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*g/s/i* is an annual peer-reviewed journal which publishes research on gendered identities and the ways they intersect with and produce Italian politics, culture, and society by way of a variety of cultural productions, discourses, and practices spanning historical, social, and geopolitical boundaries.

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### Editor Bios

**Nicoletta Marini-Maio** is Professor of Italian and Film Studies and Chair of the Italian Department at Dickinson College. She is the recipient of the 2013-2014 Andrew W. Mellon Humanities Forum Fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania for her research on the representations of the Moro Affair in film and theater. Her research interests center on Italian political cinema, gender and sexuality in film and media, feminist and postfeminist theory, and auteur cinema. She is the author of *A Very Seductive Body Politic: Silvio Berlusconi in Cinema* (Milan: Mimesis, 2015) and co-editor and co-translator of *Body of State: A Nation Divided* (Fairleigh- Dickinson, 2011). She is currently working on the postfeminist transmedia project incarnated by Italian fashion influencer and digital entrepreneur Chiara Ferragni. With Ellen Nerenberg, she is co-author of *La Nazione Winx: Coltivare la futura consumista* (forthcoming, Rubbettino Editore, 2022) and, with Paola Bonifazio, she is completing a study on the transmedia and transnational representation of female teens’ sexuality. She is co-founder and Editor of *g/s/i*.

**Paola Bonifazio** is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of French and Italian at the University of Texas at Austin. In 2011-12, she was NEH/Andrew Mellon Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome. Her research interests focus on film and media theory and history, cultural studies, gender studies, and feminist and postfeminist theories. Her first book *Schooling in Modernity: The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy* (University of Toronto Press, 2014) explores short film productions sponsored by state and non-state agencies to promote modernization and industry, and to govern the Italian people’s conduct. Her second book *The Photoromance: A Feminist Reading of Popular Culture* (MIT Press, 2020) examines the “convergence culture” of Italian media as photoromance magazines dispersed their content across multiple formats, narrative conventions, editorial and business strategies, and platforms.

**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). Current essays have focused on nostalgia in the cinema of Paolo Sorrentino and on the [North American reception of the Andrea Camilleri’s transmedial Montalbano project](#). At present, she is co-author, with Nicoletta Marini-Maio, of *La Nazione Winx: Coltivare la futura consumista* (forthcoming, Rubbettino Editore, 2020). She is co-founder of *g/s/i* and Editor of the *Open Contributions* and *Continuing Discussions* sections and an editor of the [Italian Studies Channel](#) on the New Books Network.

**Keywords:** queer, feminism, masculinities, motherhood, fotoromanzi, reproduction

**Abstract:** Nicoletta Marini-Maio, Paola Bonifazio and Ellen Nerenberg discuss the topic of the Themed Section. Paola Bonifazio presents the rationale of the Invited Perspectives. Ellen Nerenberg presents the Open Contributions and Continuing Discussions. Marini-Maio presents the new section Collaborations, which hosts discussions and descriptions of current scholarly collaborations.

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## Intersectionality in Italian histories, cultural products, and social practices.

