

**Scandalous Practices: Homosexuality, Male Prostitution,
and Sexual Citizenship in Post-Fascist Italy**

by

Alessio Ponzio

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(History and Women's Studies)
in the University of Michigan
2019

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Dario Gaggio, Co-Chair
Professor Scott Spector, Co-Chair
Professor Kathleen M. Canning, Rice University
Professor Nadine Hubbs
Professor Helmut Puff

Alessio Ponzio

ponzio@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1068-0946

© Alessio Ponzio 2019

Acknowledgements

This project was made possible by the generous financial support of Rackham Graduate School, of the departments of Women's Studies and History at the University of Michigan, and of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender. This research would have never come about without the support of all the libraries and archives I visited in the last years: *Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea* (Rome), *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale* (Rome), *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale* (Florence), *Biblioteca dell'Università degli studi di Firenze*, *Biblioteca dell'Università degli studi di Torino*, *Biblioteca della Camera dei Deputati* (Rome), *Biblioteca del Senato della Repubblica* (Rome), *Istituto per la storia dell'Azione Cattolica e del movimento cattolico in Italia, Paolo VI* (Rome), *Fondazione Gramsci* (Rome), *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* (Rome), *Archivio di Stato di Roma* (Rome), *Archivio dell'Ospedale Psichiatrico di Santa Maria della Pietà* (Rome), *Archivio dell'Istituto Luigi Sturzo* (Rome), *Archivio del Tribunale di Pisa*, *Fondazione Archivio Diaristico Nazionale* (Pieve Santo Stefano), *Centro di documentazione Flavia Madaschi-Cassero LGBT Center* (Bologna), *Fondazione Sandro Penna* (Turin), *Archivio privato Luca Locati Luciani* (Carrara), *Archives Générales du Royaume* (Brussels), *International Homo/Lesbian Information center and Archive-IHLIA* (Amsterdam), and *Verein Schwulenarchiv Schweiz* (Zurich).

I have relied on the support of friends and family throughout this process. Without my “safety net” I could have never finished this work. My mother, Domenica, and my father, Antonio, have always supported me unconditionally. They have allowed me to become who I

am today. Thank you, Robert, for your love, for your loving support in the last year, for helping me improve my written English, and for following me in my (icy) next step. Thank you, Luigi and Melissa, for being my best “brother” and my best “sister.” I miss you a lot. Thank you, Antonio, for being there when I need support. Thank you so much *Big Family* for being beside me in spite of the Atlantic Ocean: Antonella, Luca, Luigi, Monica, and Riccardo. Thank you, Alessia, Arianna, Damiano, Flavio, Francesca, Massimiliano, Nicoletta, Ornella, and Patrizia. Thank you, “Ann Arbor family”: Andrea, Costanza, Daniela, Domenic, Eimeel, Elizabeth, Erin, Guglielmo, Jamie, Jennifer, Jessica, Jim, Joey, Joshua, Kady, Ken, Luisa, Mattia, Özge, Roberta, Roberto, Sabrina, Sangita, Stephanie, Stephen, and Vincenzo. A special thank to Alessia, Lola, and Tuğçe: thank you for making me smile, and for having been close to me in very difficult moments of my life. I hope our paths will cross again.

I want to thank the scholarly community at the University of Michigan. You changed me deeply and I will never be thankful enough. I want to thank the members of my committee for their support, for their intellectual stimulation, and for their “tough love”: Dario Gaggio, Scott Spector, Kathleen Canning, Dean Hubbs, and Helmut Puff. I want to thank all the professors and students I have met in seminars and courses in the last 6 years. You changed my way of thinking, and you all made me a better scholar. There are a few faculty I want to thank in particular: Kathryn Babayan, Joshua Cole, Henry Cowles, Will Glover, Allison Alexy, Ellen Muehlberger, Gayle Rubin, Melanie Schulze Tanielian, LaKisha Simmons, Abigail Stewart, Ruby Tapia, Hitomi Tonomura, and Elizabeth Wingrove. You are not only fantastic scholars but also wonderful and supportive human beings.

In the end, I want to thank Gina Brandolino of the Sweetland Center of the University of Michigan, and the fantastic staff of my departments and of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender: Kate, Sarah, Donna and Heidi you will be missed.

Thank you room 2254, Lane Hall. The best place to work in the world.

