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**Abstract:** This paper parses the discourses of family, the nation and deviance in contemporary Italy. It questions how Italy’s far-right paints both queer Italians and recent immigrants as a dual threat to the proper national family. Queer subjects menace because they are thought too non-reproductive. Foreigners are, instead, considered *too* reproductive, as immigrants’ birthrates have come to outpace those of Italian-born women. In this logic, the national family is always-already heterosexual and bound to propagate straight, racially-similar individuals. More specifically, this paper offers a close-reading of Alessandra Mussolini’s critique of Vladimir Luxuria on the TV show *Porta a porta*. In that appearance, Mussolini famously declared “meglio fascista che frocio!”; furthermore, she identifies homosexuals, transgender people, and “extracomunitari” as an “outside” menace, threatening the beleaguered national family—personified in the seemingly sympathetic figure of the *mamma*. Family is here both a sign of racial/sexual continuity and a source of increasing anxiety. The latter half of this paper examines queer denunciations of Mussolini’s rhetoric, inviting a rethinking of the supposed distance between the insulted and the insulter.

**Keywords:** Vladimir Luxuria, transgender, Fascism, Mussolini, race, immigration.

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# “Meglio fascista che frocio!”: Denouncing the National Family in Modern Italy

CHRISTOPHER ATWOOD

In an episode of *Porta a Porta* that aired March 9 2006, Alessandra Mussolini, the granddaughter of Benito Mussolini, debated Vladimir Luxuria and Antonio di Pietro. Emblazoned behind the guests was the topic of the day: “IMMIGRATI: DUE RICETTE PER L’INTEGRAZIONE” / (IMMIGRANTS: TWO FORMULAS FOR INTEGRATION).<sup>1</sup> A photo projected behind them depicts a woman holding a baby, her head covered in an Islamic *hijab* (head scarf). Then leader of *Alternativa sociale*, Mussolini articulated outright hostility to immigration. Roberto Castelli, Minister of Justice in Berlusconi’s government and former head of the *Lega Nord* block, sat next to Mussolini. Whereas Mussolini and Castelli voiced distaste for rising immigration into Italy, di Pietro and Luxuria stressed that poverty, not a desire to alter what it means to be Italian, pushes people to leave their places of origin and come to Italy.

Openly transgender, Luxuria was at the time *Rifondazione comunista*’s candidate for the House of Deputies; she is also an LGBT activist, a writer, a reality TV star and actress. Di Pietro, a judge turned politician, is founder of the anti-corruption party *L’Italia dei valori*. Scolding Luxuria and di Pietro, Mussolini said:

Gli extracomunitari...sembra che tu non li puoi toccare. Sembra un tabù. Stanno diventando e sta diventando una società, la vostra società, il vostro modello di società ... quasi uno si deve vergognare a dire, “Sono sposata, io sono sposata in chiesa — io sono sposata in chiesa e ho tre figli.”<sup>2</sup>

Visibly agitated, Mussolini then stated: “quello che voglio difendere è una società fondata sul matrimonio. E c’è ed è un valore costituzionale. Così come io voglio difendere i figli nati al di fuori dal matrimonio, così come io devo difendere tutto ciò che può rubare ai figli, che può rubare agli italiani diritti, sicurezze, lavoro. È questo che noi dobbiamo difendere.”<sup>3</sup>

Upon first uttering the word “figli” (children), the camera pans to the T.V. screens behind Mussolini. It zooms in on the image of the Muslim woman cradling an infant, visually framing the debate in terms of immigrants’ *fecondità* (fertility) and, by implication, Italian-born women’s falling *natalità* (birth rates). Absent from the show are flesh-and-blood migrants. Immigrants remain a body without a voice.

My essay looks at the implications of this debate and the responses it garnered in LGBT civil society. The first half argues that Mussolini tries and fails to draw an impermeable border between “noi” (we) (Italian, straight, married) and “loro” (they) (foreign, queer, unmarried). In order to believe in that confine, Mussolini must linguistically expel the *frocio* and foreigner from the nation – a position undermined by the shifts in demography and social norms she also decries. The essay’s latter part then traces LGBT retorts to the far right. In protest flyers and posters, insults are cited and reworked. In insisting on quoting the affront, there is a refusal to cleave critique from the

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<sup>1</sup> *Porta a Porta*. “Immigrati: due ricette per l’integrazione.” Interview by Bruno Vespa. RAI Uno, March 9 2006. The term “ricetta” in Italian carries with it multiple meanings—including “recipe,” “formula” and “prescription.”

<sup>2</sup> “Immigrants [*gli extracomunitari*], it seems like you can’t touch them, it seems like a taboo. They’re becoming, it’s becoming... your society, your model of society [...] one almost has to be ashamed to say: ‘I was married in church, I was married in church and I have three children.’”

<sup>3</sup> “What I want to defend is a society founded on marriage. And, it already exists and it is a constitutional right. Just like I want to defend children born outside of marriage, I must defend [against] all that can be robbed from the children, that can be robbed from Italians: rights, security, work. This is what we need to stick up for [defend].” *Porta a Porta*, “Immigrati,” March 9 2006.

offense behind it. At the same time, there is an effort to invite others – including those who sought to shame queers or migrants – to feel something like the pain of social exclusion. The border between “io” (I) and “l’altro” (the Other) becomes a site of fraught contact. This insistence of relationality across difference is, ultimately, what defines queer *denuncia*.<sup>4</sup>

What starts in *Porta a Porta* as a debate over foreign-born migrants soon morphs into a discussion over the contours of the Italian family.<sup>5</sup> According to Mussolini, this family needs protection from the twinned threats of foreigners and sexual deviants. In the ensuing exchange, she evokes two Italies. In hers, marriage between a man and a woman is the basis for national society and cross-generational continuity. The alternate view, which she ascribes to Luxuria and di Pietro, would instead guard the rights of homosexuals and migrants at the expense of the blameless Italian family.

To Mussolini, *extracomunitari* (non-EU migrants) and queer people are neither familiar nor part of the national family.<sup>6</sup> Here, Mussolini limns a normative vision of Italian society against the new normal immigrants and queer Italians are made to embody. Given Italian-born women’s low birth rates, however, a married mother of three does not represent a widespread sociological fact in contemporary Italy.<sup>7</sup> According to the non-partisan Istituto nazionale di statistica (ISTAT), Italian-born women had an average of 1.31 children in 2009. That same year, foreign-born women living in Italy gave birth to an average of 2.23 children.<sup>8</sup> In 2006, women residing in Italy averaged 1.35 children each.<sup>9</sup> Invoked to stand in for the national body politic, this fertile Italian mother is, then, a rhetorical figure. Mussolini deploys her in order to trace the borders of who *should* be thought of as “Italian” and who should not be allowed within Italy’s symbolic borders—whether they be menacingly reproductive (immigrants) or Italians who “fail” to procreate (queers).