### Journal Editorial

NICOLETTA MARINI-MAIO, PAOLA BONIFAZIO, ELLEN NERENBERG

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of “intersectionality” in an article in the field of Feminist Legal Theory, with the goal of addressing the problem of a “single-axis” framework, dominant in antidiscrimination law and reflected in feminist theory and antiracist politics. In the essay, titled “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” Crenshaw claims that intersectionality *as* framework does not mean adopting an additive argument wherein race, class, and other individual characteristics are added to the existing approach with which to analyze sexism; rather, it means a radical re-thinking of how we approach these categories in the intersectional experiences of individuals in their communities. The framework of intersectionality, which originated from ideas debated in the newly constituted field of critical race theory, intended to change how legal cases of both racial and sex discrimination were debated in courts of law. And then, the theory went viral. More than 30 years later, Crenshaw is featured in an article published in *Vox*, titled “[The Intersectionality Wars](#).” The author, Jane Coaston attempts to unravel the history of the concept starting from its ending point, when conservative critics largely agree that lived experiences of Black women are, say, different from those of a white woman and, at the same time, object to the “racial and cultural hierarchies” that, according to them, “intersectionality” produces. The paradox of a theory that aims at dismantling hierarchies of privilege while being accused of creating a new one itself is not just the puzzling misconception of a term in conservative circles. Rather, the intriguing case of yet another *popularized* theory (isn’t “feminism” one of them? and isn’t “intersectional feminism” also risking the same fate?) could be studied as lens through which to understand the complex social ground and culture in which it thrives.

Has “intersectionality” become a thing, a fashion, a framework, or all of the above? After recent antiracist protests, social unrest, and a pandemic, intersectionality is now even more popularized and has become an overarching concept of identity politics internationally—although it is often discussed as a framework and embraced as a practice in the so-called global north, thus **reproducing further contradictions when espoused by privileged subjects**. How is it changing the perception of feminism and its fights, and, to cite once again Crenshaw’s founding article, is it truly creating “a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytical tool”? To what extent does it raise awareness of the many forms of patriarchal oppression, including racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, fatphobia, ableism, ageism, and nativism? How do people understand and practice “intersectionality” in their everyday lives, and how are they employing it to purposefully, and intentionally, “dismantle” oppressive structures in our societies? Or, has intersectionality become institutionalized in first world societies, where it has become embedded in neoliberal postfeminist practices? From a theoretical perspective, what are the advantages and implications of using such framework not only for the study of the present but also of the past? While born in the specific context of American society following the Civil Rights Act, can “intersectionality” work as tool to re-think Italian culture and society and to delve into its structural and systemic issues of discrimination and inequality?

In the Call for submissions to *g/s/i—gender/sexuality/italy* 8, the editors invited essays studying intersectionality in its varied implications, practices, collective forms of unlearning, and critical perspectives (once again, with Crenshaw’s words: as “a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytical tool”) in both Italian society and, theoretically, in Italian Studies. Colleagues were invited to consider the following areas:

- intersectionality as an “analytical tool” to investigate the frameworks of gender in theories, structures, and practices of Italy’s present and past: white, heteronormative second-wave feminism; decolonial feminism;
- intersectionality as an ongoing, often problematic, “disposition” in Italian society: bottom-up and top-down processes of contestation of privilege and discrimination; disruption of essentialistic concepts and practices; racial, ethnic, and gender shifts in the labor of care; cultural and political tensions that originate from such transformations;
- intersectionality as a “method” to reshape, reinterpret, and recreate narratives and representations in Italian cultural products of all periods;
- intersectionality as “heuristic” feminist and postfeminist practices in Italian virtual environments: Black influencers’ activism; intersectional online feminism; viral intersectionality.

The essays the journal received in response to the Call include those outlined in the Themed Section.

### Themed Section

NICOLETTA MARINI-MAIO

With the Call, we hoped to invite a long-term debate on intersectional feminism as a productive theoretical field and a tool to investigate Italian society from different perspectives. At the same time, we aimed at gathering critical voices on the paradoxes and the risks of intersectionality we highlighted above. The response has been significant insofar as it has provided relevant documentation on the work of scholars of intersectionality across varied fields within Italian Studies, including Sociology, Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Queer Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and Sociolinguistics. The articles published in this issue’s *Themed Section* show how the discourse on intersectionality can illuminate innovative research and new critical questions.