Thank you, Ann Arbor, for having been my home in the last 6 years. It is time to go,
but you will always be in my heart.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
List of Figures.....	vi
List of Abbreviations.....	ix
Abstract.....	xi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Sensational Visibility. Anti-homosexual Representations in Post-Fascist Italy (1945-1949).....	29
Chapter 2: Homosexuals in 1950s Italy Between Repression and Resistance.....	83
Chapter 3: Falling Tiles: the Homosexual Domino Show in Early 1960s Italy.....	144
Chapter 4: Sexual (R)evolution, Sex Panic, and Homosexual Consciousness Raising.....	222
Chapter 5: OUT!: Gay Liberation Discourse and the Construction of an Insurgent Community.....	284
Conclusion.....	318
Bibliography.....	321

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Homosexual man in drag singing at a private party	62
Figure 1.2: “Madam Royale” in drag	64
Figure 1.3: <i>Cinedo</i>	64
Figure 1.4: Man in drag	65
Figure 3.1: “In the Lagoon after the Merlin Law. The youths enjoy each other’s company”	156
Figure 3.2: “Rome, working class neighborhood. Merlin’s product”	156
Figure 3.3: Pier Paolo Pasolini as the “bard”	157
Figure 3.4: Giò Stajano, devotee of the <i>sessò medio</i>	157
Figure 3.5: <i>Coccinelle</i>	157
Figure 3.6: Giorgia O’Brien	157
Figure 3.7: Giò Stajano (<i>Lo Specchio</i> , September 27, 1959, 18).....	161
Figure 3.8: Cover of Ghigo’s 45 rpm, <i>Coccinella</i>	162
Figure 3.9: <i>Coccinelle. Le Ore</i> , December 19, 1959, 36.....	163
Figure 3.10: Female impersonators of <i>Le Carrousel de Paris. Lo Specchio</i> , May 24, 1959.....	163
Figure 3.11: <i>Kiki Mistique. Le Ore</i> , December 26, 1959, 2	163
Figure 3.12: <i>Bambi. Mascotte</i> , September 20, 1959, 24	163
Figures 3.13-3.14: Men dancing in Rome	164
Figure 3.15: Map of Italy showing where homosexuals lived and spent their holidays (<i>Lo Specchio</i> , March 6, 1960, 14).....	168
Figure 3.16: Legend of the map (<i>Lo Specchio</i> , March 6, 1960, 14)	168
Figure 3.17: Two of Feile’s boys	173
Figure 3.18: Feile together with some youths	173
Figures 3.19-3.20: <i>La centrale dei ragazzi-squillo</i> (The headquarters of the call- boys), <i>Lo Specchio</i> , May 1, 1960, 3.....	174
Figure 3.21: Cartoon about Feile	176

Figure 3.22: Cartoon about <i>Coccinelle</i>	176
Figure 3.23: <i>Il Borghese</i> , October 20, 1960.....	188
Figure 3.24: <i>Lo Specchio</i> , October 23, 1960, 25	189
Figures 3.25-3.28: <i>Le Ore</i> , November 15, 1960, 12-13	190
Figures 3.29-3.30: “Claretta.” <i>Meridiano d’Italia</i> , 19, 23	191
Figure 3.31: “When vice becomes tragedy.” <i>Le Ore</i> , November 15, 1960, 5	193
Figure 3.32: “The Murder of Via Veneto.” <i>Lo Specchio</i> , November 13, 1960	193
Figures 3.33-3.34: Donges’ corpse and his car on via Tiburtina	195
Figures 3.35-3.36: “I battoni”	197
Figures 3.37: Illustration of the article “ <i>Il Peccato maschile</i> .”	198
Figures 3.38-3.39: Pictures of young “flamboyant” Italian men	210
Figure 3.40: First page of an article about the preliminary decision of the <i>Balletti Verdi</i> case.....	215
Figure 4.1: Aldo Braibanti	230
Figure 4.2: Giovanni Sanfratello and Pier Carlo Toscani	230
Figure 4.3: Don Backy as Gitone in Gian Luigi Polidoro’s <i>Satyricon</i> (1969).....	239
Figures 4.4-4.5: Beach of Marina di Vecchiano	241
Figure 4.6: “Clean up the pinegrove!”	243
Figure 4.7: Marco Baldisseri.....	245
Figure 4.8: Rodolfo della Latta	245
Figure 4.9: Andrea Benedetti	245
Figure 4.10: Adolfo Meciani.....	247
Figure 4.11: Giuseppe Zacconi	247
Figure 4.12: “Tourists” and peddlers on the beach where Ermanno’s corpse was found	249
Figure 4.13: Picture of a store selling Trincale’s records	249
Figure 4.14: Pietro Vangioni	250
Figure 4.15: <i>ABC</i> , February 7, 1971, “Ermanno, victim of the extreme right”	251
Figures 4.16-4.17: Two of the men arrested for the <i>Balletti Verdi</i> in Reggio Emilia	256
Figure 4.18: <i>Men</i> , July 14, 1969, cover	262
Figure 4.19: Cover of <i>Panorama</i> (May 15, 1969)	267
Figure 4.20: Ermanno Lavorini on the day of his first Communion	270
Figure 4.21: Cover of <i>Il Borghese</i> (May 22, 1969)	270