Alarm over Italians’ ability to generate a *specific* family form — ethnically Italian, married, child-rearing and heterosexual -- is voiced as a general concern for “the family.”<sup>10</sup> Mussolini says that the Italian mother risks displacement by immigrants and their progeny. Construing shifts in Italy’s demography —including children with at least one foreign parent, out-of-wedlock births, and Italian-born women’s lower birth rates— as a foreign menace, Mussolini gives voice to what Elizabeth Krause calls a “cultural politics of threatened whiteness, of threatened economic privilege,

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Jonathan Mullins, Valeria Castelli, and Alessandra Montalbano for their insightful readings of my piece. In addition, I would like to thank Barbara Spackman for her probing questions and incisive critiques – my writing is better because of you.

<sup>5</sup> For a history of cultural shifts in Europe leading to “alternative visions of the family,” see: Ginsborg, “Measuring the Distance,” 46-63.

<sup>6</sup> Literally referring to people not in the European Community, the Italian word *extracomunitario* also evokes what historian Paul Ginsborg calls “strong overtones of exclusion, [...] describing those who lay outside of the national community.” See, Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents*, 62.

<sup>7</sup> See, Krause, *Crisis of Births*, 2005. Krause notes that many media outlets and professional demographers refer to a “crisis” of low birth-rates in Italy, implying that Italy—and its social body—is graying, stagnant and quasi-moribund. Krause goes on to discuss how this “crisis” is often cited by alarmist, nativist politicians who strive to give the impression that Western culture, Christianity, and the white majority are all threatened by a rising “global” population, 2-5.

<sup>8</sup> “Natalità e fecondità della popolazione residente: caratteristiche e tendenze recenti.” Istituto nazionale di statistica (ISTAT), published September 14, 2011, <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2011/09/natalita-fecondita.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> “Fertility Rates for Low Birth-Rate Countries, 1995 to Most Recent Year.” Population Reference Bureau, published October 31, 2007, <https://www.prb.org/newfertilityrates/>.

<sup>10</sup> On the role of ethnic conceptions of the “family” in the development of Italian national identity, see: Banti, *Sublime madre nostra*.

and of threatened patriarchy.”<sup>11</sup> And yet, in marshalling fears of diluted whiteness, Mussolini first cites a non-threatening and, in fact, beloved figure: the *mamma*.

Aversion to immigrants is sold as a seemingly unobjectionable concern for mothers. Through this sympathetic figure, racist fears are stoked and, simultaneously, masked as a “love” of the family. Sara Ahmed says that it is wrong to consider “love” and “hate” as separate, incongruent, affects. In her view, a subject experiencing hate tends to see itself “under threat by imagined others whose proximity threatens, not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth, and so on), but to take the place of the subject.”<sup>12</sup> The reviled other is perceived “as a threat to the object of love.”<sup>13</sup> To feel hatred for something or someone is to have already incorporated that imagined other inside one’s own emotional life.

Read in this light, the claim that Italy was once stably “us” and only recently adulterated needs unpacking. Belief in Italians’ cultural uniformity is a reaction to the very “outsider” that is said to water down “our” Italianness. Only after highlighting immigrants’ presence on the nation can Mussolini and Castelli then slur the regional differences *within* Italy into a uniform national “noi.” Retroactively sketched as internally cohesive prior to foreigners’ arrival, the “we” Mussolini defends emerges in a here-and-now already touched —intimately constituted— by a “them.” Far from signifying a historical identity, the “we” uttered here is an antagonistic response to Italy’s multicultural present.

The nation’s symbolic limits, I am claiming, are sustained through the discursive and material exclusion of those who do not replicate continuity: the queer, the migrant, and the ethnically mixed couple. But such abject bodies also function as the “bad” forms around which the social good, “the family,” can then define itself. Jasbir Puar notes that there are “multiple figures of ambivalence, many strangers, who trouble and destabilize the nation’s boundaries.”<sup>14</sup> Rather than interpreting immigrants and queers as somehow inimical to the nation, they represent one of its (disavowed) conditions of possibility – the strangers, already “here,” around which a phobic “we” accrues affective coherence and ahistorical unity. In powerful language, Puar calls this “the shadow that is within and outside, internally disciplined and the externally quarantined and banished.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite being a denigrated term, the word “outsiders” still shapes how the “we” thinks itself in relation to others. As a result, they must stay visible on the very horizon that is, allegedly, endangered by their presence. That national identity is conceptualized in relation to family bloodlines is nothing new. Broadly, terms like motherland and *patria* collapse the homeland with the social actors, especially parents, peopling the home. As a point of fact, Italy mainly grants citizenship under *jus sanguinis*, or the right of blood.<sup>16</sup> Individuals are deemed legally Italian if their parents (or direct ancestors) were Italian. Birth on Italy’s soil will not necessarily grant an individual citizenship. Here, national citizenship is not just where one is born or where one’s mother and father come from. Claims to citizenship rest in part on reproducing Italianness’ expected form—embodied in the concept of a shared bloodline.

Utilizing a rhetoric of defense and incursion, Mussolini implies that the Italian people are the intrinsic inhabitants of the land called Italy. But, as Ahmed reminds, the notion of a stable

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<sup>11</sup> Krause, *Crisis of Births*, 187.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmed, “Organisation of Hate,” 346.

<sup>13</sup> Ahmed, “Organisation of Hate,” 346.

<sup>14</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the blurring of *jus solis* (place of birth) and *jus sanguinis* (blood descent) claims to citizenship brought on by colonialism, see: Stoler, “Sexual Affronts,” 392-421. Étienne Balibar also notes that earlier nation-forms based on blood or biology have given way in European countries to a racism based on apparent cultural difference. See: Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, 1991.

homeland, where one is and need not arrive, is itself a fiction: “Diasporic spaces do not simply begin to take shape with the arrival of migrant bodies; it is more that we only notice the arrival of those who appear “out of place.” Those who are “in place” must also arrive; they must get “here,” but their arrival is more easily forgotten, or is not even noticed.”<sup>17</sup> Italy has functioned as a diasporic space for centuries prior to the current moment – including communities such as the *arbëreshë* and *grico*, who emigrated to the Italian peninsula centuries ago. Other “external” groups, such as the Lombards, are instead conceived of as already within the Italian nation.

Immigration can unsettle notions of the familiar, by drawing attention to the radical contingency – not the universality – of the social forms “we” take for granted. If the “there” can enter into and become part of “us,” how might this movement trouble notions about the distance between “us” and “there,” “here” and “them”? Would this stir a frightening sense of disorientation, driving a “return” to a seemingly timeless “we”? Or, might it also make visible alternate forms of living once thought out of bounds? With these queries in mind, it is fair to say that Mussolini’s “we” tries to preserve a distance between “us” (Italian, child-rearing and heterosexual) and “them” (alien, not Christian, non-reproductive/too fertile).

For Mussolini, the queer and the immigrant pose distinct threats to the family and the nation. Despite being raised “over here,” queer Italians’ assumed non-reproductivity makes them unsuccessful citizens. Moreover, the suggestion that children need protection from them evinces fears that proximity to these “bad” subjects might pervert proto-heterosexual citizens – diverting them from the obligation to spawn future Italians. Immigrants – even if straight, even if married, even if reproductive – evoke a different fear. They raise the possibility that the wrong cultural forms might be reproduced “here” within Italy. Discussion of immigration has as much to do with the actual crossing of geographical borders as it does with the shoring up the symbolic frontiers — murky, uncertain, volatile— of national identity.