The emergence of the intersectional paradigm in Italian feminist theory is examined in Claudia Santoni’s “Il paradigma dell’intersezionalità: Migrazione e disparità lavorativa in Italia.” Starting from a historical overview, this comprehensive study uses a sociological framework to first discuss how North American intersectional feminist discourse has encountered, and percolated into, Italian feminist theories and practices, including intercultural female *associazionismo* (*Almaterra*, *Nosotras* and *Punto di partenza*), philosophical collectives (*Diotima*), national feminist movements (*Non una di meno*), and *queer* cultures. The multiplicities that intersectionality has brought to the fore, Santoni argues, have necessitated adopting a systemic perspective to investigate female migration and labor discrimination in contemporary Italy. Santoni acknowledges the risk of using intersectional feminism as another oppressive way to establish a hierarchy of discriminatory factors in sociological analysis. Her original solution to this theoretical conundrum is connecting intersectionality with the sociological notion of paradox, showing how gender and other personal and identity factors intersect with the job market in a two-way modality, namely, as both discriminatory limitations and feminist choices (as it happens, for example, in care work).

Alice Parrinello’s article “Piazza dei Cinquecento: An Intersectional *Lieu de Mémoire* in Igiaba Scego and Porpora Marcasciano” uses the intersectional lens as a method of analysis to resignify the colonial memory of Piazza dei Cinquecento through Porpora Marcasciano’s *L’aurora delle trans cattive* (2018) and Igiaba Scego’s *La linea del colore* (2020). Parrinello’s discussion originally connects spaces and places with the experiences of exclusion and violence lived by the non-conforming (trans and Black) bodies that transit through the Piazza, characterizing it as a *lieu de mémoire* reshaped and re-memorialized by the two narratives. The conventional representation of the Piazza as a national

monument to the Cinquecento (500 hundred) “virile white, cisgender, heterosexual Italians” is transformed into a space that bears the memory of queer trauma and racialization.

The possibility to develop intersectional linguistics is the focus of Rosalba Nodari’s compelling article “È possibile una linguistica intersezionale in Italia? Breve storia di un termine militante all’interno degli studi linguistici italiani.” The study challenges the assumption that intersectionality may have become central either in the Italian scholarly debate or in media discourses. Nodari analyzes a set of national and international linguistic *corpora* to confirm that the term intersectionality entered the Italian language through English only after the year 2000, that it appears almost exclusively in specialized contexts, and that it is absent in the press. A survey that Nodari administered to the Italian scholarly community demonstrated that most linguists are interested in the paradigm of intersectionality but are uncertain about its applicability to scholarly research. In fact, she points out that academic discussion has largely centered on language as a marker of social identity and gender discrimination. She argues that intersectional linguistics should include “the potential implications of discrimination that can result from multiple axes intersecting each other (discrimination by gender, race, ableism, etc.)” and apply other sociolinguistic paradigms, such as raciolinguistics, glottophobia, and linguicism. Expanding intersectional linguistics from a theoretical framework to concrete positionality (“posizionamento”) in society, would allow scholars to propose adequate linguistic policies.

All the *Themed Section’s* articles emphasize the embryonic stage of intersectionality in Italian Studies, while also pointing to the potential contradictions of intersectionality when embraced by privileged subjects and the risk of a hierarchical, or additive, intersectional methodology. We look forward to welcoming more of these critical reflections in the next issues of *g/s/i*. The *Continuing Discussions* section will be the right arena for future developments.

## Collaborations

NICOLETTA MARINI-MAIO

We continue to cultivate our statement of intent, “we believe in collaboration,” by publishing in this section an inter-institutional and inter-personal collaboration between Daniela Cavallaro (University of Auckland), Luciana d’Arcangeli (independent scholar for Flinders University, Adelaide), and Claire Kennedy (independent scholar). The three scholars, who have worked for many years chiefly in Australia, have just published an edited volume featuring three theatrical works on violence against women and interviews with the practitioners who wrote and staged them. Entitled *Atti di accusa: Testi teatrali e interviste sulla rappresentazione della violenza contro le donne*, the volume stems from a conference, Indelible [Eng]/Indelebile [It],” hosted at Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia, in October 2019. The conference, with its focus on representations of violence on women and featuring several performances centering on the topic, provided the three scholars with the opportunity to begin discussions about a *pubblicazione creativa* (creative publication) on the theme.