Figure 4.22: <i>ABC</i> , May 23, 1969, 14	278
Figure 5.1: Cartoon, <i>FUORI!</i> , June 1972, n. 1, backcover	287
Figure 5.2: Sofia with her murderer	288
Figure 5.3: Sofia photographed during her interview	288
Figures 5.4-5.5: Slogans against heterosexist society and psychiatrists	297
Figures 5.6-5.7: Gay protesters outside of the Casino	303
Figure 5.8: Two French gay activists in Sanremo	303
Figure 5.9: Italian gay activists in Sanremo	303
Figure 5.10: Members of IHR outside of the Casino	303
Figure 5.11: Activists trying to hand leaflets to nuns going to the Congress	303
Figure 5.12: Françoise d'Eaubonne speaking at the Conference	304
Figure 5.13: Mario Mieli	309
Figure 5.14: Mario Mieli	309
Figures 5.15-5.17: Back covers of the issues of <i>FUORI!</i> number 3, 4 and 5	310
Figure 5.18: Advertisement of <i>FUORI!</i> published in <i>L'Espresso</i> on June 25, 1972	314
Figures 5.19: The magazine <i>OS</i> publicized <i>FUORI</i> and Peter Bom with a series of pictures representing the Dutch singer as Jesus Christ	315
Figure 5.20: Cover of the first issue of <i>FUORI!</i>	317

List of Abbreviations

ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato
AF	Archivio Fuori
AFSP	Archivio della Fondazione Sandro Penna
AFHQ	Air Force Headquarters
AG	Archivio Generale
AGR	Archives Générales du Royaume
AMC	Archivio Massimo Consoli
APLLL	Archivio Privato Luca Locati Luciani
APO 49	John Horne Burns' post office code
APO 512	John Horne Burns' post office code
ATP	Archivio del Tribunale di Pisa
b.	Busta (box)
CGPJ	Commissariat général de la police judiciaire
CL	Caso Lavorini
CPI	John Horne Burns' Intelligence Unit
CS	Corrispondenza segreteria
DAGR	Divisione affari generali e riservati
DAR	Divisione affari riservati
DGPS	Direzione generale Polizia di stato
DPAS	Divisione polizia amministrativa e sociale
f.	Fascicolo (file)
FP	Fascicoli Permanenti
FSP	Fondazione Sandro Penna
Gab.	Gabinetto
HGARC	Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center
ISACEM	Istituto per la storia dell'Azione Cattolica e del movimento cattolico in Italia
MI	Ministero degli Interni
NW	Nachlass Welti

PG	Presidenza Generale
PM NYC	Postmaster in New York City
PWCD	Ports, Waterways, Coastal Defense
R	Relazioni
SAZ	SchwulArchiv-Zurich
Sf	Sottofascicolo
SM	Segretariato Moralità
USFET	United States Forces European Theater of War

Abstract

By analyzing popular magazines and newspapers, fictional accounts, personal letters, and police files, this study explores experiences and discourses produced around male prostitution and homosexuality in post-Fascist Italy. It makes the central argument that male prostitution provides a lens for the historical analysis of homosexualities and anti-homosexual anxieties between the end of WWII and the foundation of the Italian gay liberation movement in the 1970s. In so doing, this dissertation highlights the centrality of (homo)sexuality to the investigation of the crucial turning points of postwar Italian (and European) history, from reconstruction and the Cold War to the economic miracle and the protest movements of the late 1960s. The nexus of male prostitution and homosexual subjectivities, propagated by the media and increasingly resisted by an emerging emancipatory movement, contributed to the ongoing redefinition of normalcy and deviance, thereby redrawing the contours of citizenship and belonging.

This research charts male prostitution as a pervasive and ordinary practice in post-Fascist Italy. Parks, train stations, cinemas, and public restrooms were queer spaces where men and male adolescents met and had sex. For many young Italians prostitution was a temporary expedient, a rite of passage into city life and a way to satisfy their financial and sexual needs. Some homosexual men would later remember these sexual experiences with young hustlers as pleasant, adventurous and, at times, genuinely emotional. Nonetheless, cruising and picking up young male prostitutes could also entail blackmail and violence. This study focuses indeed on scandals and murders that dotted the history of male prostitution in

Italy and on the discursive explosion that these events engendered. Italian media promoted sexual panics and favored the outbreaks of political anti-homosexual persecutions, while at the same time creating a discursive arena where insurgent homosexualities could emerge through self-identification and mutual solidarity.

