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**Ellen Nerenberg** is Hollis Professor of Romance Languages & Literatures at Wesleyan University. With *Prison Terms: Representing Confinement During and After Italian Fascism* (University of Toronto Press, 2001), winner of the Howard S. Marraro Prize from the Modern Language Association, she is also author of *Murder Made in Italy: Homicide, Media, and Contemporary Italian Culture* (Indiana University Press, 2012). Her research interests include feminism and postfeminism in Italian and global comparative contexts, television seriality, and screen studies more generally. At present, she is co-author, with Nicoletta Marini-Maio, of *Winxology: Grooming the Future Female Consumer*. She is co-founder of *g/s/i* and Editor of the *Open Contributions* and *Continuing Discussions* sections.

**Abstract:** The editorial includes the Editors' introductions to their respective areas: Giovanna Faleschini Lerner and Nicoletta Marini-Maio discuss the Themed Section; Paola Bonifazio presents the rationale of the Invited Perspectives; and Ellen Nerenberg presents the Open Contributions and introduces the new section, Continuing Discussions, which hosts informed voices on themes developed in previous issues of *g/s/i*.

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# Reproduction, Fertility, and Parenthood: The Italian Case.

## Journal Editorial

NICOLETTA MARINI-MAIO & GIOVANNA FALESCHINI LERNER

“Where are all the bambini?” asked British journalist Fred Pearce in a brief 2005 article titled “Italy: a dying country?”<sup>1</sup> In his bewilderment, Pearce echoed the concerns circulating in political and media discourses, which have often depicted Italy as a “dying country” with a rapidly aging population. Today, Italy has de facto one of the lowest birthrates in the world, ranking alongside Portugal, Hong Kong, China, and Japan.<sup>2</sup> The dramatic decline of Italy’s birthrate is not an isolated phenomenon, but, rather, a symptomatic case of an international trend that began toward the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Western industrialized world and has expanded to most of the so-called Global North, peaking in those societies that are traditionally the most family-oriented.<sup>3</sup> The steadily declining curve was interrupted only, albeit remarkably, by the 1950s baby boom, which unfolded in the specific economic and technological context of the postwar period.<sup>4</sup> The symbolic repertoire that characterizes discourses and representations on sexuality and reproductive rights has recently acquired new distinctive features, even in popular culture, reflecting international concerns.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding the secular decline and the contemporary global magnitude of the phenomenon, in the last two decades the baby bust has been framed in Italy as a “dangerous” problem and a “demographic emergency.”<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Krause and Milena Marchesi argue that policy makers and experts have shown “heightened

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Pearce, “Italy: a Dying Country?”, *New Scientist*, 21 February 2015, 1.

<sup>2</sup> See the statistical information on fertility rate (births per woman) in *The World Bank* 2016. Web. Accessed 3 August 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN>. A map showing the trend in the countries of the Global North is also available in *The World Data Bank* 2016. Web. Accessed 3 August 2018.

<http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SP.DYN.TFRT.IN&country=>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the 2016 study on “Demography and family policies from a gender perspective” coordinated by the by the Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs of the Directorate General for Internal Policies at the European Parliament, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571394/IPOL\\_STU\(2016\)571394\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571394/IPOL_STU(2016)571394_EN.pdf) Web. Accessed 3 August 2018, Chiara Saraceno’s article “Il paradosso riproduttivo di una società a famiglia forte: Il caso della bassa fecondità in Italia,” *La questione agraria*, 1, 1 (2005), 7-28, and Ross Douthat’s analysis “Is Feminism the New Natalism?” *The Atlantic*, 8 April 2009, <https://www.theatlantic.com/personal/archive/2009/04/is-feminism-the-new-natalism/56084/>. Web. Accessed 3 August 2018. For a nuanced definition of the Global North, see “The Global North/South Divide,” *Royal Geographical Society*, Web. Accessed 3 August 2018.