In a feat of rhetorical acrobatics, Mussolini claims that the God-fearing straight couple risks having its rights snatched away. Mussolini assumes that the reproductive family, the figural bedrock of her ideal society, will replicate heterosexuality and Italianness. She fails to mention that lesbian and gay Italians enjoyed *no* national domestic partnerships rights at this time. Mussolini also omits the fact that same-sex couples cannot adopt children in Italy. Implicit in her account is the belief that the couple’s “figli” will not be lesbian, gay or transgender. In addition, she fails to acknowledge that, statistically, the only heterosexual couples having more than two children in Italy include a foreign-born mother. Nor does she consider the possibility that migrants may be queer and that some lesbians and gays already have children.

Toward the end of the transmission, the following exchange takes place between di Pietro and Mussolini:

**A. Mussolini:** [...] il modello multirazziale è fallito. È fallito perché? Perché, se tu non difendi la tua identità, le tue tradizioni, non puoi difendere e rispettare gli altri. Guarda quello che stanno facendo con noi, guarda quello che sta accadendo all’Italia. Allora, difendiamo i nostri figli, difendiamo la nostra italianità. E, poi, possiamo difendere anche gli altri. Altrimenti, noi soccombiamo, soccombiamo.

**Di Pietro:** Io difendo figli italiani, cara Mussolini. Che ti posso dire?—

**A. Mussolini:** No, tu difendi gli extracomunitari e l’omosessuale. Di Pietro, t’ho capito.

**Di Pietro:** Abbi pazienza. Per me, l’extracomunitario e l’omosessuale è fratello e sorella mio —a me e a te, a me e a te.

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<sup>17</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 10.

**A. Mussolini:** Ma, allora, come sei ecumenico! Io non voglio 'sti fratelli e sorelle. Io voglio avere chi scelgo io!

**Di Pietro:** Per questo sei fascista! Questo è il problema!

**A. Mussolini:** Amore, me ne vanto! Me ne vanto! [...] Io voglio difendere i miei figli. Perché mi dici che sono fascista?<sup>18</sup>

The society founded on marriage that Mussolini envisions is shown to be anything but *l'Italia multi-etnica* (multi-ethnic Italy). By opposing “multiracial” societies while also affirming reproduction, Mussolini admits that the Italian family—a priori understood as one man and one woman—cannot be interracial. Italian, that is, a veiled synonym for whiteness.

Mussolini’s “familiar” society would reproduce only Catholic, Italian-born, straight and mono-racial subjects. Because categories like whiteness or heterosexuality are thought normal (imagining themselves as either lacking racial markers or synonymous with nature itself), anything unlike them is, by contrast, considered visibly deviant. But, it is precisely the precariousness of whiteness—the knowledge that it too can become marked through mixture—that leads to vocal attempts to “defend” its always-porous borders. Whiteness needs those it calls “non-white” in order to sketch itself as blank. Ultimately, whiteness’ very condition of possibility, the presence of bodies called non-white, underwrites fears of its impending dilution.

Mussolini’s discourse bears out Ahmed’s claim in *Queer Phenomenology* that “race has been understood through familial metaphors.” She writes:

the family line establishes what we call a racial line, which “directs” reproduction toward the continuation of that line. Such a direction means that the family line coheres ‘around’ a racial group, which become a boundary line: to marry someone of a different race as the family is defined in racial terms. The analogy works perfectly to produce a particular version of race and a particular version of family predicated on likeness, where likeness becomes a matter of “shared attributes.”<sup>19</sup>

Reproducing family lineages is thought of in terms of producing corporeal similarity. At the same time, racial and familiar lineages are thought in terms of spatial metaphors that imply a walling off. To cross that imagined boundary is to transgress the normative family, founded on the reproduction of likeness across the generations.

Appealing to an ideal of inclusiveness, di Pietro calls the migrant and the homosexual “my brother and sister.” He implies that the nation, like most families, contains internal differences. At the same time, the family metaphor (“my brother and sister”) domesticates the alterity of immigrant and queer subjects. David Eng writes compellingly of how “homosexual particularity and difference are absorbed into a universalized heteronormative model of the liberal human, an abstract national culture and community.”<sup>20</sup> In this case, the nuclear family stays the figure of human fraternity. This

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<sup>18</sup> I would like to thank my colleague, Dr. Rosella Carbotti, for her assistance in transcribing this discussion.

**A. Mussolini:** The multi-racial model has failed. Why did it fail? If you don’t defend your identity, your traditions, you can’t defend and respect other people. Look what they’re doing with us, look what’s happening in Italy. So, let’s defend our children, our *italianità* and then we can also defend others. Otherwise, we’re giving in (*soccombiamo*).

**Di Pietro:** I defend Italian children.

**A. Mussolini:** No, you defend the foreigner (*extracomunitario*) and the homosexual. Di Pietro, I’ve got you figured out (*t’ho capito*).

**Di Pietro:** For me, the foreigner and the homosexual are my brother and sister.

**A. Mussolini:** How ecumenical. I don’t want them as my brothers and sisters. [...]

**Di Pietro:** This is why you’re fascist. This is the problem.

**A. Mussolini:** I’m proud of it. I’m proud of it. [...] I want to defend my children; why do you say I’m fascist?”

<sup>19</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 122.

<sup>20</sup> Eng, *Feeling of Kinship*, 30.

move acknowledges that foreign-born people and queers are inside Italy's families and collapses the alleged distance between "them" and "us." Employing a rhetoric of kinship, di Pietro discards sameness as cause for inclusion in the nation and, unintentionally, invites queers into a family whose forms they might never reproduce.

Mussolini's exhortation "let's defend our children, our *italianità*" comes right after she paints an Italy assailed by immigrants. To defend "our" children is, by metonymic slippage, tantamount to defending the motherland. "They" (immigrants) risk adulterating "our" *italianità*. Contiguity creeps close to contagion. Mussolini dismisses di Pietro's appeal to the family because, for her, homosexuals and migrants incarnate the "they" and "there" against which the traditional—that is, familiar—family model orients itself. "They" are thought outside of "our" family because, in the case of LGBT people, they "fail" to duplicate the reproductive family (a parent begets child who in turn becomes a parent) or, for the *extracomunitari*, because they "fail" to re-produce a racial category whose unity has been retroactively projected onto the *patria* (nation/fatherland).<sup>21</sup>

Fifteen minutes into the show, Mussolini appears baffled by Luxuria's transgender identity. Mussolini says: "Mi scusi, non voglio essere offensiva, ma che vuol dire transgender? Transgender, transgendermi, sembra Schwarzenegger... Usiamo termini italiani."<sup>22</sup> Luxuria's gender bending is presented as the internalization of "outside" categories. In highlighting Luxuria's use of the English "transgender," Mussolini implies that this term – and anyone using it as a self-descriptor – is less than Italian. She then states that the word reminds her of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Mentioning the former body-builder serves Mussolini in two ways. First, she can align "transgender" with a well-known non-Italian. Secondly, linking Luxuria to Schwarzenegger allows her to allege Luxuria's virility – *he's* not a real woman.