By exploring the contours of sexual citizenship in post-Fascist Italy, this work argues that homosexuals were “partial citizens” denied full access to an array of social and political rights. The Italian Homosexual Front, founded in 1971, actively sought to change these conditions, presenting a new image of homosexuals as young, proud, and able to cultivate significant affective relationships. In so doing, it broke the metonymic relationship between homosexuality and male prostitution, setting out to “normalize” homosexuality and challenge the status of homosexuals as sexual pariahs and partial citizens.

Introduction

In 2011, the gay activist Andrea Pini published a collection of interviews conducted with several self-identifying homosexual men. The interviewees recalled how in post-Fascist Italy for many “men like them” having sex with young, presumably heterosexual “*veri maschi*” (real men) was a rather common practice. These youths sold their bodies to earn a little money or obtain something in exchange.¹ Riccardo Peloso, one of the men interviewed, noted that in the early 1960s in his Roman apartment there was no bathroom and that on Saturdays, he would go to a public bathhouse – the *Cobianchi* – to take a shower. All the young men working in the market of Campo de’ Fiori went there and the most important thing for them, according to Peloso, was “*scopare*” (fuck). He explained: “Obviously I was not the only homosexual who had discovered that place, and everything happened as if it were the easiest thing in the world. During the week, I met them at the market and they told me: ‘*A Riccà, se vedemo sabato al Cobianchi...*’ (Riccardo, we will see you on Saturday at the Cobianchi) which meant: ‘*Scopiamo*’ (We will fuck).” Peloso remembered how these youths were poultry men, fish sellers, and fruit sellers, who met him on Saturday afternoon in the bathhouse and then went out with their girlfriends on Saturday night, maybe spending the money they had earned hustling.² Peloso recounted also how simple it was to pick young men up in Piazza di Spagna. They were easily satisfied by a bit of change to buy a couple of cigarettes and eat a humble breakfast. They “fucked you with good grace,” the interviewee emphasized, but they always asked you for something afterwards.³

¹ Andrea Pini, *Quando eravamo froci. Gli omosessuali nell'Italia di una volta* (Roma: Il Saggiatore, 2011), 134-136.

² *Ibid.*, 282.

³ *Ibid.*, 281.

Unlike recent ethnographic research where sexual acts between male hustlers and clients are often described in detail, we do not know exactly what happened between Pini's interviewees and these casual male prostitutes (generally called *marchette* or *marchettari*).⁴ We do not know what “*scopare*” (fuck) actually meant in these accounts. We do not know if homosexuals and hustlers kissed. We do not know if there was any sort of sexual foreplay between them. And we do not know if clients sexually penetrated their partners or were penetrated or both. In Pini's book sexual practices remain largely untold, and the young *maschi* do not tell their stories.

As several men Pini interviewed suggest, and as my research will show, male prostitution was a pervasive and ordinary practice in Italy. Many young men actively searched for clients or took advantage of unexpected encounters. Parks, train stations, cinemas, and public restrooms were queer spaces where men and boys – usually of different classes – met and had sex. Since the end of WWII for many young Italians – often coming from the countryside and the South in search for a better life – prostitution was a temporary expedient to survive, a rite of passage into urban life, a way to satisfy their sexual needs, and a means to have the money for a night out with their girlfriends.⁵ The *marchette* recalled in Pini's book were usually soldiers, delinquents, unemployed and lower-class individuals, but in post-Fascist Italy there was a multiplicity of male prostitutes that also included children, students,

⁴ The so-called *marchetta* was originally a token Italian female prostitutes received from brothel-keepers after every client they met. At the end of the day they were paid according to the tokens (*marchette*) collected. For metonymy, *marchetta* is used as a noun for female and male prostitute (<http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/marchetta/>). Only in the case of male prostitute another word used is *marchettaro* (<http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/marchettaro/>). The word *marchettaro* would translate the Anglo-American *trade* or *rough trade*. See, for example, George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 69-70. For recent ethnographic works about male-male prostitution see for example Cirus Rinaldi, “Il sex worker maschile (omosessuale): rappresentazioni, mondi sociali e analisi,” in *Prostituzioni visibili e invisibili*, Costantino Cipolla and Elisabetta Ruspini eds. (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2012), 189-222; Nicola Mai, “Surfing Liquid Modernity. Albanian and Romanian male sex workers in Europe,” in *Men Who Sell Sex: Global Perspectives*, Peter Aggleton, Richard Parker, and Dennis Altman eds. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 27-41; Cirus Rinaldi, “Dalla ‘messa-in-scena’ alla costruzione delle gerarchie. Riflessioni su copioni sessuali, maschilità e neutralizzazione dello stigma nel *sex work* maschile,” in *I copioni sessuali. Storia, analisi e applicazioni*, Cirus Rinaldi ed. (Milano: Mondadori education, 2017), 324-358.

