young age to discriminate, isolate, and ban anyone defying the shared ideal of a fairly toxic masculinity. The focus on linguistic forms does not necessarily preclude a more comprehensive approach when needed, including alarming reports of physical violence perpetrated against members of the LGBT community.

The book intended audience, whose attention it tries to kindle as a first step toward a badly needed change of tendency, is diverse and includes all those people interacting with students, beginning with teachers next to a possible array of pedagogical figures, to continue on to parents and other influential adult role models.

The book has a tri-segmented structure. Its first three chapters provide a general introduction to the topic of homophobia, including a historical analysis of its origins, cruel examples of LGBT persecution in Italy and across the globe, and, more specifically, the use of homophobic language paired up with bullying behaviors among the current young generations. Chapters four and five address the sociolinguistic investigation that stands at the core of the entire book, describing its methods and analyzing the results produced. Chapters six and seven seek to conclude the whole discussion on a more positive note by highlighting reformative measures taken within and out of the school boundaries, on the pedagogical and social media, if not governmental, spheres.

Accolla searches in the prehistoric human aggregates the origin of homophobic tendencies, when homosexuality directly jeopardized humans’ societal hierarchies, and the feminine male was openly feared. Such fear, and the rejection it produced, were internalized and variously staged through several millenniums of human history. Actual reports from some of the most advanced nations, and specifically Italy, demonstrate how deeply rooted the fear/rejection of homosexuality still is, and how frequently it foments acts of heinous violence.

Reminiscent of the “personal is political” feminist slogan, Accolla displays a penchant for political analysis throughout the whole book. He effortlessly shifts the focus on the legislations unsuccessfully implemented in recent years by the Italian government to address LGBT cruel predicament. The author however fails to provide adequate background information and risks losing the reader who is not equally well informed or might not believe any dramatic upgrading of the collective consciousness can effectively be induced by a legislative intervention.

On the other hand, when addressing the specific topic of Italian juvenile language, Accolla's passion for the discipline of linguistics fully manifests in his use of a highly specialized jargon, properly belonging to academic journals usually consulted only by linguists. Unconcerned with the challenge it might pose to the average reader, the author's display of linguistic terminology appears at times gratuitous, an academic identity Accolla is unwilling to drop even as it generates reoccurring tautologies for the sake of textual clarification.

The sociolinguistic qualitative study, described in chapters four and five, is based on a questionnaire distributed online to 333 subjects of ages ranging between 13 and 20 years who lived at the time in 9 major cities spread throughout north (4), center (2), and south (3) of Italy. Accolla promises, while introducing the method to the reader, to expound the criteria adopted to choose the subjects, but he never divulges this aspect of the study. A second set of data (137 texts) is collected from internet sites of public schools, discussion blogs, Facebook and Ask.com. This procedure also lacks a description of how the sources of data were selected. From a purely methodological perspective, these lacunae would suffice to invalidate the whole research results. Even if such strictness may appear out of place, a curiosity remains as to the author's dismissive attitude toward these important features of the study. It certainly strikes a weird note when compared to the thorough tone of the data analysis presented in the book.

Finally, the conclusions Accolla reaches do not sustain any powerful revelation—sort of claiming “there's water at the bottom of the ocean” to those familiar with the ocean. Still, the most important of Accolla's contributions resides in his attempt to peel off the thick layer of self-righteousness and/or indifference the homophobic monster wraps itself with, to leave its ugly nakedness exposed for everyone to see. And some people in Italy have begun to notice it.

Various associations in recent years—*Arcigay* and *Amnesty International* are examples mentioned in the book—have worked to initiate a discussion around the damage caused by homophobic behaviors. As a result, a new consciousness appears to be stirring. Accolla minutely describes the strong opposition from conservative/religious groups, and their sinister ability to swerve the Italian government course of action. But he wants to inform the reader about a grid of groups and even single open-minded operators within the educational field who orchestrate a series of activities that restrain homophobic bullying and alleviate the suffering it exacts. In the same vein, the author writes about an Italian website homologous to the famous American *It Gets Better*, created with the support of one of the largest Italian newspapers and readily adapted as didactic material accessible to educational institutions in Italy. Accolla's book could suitably serve the same purpose and would certainly be useful to any person engaging with the young generations of Italy.

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