Adherence to familiar gender roles is, thus, made part of reproducing *italianità*. Not being a "real" man or "real" woman is considered a symptom of not being a *real* Italian. Aligned with "them" and "there," Luxuria is called deficiently Italian, despite being born and raised "here" in Italy. In Mussolini's heteronormative vision of Italy, reproductive men and women *are* the nation. Transgressing familiar notions of male and female can thus be constituted as treasonous – an Italian corrupted by "foreign" ideas. Rhetorically exiled from Italianness, Luxuria's transgender identity is not for Mussolini a sign of gender's variability. Rather, it is further proof of the need to "return" to the stable terrain incarnated by the married, heterosexual, and gender-loyal Italians.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the racial history of Italian-Americans and Italian emigrants, see: Guglielmo and Salerno, *Are Italians White?*. For a discussion of how Southern Italians were considered racially distinct, see: Teto, *La razza maledetta*. For a discussion of the historical construction of race in Italy in 1800s, colonial era and fascism, see: Burgio, *Nel nome della razza*.

<sup>22</sup> "Excuse me, I don't mean to be offensive. But, what does transgender mean? Transgender, transgender myself... It sounds like Schwarzenegger... Let's use Italian terms."

<sup>23</sup> Let me be clear, not all left-leaning or lesbian- / gay- identified Italians are trans-affirming. The national organization *ArciLesbica*, for instance, has been roundly criticized in recent years for some of its vocal anti-trans positions. A notable example of this is the sharing in 2017 of the article, "I am a woman. And you are a trans woman. That distinction matters," on *ArciLesbica*'s official Facebook page. Numerous queer activists in Italy have since voiced their break and opposition to *ArciLesbica*'s stance. The president of Arcigay Napoli, Antonello Anteo Sannino commented: "non decide Arcilesbica cosa significa essere donna, come non decide Arcilesbica sull'autodeterminazione delle donne, sul loro corpo e su quello delle persone transgender." In their official 2017 conference statement, *Arcilesbica* contested: "È in atto un'azione fortissima di ricatto contro ArciLesbica e, tramite noi, contro tutte le donne che avessero l'ardire di pensare, parlare, agire in modo autonomo dai diktat lgbt\* del momento: sotto il segno queer dell'antibinarismo si sta consumando la distruzione della soggettività lesbica e la cannibalizzazione della differenza femminile." For the shared article, see "I am a woman. And you are a trans woman. That distinction matters," *Medium*, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://medium.com/athena-talks/i-am-not-a-cis-woman-i-am-a-woman-and-that-matters-da2248223e2a>. For a queer critique of *ArciLesbica*'s position, see: "ArciLesbica Nazionale: Una Giornata di Transfobia Ordinaria," accessed

Mussolini is not the only guest troubled by Luxuria’s gender. Unable to pin down Luxuria’s gender in an either- / or- binary, Roberto Castelli calls Luxuria “il signore”

**Luxuria:** Se mi chiama signor Guadagno per offendermi, non attacca.

**Castelli:** Non voglio offendere il signore, ma mi dica come chiamarlo – lui, lei...

**Luxuria:** Mi dia del loro.<sup>24</sup>

Coyly, Luxuria declines to choose between male or female pronouns: “Mi dia del loro.” *Loro* has two meanings in Italian: 1) “they” and 2) a formal “you” used when speaking to a group. In proffering this polyvalent term, Luxuria spurs the hail of Castelli’s interpellation. Instead of clearing up the ambiguity, the pronoun selected is capable of referring to males and females at the same time—all while conveying respect.<sup>25</sup>

Responding to Mussolini’s claim that she is proud of being called Fascist, Luxuria said: “Abbiamo sentito una persona che ha detto che si vanta di essere fascista. Io, questa cosa mi preoccupa molto. Riproporrà anche il confino, il confino per gli omosessuali?” (We’ve heard a person say that she is proud of being a fascist. To me, this worries me very much. Will she propose again *confino*, *confino* for gay people?). Luxuria’s alludes here to “il confino” or the practice during Italian Fascism of sending political dissidents to live in isolated areas within Italy – mainly, remote islands or the rural south. After 1938, the regime also sent effeminate homosexuals, accused of attacking the virile dignity of “la razza” (the race) to peripheral zones.<sup>26</sup> Considered a contagious threat to be quarantined, homosexuals were expelled from within the nation’s imagined centers and forced to inhabit its conceptual and geographic edge. As a “they” unacceptable inside the “here” of the nation, homosexuals were made to reside, quite literally, over “there.”

During the final years of Fascism, the nation was also oriented around the intersections of race, gender, fertility and sexuality. From 1927 through the end of Italian Fascism, for example, a bachelor tax was levied on single men to encourage procreation. Throughout the 1930s, the Fascist regime lauded women as an active part of the body politic. Their role: to procreate and to nurture. Victoria de Grazia identifies a “public cult of motherhood.”<sup>27</sup> Fearing demographic decline, the Fascist state told women that it is was their patriotic duty to give birth to more Italians. Here, the fertile family is made to denote the nation. As of 1936, the regime became increasingly preoccupied with racial-mixing. The 1938 “Manifesto of the Race” described, for instance, the existence of “a pure Italian race” that might be altered by “crossbreeding with any non-European race.” At the same time, homosexuality was discussed as a “perversion” of virile Italians -- something acquired via contact with foreigners.

In response to Luxuria’s comments, Mussolini interrupts Castelli to say: “[Luxuria] si veste da donna e pensa di poter dire quello che vuole. Ma basta, ma basta!” ([Luxuria] dresses like a woman and thinks [he] can say what [he] wants. Enough, enough!). While Castelli continues to

December 15, 2018, <http://www.gaypost.it/arcilesbica-nazionale-misoginia-transfobia>. For the official ArciLesbica congress notes, see: “A mali estremi, lesbiche estreme,” accessed December 15, 2018, <http://www.arcilesbica.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/A-mali-estremi-lesbiche-estreme.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> “Luxuria: If you’re calling me Mr. Guadagno to offend me, it’s not sticking.

**Castelli:** I don’t want to offend the gentleman... but tell me what to call him – he, she...

**Luxuria:** You may call me they”.

<sup>25</sup> Opting for “loro” may also be Luxuria’s ironic attempt to allude to the fact that, during the Fascist *ventennio*, official language preferred “Loro” to the allegedly more feminine “Lei.”

<sup>26</sup> Lorenzo Benadusi writes that “anche in Italia la persecuzione degli omosessuali era giustificata con il principio della difesa della sanità e la dignità della razza.” Benadusi, *Il nemico dell’uomo nuovo*, xi. See also, Goretti and Giartosio, *La città e l’isola*.