<sup>4</sup> In their study “The Baby Boom and the Baby Bust,” Jeremy Greenwood, Ananth Seshadri, and Guillaume Vandenbroucke point out that, “The fertility of American women over the last 200 years has two salient features [...]. First, it has declined drastically. The average white woman bore 7 children in 1800. By 1990 this had dropped to just 2. This decline in fertility ran unabated during the 140-year period between 1800 and 1940. Second, fertility showed a surprising recovery between the mid- 1940s and mid-1960s. The upturn was large, a ‘baby boom.’” *The American Economic Review*, 95, 1 (March 2005): 184. In “Baby booms, busts, and population ageing in the developed world,” David S. Reher examines the demographic changes and fertility cycle in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in 27 nations and discusses new policies to face the issue. *Population Studies*, 69, 1 (2015): 57–68 DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2014.963421>. These two sources on the topic of the baby bust/baby boom phenomenon are part of an ample literature on birthrate decline, that has been studied in a variety of fields and from different approaches.

<sup>5</sup> As just an arbitrary but meaningful selection showing such concerns, see the *New York Times* articles “Scientist Can Design ‘Better’ Babies. Should They?”, by Clyde Haberman, 10 June 2018 and “*The New York Times*, produced by Retro Report, 12 September 2017. The second article makes reference to the internationally acclaimed TV series *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Daniel Wilson Productions, Inc., Littlefield, White Oak, and MGM Television. 2017), adapted from Margaret Atwood’s eponymous novel (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985). The two articles are available, respectively, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/10/us/11retro-baby-genetics.html> and <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/politics/100000005417578/the-fight-over-womens-bodies.html>. Web. Accessed August 3 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth L. Krause and Milena Marchesi, Fertility Politics as ‘Social Viagra’: Reproducing Boundaries, Social Cohesion, and Modernity in Italy,” *American Anthropologist*, 109, 2 (2007): 350.

concern over the future of Italy in terms of social cohesion, economic viability, and modern status,” and that their preoccupations have acted as “social Viagra.”<sup>7</sup>

From a macrohistorical perspective, human reproductive capabilities have always furnished a battleground for moral, religious, socio-economic, and political concerns. From the Middle Ages to the present, the key phases of procreation (i.e., conception, pregnancy, birth, and parenthood) have been used in most cultures and power systems to police moral and social behaviors, exercise control over cultural and political discourses, and regulate family policies and demographic trends. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and, in some cases, through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in European Catholic countries like Ireland and Italy unwed mothers were shamed and forced to give up their children through a system of foundlings’ homes, while also providing financial support for their upkeep, whereas fathers were released from any such responsibility.<sup>8</sup>

Sexuality and reproduction have also been central to definitions of gender and sexuality, race, citizenship, ethnicity, and religion. In the last decades they have intersected with issues related to civil and human rights, medical technologies, and biopolitics. For example, while the institution of heterosexual marriage has been used as a way to regulate female sexuality since antiquity, the legalization of same-sex marriage, though a powerful symbol of equality, according to some of its critics also runs the risk of forcing non-heterosexual individuals into a model of heterosexual normativity that stifles alternative forms of sexual relationship outside that of the monogamous couple.<sup>9</sup> In the Italian colonies of the Horn of Africa, anti-miscegenation laws prohibited inter-racial sexual relations, with particularly harsh provisions for Italian women who had relationships with African men.<sup>10</sup> In contemporary Italy, citizenship is attributed through *jus sanguinis*, which requires at least one parent of Italian citizenship in order to be an Italian citizen at birth. Italy has fully transitioned from the agrarian society that it once was, characterized by a strong Catholic identity, to a country where the percentage of newborns who are baptized within the Catholic Church has dropped from 90% to 70% in the last ten years.<sup>11</sup> The referenda on the legalization of abortion and divorce in 1974 and 1981 showed a profound divide within the nation, between those who embraced a secular view of the state, informed also by the feminist battles for women’s rights in the 1970s, and those who remained attached to church teachings in matters of family ethics.