This collaborative undertaking soon turned into a militant “atto di accusa” (indictment) against violence against women, including FGM/C (Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting). The editors started to work on this project when the Covid 19 pandemic hit, collaborating intensively during the long isolation of 2020. They often consulted about translinguistic subtleties (they collaboratively translated one of the works, *Little Stitches*, from English to Italian), philosophical reflections, and feminist discussions on the emergence of domestic violence that the lockdown notoriously boosted across the world. As they state, “Collaborating on a common project during the pandemic, each of us locked in their home, promoted a particular kind of well-being and community of purpose.” Interestingly, as the collection’s editors note, in their specific case external collaborations were sometimes facilitated

by the pandemic. With global shutdown of theatrical enterprises and international traveling, they were able to involve other scholars in their collaborative network and could easily be in touch, albeit virtually, with several practitioners.

*g/s/i* looks forward to further collaborations with colleagues from other journals, with editors, artists, and scholars. We hope that with initiatives like this new section, inaugurated in *g/s/i* 7, 2020, we can advance collaborative research of many types. We are pursuing this objective as editors of *g/s/i* and contributors to external initiatives like the Film Issue of *The Italianist*, where we recently published a piece titled “Our *gender/sexuality/italy*: Collaboration as Feminist Practice.”

## Invited Perspectives

PAOLA BONIFAZIO

Leading scholars, educators, activists, and artists reflect on intersectionality and speak of their own engagement with this framework in their practices as writers, researchers, teachers, and filmmakers. In her essay in this issue, writer and philosopher Maura Gancitano sketches a critical overview of the “debate on intersectionality in Italy,” starting from the criticism that the concept has sparked in Italy: as means of cancel culture, the “dictatorship of the politically correct,” and more broadly as in itself discriminatory. These reactions, Gancitano explains, are due to the structures of political debate that are currently prominent in the Italian context, for the most part, taking place on social media and depending on individual users (influencers). Far from demonizing the web, Gancitano envisions instead a digital space for social interdependence and inclusive debate.

Also acknowledging how wary reactions towards the framework of intersectionality are present in the Italian context, anti-racist feminist activist and scholar Gaia Giuliani delivers a poignant presentation of its cogency and urgency in a 15-minute video entitled “Intersezionalità, posizionamento e studi critici della bianchezza: Strumenti epistemologici per una trasformazione sociale e culturale radicale.” According to Giuliani, in order to craft a political agenda that: 1) contests the status quo, and 2) supports an emancipatory project beyond the nation state and its borders, one must take into account that, at its core, knowledge is always non-universal, non-neutral, and non-objective. On these premises, social variables multiply and, in the specific case of Italy, citizenship intersects with gender, race, and class.

The question of citizenship as a tool of inclusion/exclusion is also touched upon in the conversation between Angelica Pesarini and myself, which revolves around Pesarini’s short fiction included in *Future: Il domani narrato dalle voci di oggi*, a collection published by Effequ in 2020 and edited by Italian-Somali writer Igiaba Scego. With respect to access to educational, economic, social, and political rights, citizenship in Italy is a privilege that is only allowed to those who are Italians by blood (*jus sanguinis*). As Pesarini explains, blood has been used to racialize and rank subjects (thus race is a consequence of racism). Her fictional story is a reflection on the future “in the way [she, a Black Italian woman] felt it” by thinking “in and about the past” of young Black women born in the Impero of Africa Orientale Italiana and left in institutions for Black “mixed-race” children born to white Italian fathers. Our conversation allowed us to discuss the intersections of scholarly approach and stylistic choices as they affect literary representations of gender, race, and citizenship. We also bridge theory and practice and, in that sense, serve as an appropriate transition to the other three pieces included in the section.