⁵ See, for example, Don Romesburg, “‘Wouldn’t a Boy Do?’ Placing Early-Twentieth-Century Male Youth Sex Work into Histories of Sexuality,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, 3 (2009): 367-392.

young men from good families, and *travestiti* (transvestites).⁶ It is difficult to reconstruct the lived experiences of these individuals because we often lack those precious “ego-documents” that would allow us to comprehend how they gave meaning to their experiences and behaviors. Given the limitation of our archive, it is not possible to say how these people understood their sexualities, and if they even conceived of themselves as prostitutes. There is much that is still unknown about the history of male prostitution in Italy, a practice that seemed to be widely diffused in the country. Bernie Woolf, a friend of the American writer Gore Vidal, considered 1960s Rome a “sexual paradise.” He remembered that the city

was a very advantageous place to live: if you were a homosexual of a certain age at that time you could have almost anybody. I don’t mean all the young men were gay, but for a certain amount of lire they were yours. If that was your proclivity and that’s what you wanted to do you were home free. It was just part of growing up for these kids: they felt no compunction about hiring their bodies out.⁷

Many men interviewed by Pini fondly remembered, like Woolf, the years after 1945 and talked about their sexual experiences as pleasant, romantic, and adventurous. It is often forgotten that the ties between homosexual clients and *marchette* could be affective. Reading the letters sent in the early 1950s to young hustlers detained in the juvenile re-education center of Milan, it is evident how some homosexual men fell in love with the boys they paid. We do not know in this case what the young hustlers thought about their clients, but nothing prevents us from hypothesizing that they developed positive feelings for them too.⁸ However, as my research will show, cruising and picking up young male hustlers was not always harmless. Male prostitution often entailed hatred, repulsion, violence, blackmail, and unfortunately sometimes death.

⁶ *Travestiti* were presented by media as male prostitutes wearing female attire.

⁷ Tim Teeman, *In Bed with Gore Vidal. Hustlers, and the Private World of an American Master* (New York: Magnus Books, 2013), 106. From this book see also the following pages about 1960s Rome: 98-108.

⁸ Alberto Giordano, “Il valore criminogeno della prostituzione maschile nell’età evolutiva,” *La giustizia penale* 1 (1951): 208-219. For affective relationships between hustlers and clients see also, for example, these two fictional accounts: Giuseppe Patroni Griffi, *Il ragazzo di Trastevere* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1955) and Donald Windham, *Due vite* (Milano: Mondadori, 1966).

I started out my research tracking media representation of homosexuals and homosexuality in post-Fascist Italy, but this quickly led me to male prostitution and sexual scandals. In Italian magazines and newspapers homosexuality and male prostitution frequently were conflated. According to several journalists, homosexuals were not interested in other “men like that” but looked for non-homosexual young partners. The Italian media, searching for titillating news and trying to raise alarms about post-war juvenile sexual deviance, spilled much ink about crimes committed in the “sordid world” of male prostitution. Analyzing my sources I came to realize that same-sex scandals related to the world of male prostitution, unfolding over decades, paralleled and shed light upon homosexual identities, conceptualizations of sexuality, and eventually even emancipation movements.

Male prostitution, as Robert Aldrich and Lorenzo Benadusi underline, was not a new, post-Fascist phenomenon.⁹ It was a common – and often carefully concealed – practice in liberal as well as in Mussolini’s Italy. What was different was that after WWII the “unsaid” became “widely discussed.” Between the 1940s and the 1970s, as my work will demonstrate, magazines and newspapers spoke with gusto about male hustlers and homosexuals and played a major role in nurturing social panics which, on the one hand, buttressed heteronormativity and, on the other, stimulated homosexual self-awareness. Media offered a new vocabulary, allowed many readers to become familiar with debates about sexuality and gender, and recognized (and fostered) the emergence of new identities.

Male-male sexualities and male-male prostitution have been policed using similar or related legislation since the 19th century in a variety of countries. Thus, according to Jeffrey Weeks, studying homosexual prostitution we can “illuminate changing images of homosexuality and its legal and social regulation, as well as the variability of sexual identities

⁹ See Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean. Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man. Homosexuality in Fascist Italy* (Madison-WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

in our social history and their relationship to wider social structures.”¹⁰ Following Weeks’ argument, I contend that male-male prostitution, besides being an emotional and physical experience, is a prism through which we can understand how Italian male same-sex identities, sexualities, affectivity, and sociability have evolved in the recent past. The relentless discursive attention around male-male prostitution made homosexuals – and their different ways of living and experiencing their sexual orientations – visible, debatable and understandable.

My study, by analyzing popular magazines, newspapers, fiction, personal letters, and police files, explores discourses produced around scandals and murders that occurred in the world of male prostitution in post-Fascist Italy. In doing so I recover the largely neglected history of male homosexualities after 1945 and trace how discourses about homosexuality and anti-homosexuality changed – or persisted – between the end of WWII and the foundation of the Italian gay liberation movement in the Seventies. In particular, in my research I investigate 1) how more visible forms of same-sex sexuality and gender non-conformity not only stimulated fears of “contagion,” but also publicized and encouraged “deviant” behaviors, 2) how the public tried to make sense of homosexualities and homosexuals, and 3) how homosexuals tried to make sense of themselves.