Concerns about Italy’s natality rates continue to emerge, especially against the background of media’s and politicians’ representations of migration as an “invasion” and a menace of “reproductive excess.”<sup>12</sup> In 2016, then Health Minister Beatrice Lorenzin launched the pronatalist #FertilityDay

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>8</sup> See David Kertzer, *Sacrificed for Honor: Italian Infant Abandonment and the Politics of Reproductive Control*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) and Brian Pullan, *Tolerance, Regulation and Rescue: Disboured Women and Abandoned Children in Italy, 1300-1800* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> On the question of marriage as a tool for policing women’s sexuality, see David Kertzer and Richard Saller, eds., *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993). On the ambivalence raised by the legalization of gay marriage among some queer thinkers, see Judith Bourne and Caroline Derry, *Gender and the Law* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> On racial anxieties in colonial and postcolonial Italy, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities. Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and David Fogacs, *Italy’s Margins. Social Exclusion and Nation Formation Since 1861*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> For this statistic, see “Il figlio di Fedez e il battesimo: in Italia solo il 70% dei nuovi nati riceve il sacramento.” *Il Corriere della Sera*, 24 July 2018. [https://www.corriere.it/cronache/18\\_luglio\\_24/figlio-fedez-battesimo-italia-solo-70percento-nuovi-nati-riceve-sacramento-af3e378a-8f13-11e8-84b6-8543850c3d94.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cronache/18_luglio_24/figlio-fedez-battesimo-italia-solo-70percento-nuovi-nati-riceve-sacramento-af3e378a-8f13-11e8-84b6-8543850c3d94.shtml). Web. Accessed 25 July 2018.

<sup>12</sup> On the idea of “invasion,” see Hein De Haas, “The Myth of Invasion: The Inconvenient Realities of African Migration to Europe.” *Third World Quarterly*, 29.7 (2008):1305-1322. DOI: [10.1080/01436590802386435](https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590802386435). On reproductive excess, see Milena Marchesi, “Reproducing Italians: Contested Biopolitics in the Age of ‘Replacement Anxiety.’” *Anthropology & Medicine*, 19.2 (2012):171-188. DOI: [10.1080/13648470.2012.675043](https://doi.org/10.1080/13648470.2012.675043).

campaign, targeting emerging manifestations of “biopanic,” or fears related to fertility and age, as well as ethnic and racial anxieties.<sup>13</sup> The campaign aroused both anger and dismay that it promoted a proto-fascist view of fertility and reproduction as a patriotic duty, as did the more recent campaign by Chicco, producer of equipment and toys for children and babies. In their [video ad](#), distributed on television during the 2018 FIFA World Cup, Chicco suggested that each soccer World Cup victory resulted in a baby boom—and invited viewers to have sex and produce children, for Italy, tragically excluded from the World Cup.<sup>14</sup> “Abbiamo bisogno di bambini,” recited the voice over, “bambini che ci aiuteranno a crescere portando l’Italia dove è giusto che stia. Facciamolo per l’Italia.” (We need children [...], children who will help us grow and take Italy where it is right for Italy to be. Let’s do it for Italy). However tongue-in-cheek the ad meant to be, the reactions it provoked again showed a deeply divided nation, with Giorgia Meloni, leader of the conservative party, Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy), reposting the video on social media as a positive message, while a majority of progressive critics commented on several incongruities and misconceptions in the ad—for example, the “fake news” that a baby boom followed the 2006 Italian World Cup victory.

In addition to this “biopanic,” in Italy and in other western countries the response to the demographic crisis has included the reconfiguration of the “maternal feminine” as a highly visible individual, whose commodified and sexualized body (Littler’s “yummy mommy”) is no longer confined to spaces of domesticity but instead occupies a prominent place in the public sphere.<sup>15</sup> Breastfeeding advocacy groups, motherhood support groups, “momoirs,” and mommy blogs have proliferated on-line as community building instruments of solidarity, employed also to share personal narratives of liberation, self-awareness, and desire. As critics have observed, however, despite their emancipatory promises, some of these forms ultimately reinforce the idea of “intensive mothering” and “perfect motherhood”—concepts associated with postfeminist celebrations of motherhood as empowerment.<sup>16</sup> This notion interpellates mostly white, heterosexual, economically privileged women, to the exclusion of women of color, queer, single, childless, or poor women.<sup>17</sup> This “new momism,” moreover, obliterates the experience of migrant women who are mothers.