<sup>27</sup> de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, xi.

defend the 2002 Bossi-Fini law, which had criminalized (under threat of imprisonment) undocumented migrants, Mussolini blurts out: “Meglio fascista che frocio!” (Better a Fascist than a faggot!). Her words are more than a crass stab at offending Luxuria. Read in light of the snarled knot of Fascism, homosexuality and racial notions of Italianness, Mussolini’s declaration is an invocation of a time and place when “they” were “there,” men were men and “we” defended “our” *italianità* against adulteration. It imagines an Italy when heterosexual reproduction, the defense of the race and national identity were the same project.

Alessandra Mussolini’s repetition of the word “difendere” (to defend/to guard) is not accidental. We defend against invaders and intruders. By repeating “difendere,” she figures LGBT people and immigrants—not to mention the un-thought possibility of LGBT immigrants—as an outside threat trespassing into the “here” of Italy. She exalts Italy as the —exclusive— homeland of good, native-born Italians, who she makes coterminous with straight, child-rearing citizens. Reproducing *italianità* demands reproducing heterosexuality. And yet, the fears voiced about immigrants’ reproductivity – that their children might become Italian citizens some day – indicate that procreation is not enough on its own. Heterosexuality is desirable only insofar as it ensures the re-production of racial, cultural and religious likeness.

If male-female coupling, instead, leads to the reproduction of “unfamiliar” forms, heterosexuality itself can become a source of anxiety. Reproducing the family is made akin to reproducing the familiar. Proper citizens, according to Mussolini, return—via reproduction—the familiar forms they have inherited. And yet, precisely when racially “Other” families and queer nationals have been spotted inside the nation, Italy is invoked as always-already white and heterosexual. *Italianità* is endowed with a coherence not evidenced by Italy’s regional differences, historical fissures or variegated present. Mussolini can conjure the nation’s uniformity only by first naming those whose presence “here” has already changed who counts as Italian and what constitutes the familiar.

Intended to offend, Mussolini’s words soon became a site of proliferating resistance. In the years after her appearance on *Porta a porta*, there emerged many retorts from Italy’s LGBT social spheres. To name a few: “Meglio frocio che fascio!” (Better a fag than a fascist), “Froce sempre, fascisti mai!” (Fairies always, fascists never), and “Meglio gay che moglie” (Better gay than a wife). More broadly, activists like Vladimir Luxuria denounced the right’s exclusive definition of family. Rather than defining family in terms of a shared bloodline, she stressed the emotional and erotic component of queer families. In addition, Luxuria chided the right for refusing to acknowledge the presence of queers within Italy’s reproductive families.

In May 2007, close to a year after the *Porta a porta* debate, Luxuria gave an online interview. In it, she discussed a protest, “Coraggio laico,” in which she would participate. “Coraggio laico” supported civil unions for same-sex couples. It also sought to counter the much larger “Family Day” demonstration, which had been organized by lay groups who opposed the government’s plan to legally recognize gay couples. In the interview, Luxuria contrasts her notion of family with that praised in the “Family Day” event:

È emersa la realtà italiana che non è quella di una famiglia sola, ma di più famiglie: sposati in chiesa (in ulteriore calo), sposati civilmente (aumentati e per fortuna non più tacciati di concubinato), famiglie monoparentali, famiglie miste, conviventi eterosessuali con figli, e conviventi omosessuali (in crescita esponenziale). La politica seria è quella che riconosce la società così come è, e non quella che ha una visione idealistica e utopistica della società come si vorrebbe che fosse. Io credo che gli eterosessuali non abbiano il monopolio della famiglia. Per me famiglia è nucleo affettivo, luogo in cui ci si rispetta, luogo in cui non avvengono violenze domestiche o pedofilia, luogo in cui non

avvengono omicidi, in cui ci si ascolta. Per me è più famiglia quella composta da due persone dello stesso sesso che si amano, che non una famiglia dove si caccia di casa un figlio quando si scopre che è gay.<sup>28</sup>

Describing family as a “nucleo affettivo,” Luxuria advances a model of kinship defined by kindred feelings. These felt relations, Luxuria states, help queers to survive the strained reality of everyday life in Italy, including lesbians’ and gays’ exclusion and expulsion from their biological families. Today’s traumas get bent here into a pained hope. Even as Luxuria contests the inadequacy of the present, her denunciation reminds the public that queers *do* inhabit their families. The exclusionary logic of the right, which would wall off the “family” from queerness, is a lie. Whether acknowledged or not, the “unfamiliar” *already* defines Italy’s families. Chiding the “us” without “them” logic of Mussolini, Luxuria invites the majority to consider itself *in relation* to those called *frocio* and foreign.

This strained relationality, I will argue, is at the heart of queer denunciation in Italy. Denunciation aims to elicit affective responses, invoking feelings akin to the exclusion lesbians and gays live through each day.<sup>29</sup> Rather than seeking to “cure” the insult, the shame-filled rhetoric used by those like Mussolini is twisted. Queer *denuncia* refutes in this way the absolute distance between “insulted” and “insulter,” speaking instead from the position of being touched by another – in contact, in friction, in relation with those who hurt “us.” It is the felt experience of exclusion — including affects like shame and anger— that animates queers’ critique of the present world.

### *Speaking Out, Sharing Shame*

The last part of this essay turns to responses – posters and protest flyers – produced in Italy’s lesbian, gay and transgender social realms. The shared hurts of homophobia and racism become the basis for a playfully pained politics that both contests and names that trauma. Denunciation, in the context of queer Italy, means articulating what it feels like to be made ashamed of one’s difference. When translated into representation, this raw frustration serves as the basis for imagining less toxic realities and denouncing the exclusionary tactics that define the present.

Italy’s LGBT organizations have no single voice. Associations like *Arcigay* or *Arcilesbica* balance offering “social spaces” (“centri sociali”) for LGBT people with public campaigns like the yearly *Pride* event.<sup>30</sup> Groups like *Famiglie Arcobaleno* seek acceptance in existing family forms, advocating for lesbian and gay parents. Radical associations, like the Lesbian-separatist *Fuoricampo*, instead question the need for institutions like marriage. In analyzing the cultural products from these

<sup>28</sup> “Vladimir Luxuria: ‘Piazza Navona, Manifestazione dell’orgoglio Laico,’” *Attacfoglia*, accessed December 1, 2010, <http://attacfoglia.wordpress.com/2007/05/12/vladimir-luxuriapiazza-navona-manifestazione-dellorgoglio-laico>.

“There’s emerged a reality in Italy that goes beyond just one type of family... We have families: married in church (in decline), civil marriage, single-parent families, mixed families, straight people living together with kids, and cohabitating gay couples. Serious politics recognizes society as is it. It does not present an idealized, utopic vision of society as one hopes it would be. I believe that straight people do not have a monopoly on the term family. For me, family is an affective nucleus... a place in which you respect one another, where domestic violence and pedophilia do not occur, where murder does not take place, where you can listen to each other. For me, a family made up of two people of the same sex— who love each other— is more of a family than one where you kick your son out once you find out he’s gay.”

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of collective trauma, see: Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*.