Rahma Nur and Valentina Migliarini, in a video conversation here about an intersectional approach to education, were able to build on their past collaboration with Annalisa Frisini (University of Padua) of the construction of an “anti-racist toolkit for schools” for Razzismobruttastoria (<http://www.razzismobruttastoria.net/>), a cultural association funded in 2011. Migliarini is a scholar-teacher at the University of Birmingham, Nur “one of the rare black teachers in Italian primary schools,” as well as a published poet and writer of short stories. In their video-recorded chat, they share experiences,

ideas, and responses to what it means to teach K-12 intersectionally in Italy. Respectively, they approach the subject from the position of a white scholar interested in studying and promoting equitable access to education for migrants as well as students identified with disabilities and from that of a Somali Italian and disabled person who has lived first-hand the dynamics and issues both aim to expose and resolve.

While Nur and Migliarini's video addresses similar concerns as Giuliani, with regard to both the multiple social variables at play and the question of citizenship (Nur, for example, highlights how access to certain professions such as teacher in public schools is not available to non-citizens), Mariana Califano and Jadel Andreetto, like Pesarini, look at the present through the past by working through its layerings in order to understand "the politics of memory and oblivion" that constructs national identities. Califano and Andreetto are among the founders of Resistenze in Cirenaica (RIC), "a permanent cultural think tank with the declared purpose of making the Cyrenaica district of Bologna," a neighborhood whose street names celebrate the crimes and perpetrators of Italian Colonialism. RIC has devised and experimented with the so-called "odonomastic guerrilla warfare," a political act consisting in the recontextualization or hacking of street signs, commemorative plaques, and monuments. Street names carry historical meaning and political value: by physically renaming (i.e., placing new signs), subtitling (e.g., adding label under the name of the street), and organizing public events such as narrated walks, RIC collectively re-acts against historical amnesia, unburying the past and dismantling false beliefs. In their beautifully written essay, Califano and Andreetto dive deep into their own past of shared experiences as members of RIC, also challenging the movement's pitfalls, vis-à-vis gender and intersectional approaches, all the while making plans for the future. Closing the Invited Perspective section is Califano's own visual retelling of odonomastic guerrilla warfare and its history, weaving together archival footage to tell the story of RIC, a mix of "street attitude, punk spirit, and historical rigor."

## Open Contributions

ELLEN NERENBERG

The Open Contributions of this issue of *g/s/i* feature one essay, "Vestiti semimaschili": Women Dressing as Men in Italian Silent Cinema", by Robert Rushing. In her path-breaking 2016 study *Girls will be Boys: Cross-Dressed Women, Lesbians, and American Cinema 1908-1934* (Routledge), Laura Horak explored a world of early cinema that resisted rigidly defined gender and societal norms as it concurrently worked to dignify and make respectable cinema in its fledgling phase. *Girls will be Boys* offered a deep dive into troves of paracinematic materials (e.g., publicity materials and censorship policies and broader contextualization of the theater arts), rigorous historicization, and sustained scrutiny of an archive of some 400 films from the early cinema. Horak called into question assertions that actresses appearing in "trouser roles" were necessarily subversive of then contemporary gender norms. Using Horak's study as a point of departure, "Vestiti semimaschili": Women Dressing as Men in Italian Silent Cinema", seeks to understand multiple instances of female-to-male cross-dressing in early Italian cinema. With focus on three World War I-era films, *Histoire d'un Pierrot* (1914), *Filibus* (1915), and *Justitia* (1919), and invited by Horak's examinations, Rushing explores what, cross-dressing in this period, may be considered not transgressive. While later instances of cross-dressing may have signaled "disordered" figurations of gender, Rushing argues that early-twentieth-century Italian audiences found such representations playful. In Italian cinema of the 1910s, the game of dress-up, Rushing finds, "doesn't arouse alarm, suspicion or anxiety precisely because it is play, and hence, like the carnivalesque, inherently temporary."

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