It is important to distinguish the “new momism” from Corrado Alvaro’s *mammismo* (momism) or with the myth of the *mamma italiana*.<sup>18</sup> Penelope Morris and Perry Wilson analyze and deconstruct

<sup>13</sup> See Larisa Corda, Amita Khanapure, and Mahantesh Karoshi, “Biopanic, advanced maternal age and fertility outcomes,” in Mahantesh Karoshi, ed. *A textbook of preconceptional medicine and management* (Wetheral: Sapiens, 2012), pp. 1-16.

<sup>14</sup> “Baby boom,” *Chicco*, 10 July 2018. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upxsL\\_Wm\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upxsL_Wm_U). Web. Accessed 8 August 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Jo Littler, “The Rise of the ‘Yummy Mummy’: Popular Conservatism and the Neoliberal Maternal in Contemporary British Culture,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 6.2 (2013), pp. 227–243. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12010>. See also Angela McRobbie, “Feminism, the Family and the New ‘Mediated’ Maternalism,” *new formations: a journal of culture/theory/politics*, 80-81 (2013), pp. 119-137; Loredana Lipperini, *Di mamma ce n’è più d’una* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2013), and Imogen Tyler, “Pregnant Beauty: Maternal Femininities under Neoliberalism,” in *New Femininities Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, pp. 21-36 (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> For critical discussions of postfeminist infiltrations of discourses on femininity and motherhood, please see Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), Diane Negra, *What a Girl Wants? Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), and Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women* (New York: Free Press, 2004). For an analysis of postfeminism and the genre of the maternal memoir (or momoir) see Marina Bettaglio, “Maternal Momoirs in Contemporary Italy,” *To Be or Not to Be a Mother: Choice, Refusal, Reluctance and Conflict. Motherhood and Female Identity in Italian Literature and Culture*, eds. Laura Lazzari and Joy Charnley, special issue of *intervalla* 1 (2016), pp. 47-60.

<sup>17</sup> See Douglas and Michaels, *The Mommy Myth*, and also Alessandra Gribaldo and Giovanna Zapperi, *Lo schermo del potere. Femminismo e regime della visibilità* (Verona: Ombre corte, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> On *mammismo*, see Corrado Alvaro, “Il *mammismo*,” in *Il nostro tempo e la speranza* (Milano: Bompiani, 1952), pp. 183-190. On stereotypes of the Italian mother, see Marina D’Amelia, *La mamma* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005) and Silvana

the stereotype of *mammismo* as inherent in the Italian national character, in their 2018 edited volume, *La mamma. Interrogating a National Stereotype*. They also highlight the paradox of the “obstacle course” that mothers face in a country, whose men are stereotypically perceived as idolizing their mothers.<sup>19</sup> Despite comparatively generous leave provisions for childbirth, Italian working parents struggle to find affordable child care options for their young children, and rely heavily on their own parents and family networks. Familism thus remains a trait of Italian society even while gender roles within the family are evolving toward greater equality.<sup>20</sup>

The coexistence of these conflicting discourses related to cultural representations of procreation, political and religious control, media campaigns, family policies, masculinity, and feminist and postfeminist configurations of femininity shapes the landscape of contemporary Italian society. Despite the increasing secularization of the country, the Catholic Church continues to exercise tremendous influence on Italian public opinion. Its official position on such issues as contraception, abortion, and some forms of assisted reproduction continues to clash with women’s free access to sexual health through the local *consultori* (free sexual health clinics), a social right secured in the 1970s. Seventy per cent of gynecologists are *obiettori di coscienza* (conscientious objectors) and would not provide abortions, while at the same time the political debate on a number of related topics like pro-life/pro-choice positions, surrogate maternity, gay marriage, and adoption by homosexual couples and single parents is heating up. The availability of increasingly sophisticated technologies of assisted reproduction finds its counterpoint in the natural and home birth movement.