Sexualities Matter

Sexual issues are not phenomena on the social margins. The history of sexuality is far more than the recollection and analysis of sexual practices, behaviors, and identities in the past.

Sexuality, society, ideology, and politics are inextricably interconnected.¹¹ As Matt

¹⁰ Jeffrey Weeks, “Inverts, Perverts, and Mary-Annes. Male Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 6, no. 1-2 (1980): 114.

¹¹ See Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Id., “Sexuality, Memory, Morality,” *History&Memory*, 17, 1-2 (2005), 238-266; Id., “Syncopated Sex: Transforming European Sexual Cultures,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (2009): 1287-1308; Victoria Harris, “Sex on the Margins: New Directions in the Historiography of Sexuality and Gender,” *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 4 (2010): 1085-1104; Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe. A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Cambridge University

Houlbrook and Harry Cocks write, sex has been used by historians “as a prism through which to explore wider social and cultural issues.” The history of sexuality, they continue, “allows us to enter a world of meaning, to understand the most fundamental assumptions about everyday life that shape the social, cultural and political life of modern Western societies.”¹² Dagmar Herzog, making a similar argument, writes that sex can “be the site for talking about very many other things beside sex and working through a multitude of other social and political conflicts.”¹³ By integrating the history of sexuality “with more traditional historiographical foci,” Herzog continues, we can challenge “assumptions about key social and political transformations” and provide “new insights into a broad array of crucial phenomena.”¹⁴

Scandalous Practices: Homosexuality, Male Prostitution, and Sexual Citizenship in Post-Fascist Italy is a social history that emphasizes the interconnectedness of society, politics, economy, culture, and sexuality. Looking at the Italian past through a “homosexual lens” my work: 1) investigates social, cultural, and sexual continuities and ruptures between Fascist and post-Fascist Italy demonstrating how Mussolini’s regime was not a parenthesis in Italian history and how Fascist anti-homosexual attitudes persisted well after 1945; 2) questions rigid periodizations, and demonstrates how sexuality is a “syncopated” phenomenon that is always “under negotiation” and does not move in a straight line from repression to permissiveness; 3) emphasizes that the history of post-war Italian gender and sexuality can throw light upon dynamics and strategies of the Cold War; 4) shows how rapid social and economic changes – such as those provoked by the Italian economic miracle of late

Press, 2011); Emmanuel Betta, “Sessualità e storia,” *Contemporanea* 14, no. 4 (2011): 701-703; Donna Harsch, “Eroticism, Love and Sexuality in the Two Postwar Germanys,” *German Studies Review* 35, no. 3 (2012): 627-636; Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Gender, Sexuality and the Cold War* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017); Annette F. Timm, “The Challenges of Including Sexual Violence and Transgressive Love in Historical Writing on World War II and the Holocaust,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 3 (2017): 351-365.

¹² Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, “Introduction” in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality*, Harry G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook eds. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 1-2. See also Peter N. Stearns, *Sexuality in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 2.

¹³ Herzog, *Sexuality, Memory, Morality*, 239.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 238

1950s and early 1960s – fostered socio-cultural insecurities that exacerbated anxieties about sexuality and gender; and, in the end, 5) claims that by analyzing the history of Italian homosexuals, we can comprehend how social and sexual citizenships were constructed and defined in post-Fascist Italy. The incessant definition and redefinition of behaviors deemed acceptable or unacceptable by media, government and political parties defined what it meant to be Italian.¹⁵

This study shows that sexuality is deeply implicated in notions and practices of citizenship. Citizenship, as Terrell Carver wrote, seems to be “an on/off kind of concept.” You have it or you do not. You are a citizen or you are not. However, there are different degrees of citizenship, and we should think about it as defined by “gradations of esteem.”¹⁶ There is a “citizenship-as-legal-status” – full membership in a political community – and “citizenship-as-a-desirable-activity” – “where the extent and quality of one’s citizenship is a function of one’s participation in that community.” Many individuals, despite possessing citizenship-as-a-legal-status, are excluded from the political community for their class, socio-cultural identity, and/or for their “difference.”¹⁷ According to Bryan Turner, citizenship can be defined as a “set of practices – juridical, political, economic, and cultural – which define a person or through which persons define themselves as competent members of society.”¹⁸

¹⁵ For the concept of “syncopated sex” see Herzog, “Syncopated Sex,” 1287-1308.