<sup>30</sup> In addition, *Arcigay*, conducts and publishes reports on topics like “Bullying in Our Schools,” “Adolescenti e coming-out,” “Immigrazione e Omosessualità,” HIV/AIDS, and “Omofobia e discriminazione” in Italy. Recently, the national *Arcigay* has sought to broaden its agenda to include both LGBT Italians and foreign-born queers. Such efforts have the potential to question immigrants’ presumed heterosexuality (*extracomunitario* = reproductive). They also push a movement increasingly invested in securing rights *for gay Italians* to consider which queers – i.e., non European-Union citizens – are excluded from that goal.

spaces, I am not interested in flattening out their diverse politics. They comprise an internally contradictory response to shared exclusion. Binding them, however, is a desire to map what Halberstam calls “alternative possibilities.”<sup>31</sup> In doing so, there is no clean split with what is phobic. In other words, the very idea of a less phobic tomorrow is built on today’s hurt feelings – the off-center view of dominant culture experienced by many minorities. Instead of evoking a future unhinged from the hurt of homophobia, they *highlight* the insults that pushed them to question the status quo.

A few concrete examples will elucidate what is meant by queer denunciation. Alessandra Mussolini’s appearance on *Porta a Porta* sparked a variety of subcultural responses. Displayed below is a poster common at *Pride* and LGBT rallies in Italy in 2006. Inverting Mussolini’s “Meglio fascista che frocio!” (Better a Fascist than a faggot) this image quotes and perverts its precursor. Now, we read: “Meglio frocio che fascio” (Better a fag than a fascist!).<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 1: Protest sign displayed at Turin’s 2006 Pride.

In inking the words “Fascio” (Fascist) and “Frocio” in camp pink letters, the design queers Mussolini’s insult. Indeed, the force of critique derives from the continued legibility of the phobic term. Since only these two words are transposed, the phrase keeps its referentiality – pointing outside the “recycled” language to Mussolini’s insult. In the middle of the poster, we see a flattened out

<sup>31</sup> Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Photo printed with permission of the photographer, Moira Caracciolo.

swastika. Proximity to the word “Fascio” morphs the swastika, an icon used by the Nazis, into the visual mark of Italian Fascism. By extension, the image links a shameful era of European history to the neo-fascist rhetoric of today. Interestingly, the well-known symbol of Fascism, the “fascio,” is not drawn.

In visually collapsing Nazism and Italian Fascism, a contemporary identification is made with the traumas of the gay past.<sup>33</sup> What seems to be a woman in a high-heel shoe steps on the swastika. Whereas Mussolini’s insult on *Porta a porta* stressed that being “fascista” is less shameful than being “frocio,” the above image affirms for the queer crowd what it feels like to experience others’ aversion. It asks: who should feel ashamed here? The presence of the swastika beside Mussolini’s appropriated insult works to incite humiliation in anti-gay viewers – stressing Fascism complicity with the atrocities of Nazi Germany, including the extermination of LGBT people. Inverting society’s shunning of queerness, the poster presses viewers to feel something akin to what minorities are made to feel – shame.

Homophobic discourse is here a permeable site of appropriation and queering. At once recording and countering homophobia, images like this insist on displaying —not curing— the wound. If homophobia is here the object of criticism, at a phenomenological level, it is also a source of collective counter-knowledge. Because social repudiation endows the subject with an alienated point of view that then subsequently animates its critique, repudiation stays at the heart of the poster’s *denuncia* / denunciation. To erase the insult is to erase what feeds their denunciation. Exclusion is not wiped away, since it is hurt that drives the subject’s critique of the present world.

Put another way, the anti-phobic insights imbuing this image are forged *in response* and *in relation* to exclusionary biases. This is why the “Meglio fascista che frocio” poster refuses to erase the slurs and slights behind it. There is no forgetting of that hurt (i.e., “gay is good”). Rather, we find subjects who name a troubling and constitutive relation —not just opposition— to those who seek to cleave “familiar” from “foreign,” and “proximate” from “distant.” Its denunciation cites, inhabits and reworks the insult’s sting, unmooring the presumed distance between the “we” (subject) and “them” (Other).

Instead of the reproductive time of the nation praised by Mussolini, the viewer finds here a jumbled chronology – icons from WWII are coeval with contemporary slang. A similar uncertainty envelops the shoe. At first glance, the high heels seem to belong to a woman. But, cut off from the rest of the body, the wearer’s sex is unknown. A woman? A gay man? A drag queen? A lesbian? Whereas Mussolini advocated an Italy where men-were-men, this poster evokes a world in which any number of genders might don pink heels. Visually, this pained utopianism is expressed by the placement of the shoe, which steps just off the swastika’s center.

The wearer of this shoe is in mid stride. Intriguingly, the destination is not drawn. All we see is white space. Headed elsewhere, the shoe pushes off the traumatic icon, leaving it behind *and* dependent on it for its momentum. If queers’ appropriation of the pink triangle morphs history’s wounds into a badge of pride, the pink heel on the Nazi icon expresses a different desire. In its movement, a desire for an unreachable horizon is discernible. Instead of the unattainable fantasy of a future beyond hate —what Lauren Berlant calls cruel optimism— we find a spiky hope that, risking failure, is mobilized by present pain. This critique is built on a refusal to forget – to move triumphantly past – the hurt of today.<sup>34</sup>

Since 2008, *Arvigay* has promulgated a national ad campaign for the “Day Against Homo-

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of homoerotic appropriations of Fascism and Nazism, see: Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 147-172.

<sup>34</sup> On the possibilities of risking failure, see: Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*. On the idea of “cruel optimism,” see: Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

and 'Trans- Phobia.'<sup>35</sup> Two posters in this campaign merit a closer look. While both publically challenge the mapping of the nation on the Italian right, their strategies differ dramatically. In the first, the state's failure to recognize LGBT citizens incites a turn to familiar icons of Italy's culture, geography and cuisine. Images of "traditional" Italy are aligned with snapshots of same-sex affection in order to contest the idea that LGBT people are "outside" the nation. The second poster triangulates between homophobic, racist and national stereotypes. In aligning without eliding such insults, the poster imagines a coalitional politics around the collective pain of the slur. In comparing their strategies, I argue that denunciation seeks more than just a change in the status quo. It speaks "out" insofar as it invites others, including those who hurl insults against "us," to feel the pain of repudiation.

In the first campaign, two women kiss each other at the dinner table. In a parallel poster, two men, seated at a similar feast, are kissing.<sup>36</sup>



Fig. 2: National ArciGay posters from 2011—initially produced by Arcigay Friuli and ArciLesbica Udine in 2010.

Viewers see a spread of prosciutto, *formaggio* and red wine in the foreground. Written in capital letters next to the couples is, “Civiltà: prodotto tipico italiano.” *Civiltà* is a slippery term connoting “civilization,” “advancement,” “culture” and “civility.” (Indeed, the Fascist propaganda machine deployed the term *civiltà* regularly in publications and architecture in an effort to evoke a bright Fascist future built on the Roman past).<sup>37</sup> The posters mime and queer the visual rhetoric of ads for Italian food products. What is being sold to the Italian public is not Chianti but acceptance

<sup>35</sup> In recent years, *Arcigay* has drawn attention to the interlaced experiences of homo- and xeno- phobia for queer and transgender migrants in Italy, questioning both the heteronormative assumptions of organizations servicing immigrants and how queer migrants struggle to feel at home in Italy’s “gay friendly” spaces.