The current issue of *g/s/i* 5 contextualizes, and historicizes, the Italian case looking at cultural behaviors, media discourses, and cinematic representations related to reproduction, fertility and parenthood. Genetic, gestational, and social mothers are presented in light of socio-cultural and feminist concerns for maternity and technology as well as postfeminist figurations of motherhood.<sup>21</sup> Demographic anxieties and natalism are discussed in the contexts of contemporary migration and globalization, governmental control and biopolitics, family law, feminist contestations, and reproductive rights and contraception. The focus on motherhood and paternity has also invited critical commentary on other parental models and roles. Current debates on surrogacy, non-heteronormative parental roles, and re-naturalization of pregnancy and maternity (particularly the case of breastfeeding) are analyzed in children’s literature, film, and public and media discourses. The scholars who contributed to this issue of *g/s/i* display the diversity of disciplinary approaches and methodologies that questions of reproduction, fertility, and parenthood invite.

Beginning with motherhood, Alessandro Bellassai focuses on misogynistic manipulations of the maternal in “Di mamma ce n’è una sola. Misoginia maschile e rappresentazione del materno nella storia italiana contemporanea” (There is only one Mom. Male misogyny and representation of the maternal in Italian contemporary history). Bellassai draws on a variety of popular and scientific sources to demonstrate and analyze how virilist and misogynistic ideologies reinforced certain normative views of the maternal in order to guarantee the continuation of patriarchal power structures at a time of rapid modernization in Italy. Bellassai shows that discourses of femininity strictly related it to its reproductive and care-giving functions—thus excluding women from those spheres of action that were deemed incompatible with their “natural” functions and duties. By tracing their evolution from the late nineteenth century to the 2000s, Bellassai also highlights the subtle adaptations that these

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Patriarca, “Mammismo/Momism: On the History and Uses of a Stereotype, c.1940s to the Present,” in *La mamma: Interrogating a National Stereotype*, eds. Penelope Morris and Perry Wilson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 29-50.

<sup>19</sup> On the idea of the obstacle course, see Chiara Saraceno, “The Obstacle Course of Motherhood in Italy,” in *La mamma: Interrogating a National Stereotype*, pp. 215-235.

<sup>20</sup> Elisabetta Ruspini, “Italian Forms of Masculinity Between Familism and Social Change,” *Cultura, Society & Masculinities* 1, 2 (2009), pp. 121-136.

<sup>21</sup> On maternity and technology, see Rosi Braidotti 1999.



discourses enact, moving, for example, from representations of women as inferior to new forms of misogynistic representation based on gender diversity or complementarity.

Maria Elena D'Amelio expands this consideration of the construction of gender roles within the family by focusing on fatherhood in “‘The Ideal Man’: Amedeo Nazzari, Fatherhood, and Italy’s Melodramatic Masculinity.” D’Amelio traces the arc of Nazzari’s cinematic career, from pre-war cinema, in which Nazzari impersonated the war hero, to his post-war roles as a fatherly figure in a series of melodramas directed by Raffaello Matarazzo from 1949 to 1954. She analyzes Nazzari’s pre- and post-war roles against their cultural and semiotic background, highlighting fascist and post-war conceptualizations of heroism, constructed, respectively, as military virility and suffering masculinity related to national discourses of paternity. D’Amelio main argument is that the dynamics of Italian actor Amedeo Nazzari’s stardom served to redefine conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, class, and national identity during the transition from Fascism to democracy.

Paola Bonifazio’s article “The Secret Pill: AIED, *Fotoromanzi*, and Sexual Education in 1970s Italy” examines an interesting corpus of *fotoromanzi* sponsored in 1975 by Associazione Italiana per l’Educazione Demografica (AIED) as part of a larger campaign effort to educate Italians on sexual health, specifically on birth control and the contraceptive pill. Based on meticulous archival research, the essay adopts an interdisciplinary methodology that combines a transhistorical perspective with cultural studies and celebrity studies, focusing on the context in which the AIED *fotoromanzi* were conceived, advertised, and distributed. Bonifazio convincingly demonstrates that the communicative strategy of the AIED’s campaign followed the North American tradition of educational media, but showed a deep understanding of the *fotomanzo* as a medium within Italian culture. The strategic choice to engage with Italian celebrity culture, Bonifazio argues, allowed AIED *fotomanzi* to address not only the issue of contraception, but also that of sexual rights for both men and women in a country that in the 1970s was still predominantly patriarchal.