¹⁶ Terrell Carver, “Sexual Citizenship: Gendered and De-gendered Narratives,” in *Politics of Sexuality. Identity, Gender, Citizenship*, Terrell Carver and Véronique Mottier eds. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 14.

¹⁷ Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, “Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory,” *Ethics*, 104, 2 (1994): 353, 369, 370.

¹⁸ Bryan S. Turner, “Contemporary problems in the theory of citizenship,” in *Citizenship and Social Theory*, Bryan S. Turner ed. (London: Sage, 1993), 2. On citizenship as “status” and “practice” see also Ruth Lister, “Citizenship: Towards a Feminist Synthesis,” in *Citizenship: Pushing the Boundaries*, Prina Werbner and Nira Yuval-Davis eds., special issue of *Feminist Review*, 57 (1997): 29-33; Kathleen Canning and Sonya O. Rose, “Gender, Citizenship and Subjectivity: Some Historical and Theoretical Considerations,” *Gender and History*, 13, no. 3 (2001): 427-443; Kathleen Canning, “Class vs. Citizenship: Keywords in German Gender History,” *Central European History* 37, no. 2 (2004): 225-244; Id., *Gender History in Practice. Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class & Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Id., “Reflections on the Vocabulary of Citizenship in Twentieth,” in *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Geoff Eley and Jan Palmowski eds. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 214-232; Geoff Eley, “Some General Thoughts about Citizenship in Germany,” in *Citizenship and National Identity*, 233-248; Kathleen Canning, “Claiming Citizenship. Suffrage and Subjectivity in Germany after the First World War,” in *Weimar Publics/Weimar Subjects. Rethinking the Political Culture of Germany in the 1920s*, Kathleen Canning, Kerstin Barndt and Kristin McGuire eds. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 116-137; Jennifer Evans and Jane Freeland, “Rethinking Sexual Modernity in Twentieth Century Germany,” *Social History* 37, no. 3 (2012): 314-327.

A national community is hierarchically organized according to the adherence to specific practices and values imposed and fostered by institutions of socio-political power. Citizenship does not have “universally or regularly agreed boundaries,” but is “a movable metaphor of ‘belonging’ and ‘inclusion.’”¹⁹ Being a citizen is not a given quality, but a role that can be acquired and lost. *Citizen is someone who belongs*, those who are perceived as *non-belonging* are *partial-citizens*. They are denied the right of being full members of a particular community with a shared identity.²⁰ Gender and sexuality – together with other identity categories such as race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, education, language, able-bodiedness, etc. – establish hierarchies of citizenship.²¹ The concept of “sexual citizenship,” Jeffrey Weeks explains, brings to the fore “issues and struggles that were only implicit or silenced in earlier notions of citizenship.” Sexual citizenship, he continues, has many features in common with other claims to citizenship. It is “about enfranchisement, about inclusion, about belonging, about equity and justice, about rights balanced by new responsibilities.”²²

Everyday practices of individuals are the bases of citizenship and “intimate practices of sex are also part of the realms in which healthy citizenship is constituted.”²³ The “good

¹⁹ Carver, “Sexual Citizenship,” 16.

²⁰ Diane Richardson, “Sexuality and Citizenship,” *Sociology* 32, no. 1 (1998): 85. See also Jeffrey Weeks, “The Sexual Citizen,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 15, no. 3-4 (1998): 35.

²¹ For citizenship and race see, for example, David Taylor, “Citizenship and Social Power,” *Critical Social Policy* 9, no. 26 (1989): 19-31; M. Jaqui Alexander, “No Just (Any)Body Can be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas,” *Feminist Review*, no. 48 (1994): 5-23; *Race, Identity, Citizenship: A Reader*, Rodolfo D. Torres ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999); Patrick Wolfe, “Race and Citizenship,” *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 5 (2004): 66-71. For citizenship and gender see Anne Phillips, “Citizenship and Feminist Theory,” in *Citizenship*, Geoff Andrews ed. (London: Lawrence&Wishart, 1991), 76-88; Sylvia Walby, “Is Citizenship Gendered,” *Sociology* 28, no. 2 (1994): 379-395; Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspective* (London: Macmillan, 1997); *Citizenship: Pushing the Boundaries*; Sylvia Walby, *Gender Transformations* (London: Routledge, 1997); Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider eds. (New York: Routledge, 1998): 100-133; Rian Voet, *Feminism and Citizenship* (London: Sage, 1998); Nancy Cott, “Marriage and Women’s Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934,” *American Historical Review* 103, no. 5 (1998): 1440-1474; Canning and Rose, “Gender, Citizenship and Subjectivity,” 427-443; Maureen Healy, “Becoming Austrian: Women, the State, and Citizenship in World War I,” *Central European History*, 35, no. 1 (2002): 1-35; Canning, “Class vs. Citizenship,” 225-244; Ruth Lister, “Citizenship and Gender,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*, Edwin Amenta, Kate Nash, and Alan Scott eds. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 372-382; *Gendered Citizenship and the Politics of Representation*, Hilde Danielsen, Kari Jegerstedt, Ragnhild L. Muriaas, Brita Ytre-Arne eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

²² Weeks, “The Sexual Citizen,” 39.