<sup>36</sup> Images reproduced with permission by Studio dePeru di Pordenone. The initial campaign was regional and featured the text “Civiltà: Prodotto Tipico Friulano” (2010). In 2011, with the support of the Arcigay Nazionale organization, the caption was revised to read “Civiltà: Prodotto Tipico Italiano.” The models featured in the photos are actual members of Arcigay Friuli and ArciLesbica Pordenone.

<sup>37</sup> See, Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*.

of LGBT people. The implication is that tolerance, like Italy’s famed gastronomy, should be an object of national pride and identifiable trait of “civiltà.” Through ironic citation, this image aims to render homosexuality customary and perhaps even nationalistic.

As consumers of Italian products, the lesbian and gay couples are – by metonymic proximity – framed as *products* of Italian culture. In addition to depicting queer couples consuming “familiar” Italian fare, the image also tempts viewers to *consume* the unfamiliar picture of same-sex affection. It does so by mimicking the everyday iconography of print advertisements – queers, like salami, are presented as appetizing objects. As a synecdoche of the nation, the food serves to domesticate queerness, framing it as *already* present on the country’s tableau. This is an unruly example of what Jasbir Puar calls “homonationalism.” By that she means “the intersections, confluences and divergences between homosexuality and the nation, national identity, and nationalism – the convivial, rather than antagonistic, relations between nonnormative sexualities and the nation.”<sup>38</sup>

Rhetorically excluded from the nation’s “familiar” confines, queers here seek recognition inside its “typical” contours. Presenting themselves *through*, not against, the region’s/nation’s signifiers, at once challenges the far right’s invocation of a queer threat to the family and affirms normative traits linked to “good” citizens. These posters query viewers to consider who gets to sit (and who is denied a seat) at this table. Whose bodies do we assume signify a “typical” form of Italianness? And yet, in insiting on a seat at this table, the images still work to de-familiarize the expected embodiment of national culture – the male-female couple.

Whereas the prior image seeks legibility within familiar signifiers, the second poster problematizes the exclusionary logic by which nationalism proceeds. If the last photo “forgot” race in its production of a palatable queerness, this image spectacularizes differences within Italy’s citizens. It summons what Hong and Ferguson dub “strange affinities” around the intersections of social exclusion, including affects like trauma and shame.<sup>39</sup> Distributed by the national *ARCI* association in 2009, the poster shows the bare torsos of two members of Italy’s parliament: Anna Paola Concia and Jean-Léonard Touadi.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Ferguson and Hong, *Strange Affinities*.

<sup>40</sup> Reproduced with the permission of ARCI Nazionale.



Fig. 3: Poster disseminated in 2009, featuring Jean Leonard Touadi and Anna Paola Concia.

Concia is openly lesbian. Born in the Republic of the Congo, Touadi grew up in France and immigrated to Italy in 1979. Both are Italian citizens.

In juxtaposing the nude male/black body against the female/white body, this image mines the visual rhetoric used in *United Colors of Benetton's* "World Without Borders" campaign. Based in Treviso, Benetton flooded the Italian market with images of multiracial bodies in the 1990s and early 2000s. As others have noted, its ads at once played up and de-politicized ethnic differences – parading polychrome models in order to stress "our" universal humanity.<sup>41</sup> Such ads rely on the legibility of ruling racial categories (i.e., black opposed to white), while denying a politics of the particular. The *ARCI* poster, in contrast, insists on a politics forged around the relations between forms of social exclusion. Depicted is not the mirror resemblance of race and sexuality, but the touching of related traumas.

Posters in the *ARCI* campaign were hung in local *Arvigay* centers and plastered along the streets of Italy's urban centers. They addressed both in-group (LGBT) and out-group (passersby) audiences. In cities, the posters vied for pedestrians' attention with business flyers and political ads. While intervening in the public sphere, their protest was palimpsestic – easily plastered over by other images. Rather than proposing an untroubled multiculturalism, the *ARCI* image invokes intersections —contacts, contingencies, convergences— across differences. It collapses, that is, the (imagined) distance between the phobic subject and the insulted minority. The poster performs this by forcing the insult-spewing subject – the "tu" (you) addressed – to imagine himself as the *object* of aversion.

In the text framing Concia and Touadi, the viewer is first called with the subject pronoun "tu." It reads: "Ci chiami sporco negro e lesbica schifosa" ("You call us dirty negro and disgusting lesbian). Here, the insult's hail – typically aimed at minorities like Touadi and Concia – is flipped. Immediately below, the subject ("tu") morphs into an object ("ti"): "ma ti offendi se ti chiamano"

<sup>41</sup> See, Giroux, "Benetton's 'World without Borders'" 187-207.

italiano mafioso” (But you get offended if they call *you* Italian mafioso). Unlike in Alessandra Mussolini’s diatribe, no “we” gets voiced. The closest to it is the phrase “ci chiami” (you call us). In other words, the solidarity between Touadi and Concia responds to similar, but not identical, experiences of being the *object* of others’ revulsion. If there is a shared experience it is that of being made to feel ashamed.

All along, the specific insults hurled at Concia and Touadi – “sporco negro” and “lesbica schifosa” – are jarringly reproduced. Citation scrambles the insults’ meanings while replicating the slurs’ sting. In making the insult part of the critique, the *ARCI* poster asserts that group identities form *in relation* to others – including, especially, those who hurt or offend “us.” In this realization, a counter-politics that relates the injury of discrimination *and* finds points of contact among stigmas can be read. Let me be clear, I am not saying racism and homophobia are the same. But in contemporary Italy, where the far-right paints both queers and immigrants as foreign threats to an ostensibly-straight and ostensibly-white *italianità*, this poster does show where Touadi’s and Concia’s marginalizations —like one hand grazing another— touch.

This point of contact, the place where another’s touch is felt, never erases what cleaves them. On the one hand, it represents a commiseration around incitements to shame. It also transfigures individual shames into the grounding of a shared critique. While Heather Love doubts shame’s “ability to bring together shamed individuals into meaningful communities,” I want to pause for an instant on the tenuousness of Concia’s and Touadi’s touch.<sup>42</sup> One hand presses against another’s fingers and arm. Whatever solidarity is possible is a cautious coming together – the brief sharing of scars. The strain of Concia’s hand is felt by Touadi. Similarly, the pressure of his arm is felt by her. Bodily contact conveys the buoyant tensions, both tense and sympathetic, produced in coalitional politics.

Coalitions of shame form in the presence of differing exclusions.<sup>43</sup> Unlike Mussolini’s “we”-sans-“them” logic, these ties surface *because* of the people who insult “us.” In sharing experiences of shame, the poster depicts how the people “we” find offensive already touch “us.” This leaves open the possibility, in fact, that future coalitions might even contain the ones who now hurl insults at Touadi and at Concia. We are not asked to forget what makes “us” feel distinct, whether in indignity or in pride. Instead, the poster pushes onlookers to see themselves in tenuous relation to those unlike “us.” Shared shame serves as the basis for an alliance that, otherwise, might never have formed. Sharing shames also tries to conjure bonds not yet formed, making the insulter feel touched by the insulted.<sup>44</sup> Articulated, then, is what Halperin and Traub have called a “tactical redeployment of shame.”<sup>45</sup> It asks the audience to feel links between Italians’ national shame and the hurt experienced by *italianità*’s outliers.