Mattia Lento’s article, “Emigrazione, maternità ed emancipazione ne *Il valore della donna è il suo silenzio*” (Emigration, maternity, and emancipation in *Il valore della donna è il suo silenzio*) takes an approach informed by New Film History to the Swiss-German co-production *Il valore della donna è il suo silenzio* (1980), a docu-fiction by Gertrud Pinkus. This film centers on the story of a woman who leaves southern Italy to emigrate to Germany with her husband, and her experiences as a wife and mother—her isolation and alienation in a foreign country, her reproductive choices, and gender relationship within her family. Lento carefully reconstructs the genesis of the film and the political ramifications of its circulation and reception among Italian migrant women in Switzerland. The film, Lento claims, overthrows the patriarchal and misogynistic assumption of the title, that the value of a woman is her silence, by giving voice to a woman and her story. The film, moreover, is a unique attempt to offer a gendered representation of the Italian migrant experience in northern Europe.

Another article that focuses on diasporic identities and migration, but shifts its attention to masculine reproductivity is “Media-ting ‘Sterile Masculinity’: On Male Aging, Migration, and Biopolitics in a (post)Berlusconi Italy,” by Lisa Dolasinski. Dolasinski opens with an analysis of the Berlusconi phenomenon that draws on Leed Edelman’s concept of “reproductive futurism,” as well as Ida Dominijanni’s and Lorenzo Bernini’s psychoanalytic and biopolitical critiques.<sup>22</sup> Dolasinski argues that contemporary understandings of masculinity, race, and national belonging are strongly influenced by the ideological legacy of fascism and the biopolitics of *Berlusconismo*, which lend authority

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<sup>22</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Ida Dominijanni, *Il trucco. Sessualità e biopolitica nella fine di Berlusconi* (Roma: Ediesse, 2014); Lorenzo Bernini, “Not in my name: il corpo osceno del tiranno e la catastrofe della virilità,” in *Filosofia di Berlusconi: L’essere e il nulla nell’Italia del Cavaliere*, ed. Carlo Chiurco (Verona: Ombre corte, 2011).

to racist and marginalizing views of non-white, foreign male bodies. Through her close reading of one migrant male character in Andrea Segre's *Io sono Li* (*Shun Li and the Poet*, 2011), the aging Bepi, Dolasinski proposes the notion of “sterile masculinity” as defying heteronormativity, patriarchal and misogynistic views, and pushing notions of belonging that do not depend on citizenship or national and ethnic identity. She thus argues for a notion of sterility that is reconfigured in positive, productive sense as an alternative to the biopanic fostered by Minister Lorenzin's Fertility Day campaign.

In “Mistica della maternità: nuove repressioni ‘secondo natura’” (The maternity mystique: new oppressions ‘according to nature’) Giuditta Bassano and Aura Tiralongo engage critically, and polemically, with the widespread revival of the myth of the “natural mother” to demonstrate how this oppressive construct aims at creating normative pressure on women's freedom and self-determination. The object of analysis of this article is a corpus of healthcare campaigns in social media and Italian press outlets focusing on natural breastfeeding and diet recommendations during and after pregnancy. The authors' socio-semiotic perspective and activist intent are skillfully mingled in this essay, which effectively unveils the ideological, cultural, and historically constructed concept of “naturalness” in pregnancy and maternity. This study is the result of rigorous research performed on an abundance of social, medical, legal, and media sources.

Giovanna Faleschini Lerner draws on Italian, French, and North American feminist thought to analyze contemporary discourses of motherhood in three Italian web series: Ivan Cotroneo's *Una mamma imperfetta* (2013), Eva Milella's and Elisa Giani's *Malamamma* (2013), and Alessandra Bonzi's *Oh mamma mia* (2015). Though these series are animated by an explicit desire to escape notions of intensive mothering and perfect motherhood, Faleschini Lerner argues that they are not exempt from the pervasiveness of postfeminist ideology, and ultimately confirm the power structures they aim to challenge or even subvert. This is particularly evident in the depiction of exclusively white, affluent, and heterosexual family models, and in the representation of paternal figures as subaltern to the parental authority of mothers—thus reinforcing traditional family structures and roles rather than upending them.

Tatiana Motterle and Corinna Guerzoni examine the controversial theme of medically assisted procreation in “Sul corpo delle surrogate. Analisi del discorso pubblico italiano sulla gestazione per altri” (On the surrogates' bodies. An analysis of Italian public discourse on gestation for others). Culling from the notion of “cultural anomaly” as theorized by anthropologist Mary Douglas, the authors discuss the intersections of medically assisted procreation with scientific ethics, law, re/production and motherhood, emphasizing the many doubts and concerns that this practice raises on many levels. Their analysis is intentionally broad: it spans from the legal and political kernels of the debate to the feminist and feminist-lesbian anti-surrogacy positions. The authors maintain that the public debate on this topic in Italy lacks of depth and does not take into account the complexities of medically assisted procreation, thus contributing to stigmatizing and victimizing the women involved in the practice of surrogacy.

Dalila Forni's article “Verso la decostruzione dei ruoli genitoriali: il caso degli albi illustrati arcobaleno in Italia” (Toward the deconstruction of parental roles: the case of rainbow picture books in Italy) examines the landscape of Italian children's literature on same-sex families. Framing her analysis within theories of education, she presents an overview of the topic to then discuss specific samples of *albi*. Forni's meticulous investigation of the picture books' visual patterns and rhetorical strategies demonstrates that the *albi* reflect both Italian society's demographic changes and lack of preparedness with regard to gender identity and non-heteronormative families. Forni argues that picture books on same-sex families have the potential to promote diversity, foster inclusion, and deconstruct stereotyped heteronormative parental roles.

*Invited Perspectives: Reproduction, Fertility, Maternity*  
PAOLA BONIFAZIO

In this issue of *Invited Perspectives*, we host various scholars and artists whose expertise and experiences relate to the topics of the themed section. In the collaborative article titled “#FertilityDay e #FertilityFake. Una campagna di comunicazione pubblica e i suoi esiti inattesi,” Marco Binotto, Paola Panarese, and Stefania Parisi analyze the semantic dimension of the communication campaign sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Health in 2016 to promote the so-called “Fertility Day,” an initiative allegedly aimed at addressing the national problem of the country’s low birth rate. Their contribution provides an informed and stimulating discussion of the campaign as well as of the counter-campaign that went viral on the web, which attacked the ideological underpinnings of the governmental project through an ironic gaze. In addition to a sociological inquiry on the content of these events, considered as communicative texts, the authors shed light on the focal points of the document “*Piano Nazionale per la fertilità*,” which served as basis for the governmental campaign.

The heated debate generated by the “Fertility Day” and its communication campaign urges us, in Claudia Mantovani’s words, to review the nexus between health policies, demographic questions, and gender roles. In light of her published scholarship on the history of eugenics, and her current research interest in demographic and reproductive policies in Italy, she examines the historical foundation of this nexus in “La fertilità è un bene comune? Il ‘fertility day’ in una prospettiva storica.” The article surveys the history of the public debate on reproduction in Italy in its development: from the first half of the Twentieth century to Fascism, whose shadow is particularly important in the opposition to the 2016 campaign, up to the postwar period, when the discussion on reproductivity and birth control was strictly related to that on the legalization of abortion.