Inciting bad feelings, it conjures an “us” whose borders are willfully uncertain—porous enough to include the “them” that hurt “us.” There is no clean split between the ridiculed individuals’ perception of the social world and the biases voiced by the phobic public. The critique lodged articulates the rage of being made to feel ashamed of one’s difference. But, beyond that, it also gives voice to the strange realization that others’ aversion affects even “my” proud sense of self.<sup>46</sup> In the Italian LGBT context, denunciations often proceed in some relation to shame — of

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<sup>42</sup> See, Love, *Gay Shame*, 257.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Crimp refers to shame as “the affective substrate necessary to the transformation of one’s distinctiveness into a queer kind of dignity.” In addition, he describes “collectivities of the shamed.” See, Crimp, *Gay Shame*, 72.

<sup>44</sup> Heather Love describes shame’s capacity to move between subjects as “uncontrollable relationality.” Love, *Gay Shame*, 257.

<sup>45</sup> Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Describing shame’s volatility, Eve Sedgwick cites its “double movement [...]: toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality.” See, Sedgwick, *Gay Shame*, 51.

certain desires, of the Italian state's failures, of homophobia's dogged rootedness. Shame is a useful rubric for interpreting these critiques, since those experiencing it feel intimately, uncomfortably touched by the individuals who scorn them. Rather than invoking a shared humanity beyond "our" differences, the poster paints a space where differences – including collective histories – come in contact. In their touching, it is possible to read a subtle denunciation of parochial politics. Viewers are asked to feel something akin to – but not the same as – Concia's and Touadi's pain. To feel shamed, that is, by others' exclusion.

While formative, this relation can hardly be called "positive." Relations, after all, take many forms – antagonistic, close, and frayed. Even as revulsion stays an object of denunciation, there persists an acknowledgement that others' aversion has shaped how "I" feel/perceive. For queers, this realization can lead to feeling ashamed that others, especially those whose seem hateful, can make "me" feel shame. *Denuncia* admits and makes a spectacle of these troubled ties, relaying a queer shade of outrage and also showing the enraged group's affective bonds with those who would defame them<sup>47</sup>. Left open is the prospect of continued convergences between "insulted" and "insulter." The *ARCI* poster highlights the (disavowed) points of contact between most Italians' own experiencing of affront and those instances cited by Concia and Touadi. Viewers are reminded that they too have been on the receiving end of others' prejudices. Through this move, the poster asks the public to feel something like the shame expected from belittled minorities. As Eve Sedgwick aptly notes, "shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating."<sup>48</sup> As an affect, shame can be transmitted to others even when it stays deeply personal. Instead of claiming that all are the same, the image pushes viewers to feel themselves in a different skin—that of a lesbian or African-born Italian.

In this way, it denounces the logic of absolute difference behind the far-right's "we." Touadi elaborates this idea in the preface to a later collection of writing. In 2010, he wrote of the need to respect differences and challenge the absolute alterity of "l'altro":

Abbiamo enfatizzato le ragioni della diversità da riconoscere e da valorizzare; abbiamo collocato lo straniero nell'alterità, dentro una rigida geometria ossessiva dei confini tra il Noi e il Loro, conferendo alle identità immutabilità e impermeabilità. ... Ma quali strade intraprendere per coglier l'altro al di là delle percezioni e delle narrazioni precotte piene di clichès, piene di meccanismi inaccettabili di folclorizzazione della sua cultura? In altri termini, come fare per tracciare una pista che arriva nel cuore dell'alterità senza alzare muri d'incompatibilità? Come fare perché il problema dell'altro può diventare la ricchezza del simile?<sup>49</sup>

Touadi claims that the "confini tra il Noi e il Loro" are a rhetorical construct. In lieu of this

<sup>47</sup> In plumbing the affective work done by *denuncia*, I turned repeatedly to the writing of Ann Cvetkovich. Cvetkovich explores the negative feelings bound to political stagnation. She is interested in "depathologizing" sour affects, treating emotions like depression "as a possible resource for political action," 2. These "feelings, moods and sensibilities" – she goes on – "become sites of *publicity* and *community formation*" (my emphasis). For Cvetkovich, shared sadness can "create new forms of sociality, whether in public cultures that give it expression or because [...] it serves as the foundation of new kinds of attachment or affiliation." Here, hurt is not forgotten. Instead, it is remade into a resource. See, Cvetkovich, *Depression*, 2-6.

<sup>48</sup> Sedgwick, *Gay Shame*, 50.

<sup>49</sup> Touadi, *Rondini e ronde*, 7-8. "We've stressed the reasons to recognize and to value difference; we've located the foreigner within Otherness—inside a strict and obsessive geometry... the borders between Us and Them... conferring on identity an something immutable or impermeable. [...] But what paths might we go down in order to bring the Other beyond these perceptions and preconceived narratives – full of clichés, full of the objectionable folklorizations of the Other's culture. Put another way: how can we draw a path that gets to the heart of difference without raising walls of incompatibility? How do we act so that the problem of the Other might become the abundance of someone similar?"

imaginary divide, Touadi says that a permeable togetherness *already* exists. The “altro” is inside Italy – inside Italians’ imagining of their Italianness. Italian culture, similarly, affects those in Italy who grew up elsewhere. In arguing this, Touadi stresses that the recognition of similarities “non cancella la diversità” (does not erase difference). What he seeks, rather, is a “pedagogia relazionale” / “relational pedagogy” (8). His denouncing seeks not to “otherize” phobic Italians but, instead, to invite them “dentro gli immaginari incrociati” / “inside intersecting imaginaries.” To find relations—including feeling others’ hurt (“sentire insieme” [feel together])—where once only borders were seen.

*Denuncia* is the performative effort to incite in others feelings akin to the hurt of social exclusion. We find this in the Touadi and Concia image. Onlookers are pressed to *feel* points of contact between their own experiencing of anti-Italian stigma and what the poster’s queer and foreign-born actors have gone through. Still, the poster’s audience is multiple, addressing people who identify with Concia’s and Touadi’s tales of prejudice and inviting others to find themselves in their pain. Divergent affronts become sites of unsure contact. While this intervention may very well fail to alter the Italian state’s laws, it intercedes in the public’s affective life – even if only in a strange feeling of kinship. *Denuncia* might best be understood, then, as both a speech act—a particular twisting of phobic language—and a felt response to social exclusion. It creates a mood as much as it is a mode of critique. Such denunciations can speak to the “in-group,” affirming the shared—but often unrecognized—violence of feeling others’ disdain. As significantly, they speak “out” in the sense of pushing viewers to see themselves inside the Other’s denigration. Speaking “out” is not just protest. Ultimately, denunciations disputes here the distance between “out-group” and “in-group,” displaying them in snarled relation with one another.

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