In “New challenges for human reproduction: ‘cross-border reproductive care’ and ‘social egg freezing,’” Lia Lombardi investigates the practices of ART (Assisted Reproductive Technology) through a sociological approach, with an eye to the political and legal issues relating to the process of the medicalization of human reproduction. A widely debated theoretical question, the relationship between technology and human reproduction frames Lombardi’s discussion on gender and social inequalities generated through the reproductive technology market. In particular, Lombardi convincingly highlights how practices such as “cross-border reproductive care” and “social egg freezing” determine new forms of exploitation of the reproductive body of poorer women, and reveal the increased tendency to solve social problems using medical tools and approaches.

Finally, we have invited two artists to speak about their works and the ways in which these engage with the topics of reproduction, fertility, and maternity. In “Tutto parte da me: Alina Marazzi, regista,” Nicoletta Marini-Maio produced a video-essay from an interview with the acclaimed filmmaker. The interview is presented in alternate editing with clips from Marazzi’s experimental non-fiction films *Un’ora sola ti vorrei* and *Vogliamo anche le rose*, and her stylistically hybrid theatrical feature *Tutto parla di te*. The goal of Marini-Maio’s video-essay is to unpack, in conversation with the filmmaker, the discourse of maternity that is constructed in the films’ narratives revolving around both historical and fictional mothers. In her performances and video-art projects, Francesca Lolli also “starts from herself” in order to speak about gender issues, in their social and political contexts. Among her works, “Ri-Generazione” focuses on the relationship between femininity, fertility and creativity the first, while “Dolorosa Mater” uses the archetypic figure to represent the paradoxical condition of women today, forced to abide by gender-based double-standards and to being silent. Embodying these feminine characters, Lolli hopes that her own physical experience of re-generation, silencing, and sufferance can affect the public and trigger their reactions.



*Open Contributions and Continuing Discussions*  
ELLEN NERENBERG

“Open Contributions” and “Continuing Discussions” provide forums both for research on topics congenial to the journal’s mission but which may not dovetail with the theme of that issue of issue as well as research that responds to themes from previous issues.

The non-themed section of *g/s/i* 5 features Silvia Valisa’s exploration of “Cosa scrivevano le donne di fine Ottocento?” (What did women write at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?). This essay is painstaking and scrupulous in its reconstruction of Italy’s contributions to the *Woman’s Building Library* at the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893. The Columbian Exposition’s library, its context, and contents, affords the opportunity to regard late-19th Century Italian women’s writing in an international arena. Valisa’s inviting essay urges us to beyond the works and words of Italy’s three best-known female authors of the era (Neera, Serao, and Marchesa Columbi) and into a vibrant, sometimes chaotic, genre-defying world of women’s writing and thinking of the time. Valisa shines a light on the gaps and idiosyncrasies of the Exposition’s non-taxonomical display of books that seemed to have no regard to genre, or even “quality”. Rather than impose thematic continuities, Valisa embraces the Library’s aporias and meditates on what such gaps might signify. In so doing, she brings Italian female authors’ works into proximity with those of women writers representing other nations at the World’s Fair. What results is an enrichment of our understanding of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century women’s writing that is at once Italian and international.

In “Continuing Discussions,” *g/s/i* 5 includes an essay following on the topic of gender and language that was the theme for *g/s/i* 3 (2016), guest edited by Michela Baldo (University of Hull, UK), Fabio Corbisiero, and Pietro Maturi (both from Università di Napoli Federico II, Italy). In his article “‘Gay ti viene proprio male... continue a dire frocio.’ La variazione diastratica e il politicamente corretto nella lingua del film *Perfetti sconosciuti*” (‘Gay doesn’t come easy to you ...keep saying faggot’: Diastratic variation and political correctness in the language of *Perfetti sconosciuti*), Ettore Marchetti proposes a sociolinguistic examination of Paolo Genovese’s 2016 film *Perfetti sconosciuti*. The essay probes the film’s variations in diaphasia (the situational context) as well as those that are diastratic (references to social and professional status) in order to concentrate specifically on strategies for addressing the topic of homosexuality. What emerges from this salutary focus is a study of the configuration of socio-economic, class, and regional markers that attach to gendered stereotypes in contemporary spoken Italian.

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