²³ Diane Richardson, “Constructing Sexual Citizenship: Theorizing Sexual Rights,” *Critical Social Policy* 20, no. 1 (2000): 106.

citizen,” David Bell underlines, “is heavily responsabilized, meaning that only certain formations of sexual culture can be parlayed into citizenry.”²⁴ The “normal citizen” has been constructed as white, middle class, able-bodied, cisgender, male, and heteronormative. Homosexual individuals, as well as “non-normative” heterosexuals, are “partial citizens” who are denied full access to rights of sexual expression and sexual identity because of their desires and behaviors.²⁵ Homosexuals are entitled to certain rights of existence, but they are not part of the “normal” and “legitimate social constituency.” They are tolerated as long as they stay within well defined boundaries – “whose borders are maintained through a heterosexist public/private divide” – and as long as they remain a minority. Homosexuals have been historically presented as potential traitors, as a threat to social and national security, as individuals that the state felt the need to exclude in order to protect itself and guarantee its future existence.²⁶

Homosexuals, according to many Italian politicians and journalists, were endangering the future of the nation and jeopardizing the well-being of the Italian citizenry by corrupting

²⁴ David Bell, “Geographies of Sexual Citizenship,” *Political Geography*, no. 25 (2006): 870.

²⁵ See Steven Seidman, “From Identity to Queer Politics: Shifts in Normative Heterosexuality and the Meaning of Citizenship,” *Citizenship Studies*, 5, no. 3 (2011): 322 and Diane Richardson, “Rethinking Sexual Citizenship,” *Sexualities* 51, no. 2 (2017): 211. For sexual citizenship and privileges of heterosexual citizenry see also Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield, “Social Reconstruction and the Emergence of Companionate Marriage, 1945-1959,” in *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writing of Jaqueline Burgoyne*, David Clark ed. (London: Routledge, 1991), 6-27; David Evans, *Sexual Citizenship: The Material Construction of Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993); Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Post-War Britain*. (London: Fourth Estate, 1996); Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens. The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” *GLQ*, no. 3 (1997): 437-465; Richardson, “Sexuality and Citizenship,” 83-100; Weeks, “The Sexual Citizen,” 35-52; David Bell and Jon Binnie, *The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Richardson, “Constructing Sexual Citizenship”; Shane Phelan, *Sexual Strangers: Gays, Lesbians and Dilemmas of Citizenship* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001); Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Harris, “Sex on the Margins;” Seidman, “From Identity to Queer Politics,” 321-328; Carol Johnson, “Heteronormative Citizenship and the Politics of Passing,” *Sexualities* 5, no. 3 (2002): 316-336; Ken Plummer, *Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogues* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Carolyn Herbst, *Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Leticia Sabsay, “The Emergence of the Other Sexual Citizen: Orientalism and the Modernization of Sexuality,” *Citizenship Studies* 16, no. 4-5 (2012): 605-623; Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Alana Harris and Tim Jones, *Love and Romance in Britain, 1918-1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Elisa Bellè, Caterina Peroni, Elisa Rapetti, “Fighting About (Sexual) Citizenship: Italy’s ‘Nature or Culture’ Dilemma,” *Rivista Critica de Ciências Sociais*, 110 (2016): 73-98; Carol Johnson, “Sexual Citizenship in a Comparative Perspective: Dilemmas and Insights,” *Sexualities*, 20, 1-2 (2017): 159-175; Richardson, “Rethinking Sexual Citizenship,” 208-224; Muehlenbeck, *Gender, Sexuality and the Cold War*; Richardson, “Sexuality and Citizenship,” 1256-1260.

²⁶ Richardson, “Sexuality and Citizenship,” 88-91, 95-96. See also Herbst, *Prescription for Heterosexuality*, 4.

children and young men destined to become future husbands and fathers. Discourses over male prostitution were the main context for the articulation of these anxieties. The necessity of defending and protecting the youths from the *homosexual contagion* is one of the main leitmotifs of my work. Reading the Italian press one gets the impression that homosexuals were not only a “cancer,” a “plague,” a biopolitical threat attacking the social body and undermining the national collective health, but also parasites sapping the work ethic of the new generations.²⁷ Young hustlers searching for easy profit and their homosexual clients seemed to be the opposite of the industrious and capable workers promoted in the Italian political discourse and praised by the Italian government. In a series of short films and documentaries the Presidency of the Council of Ministers produced between the 1950s and the 1960s, good and competent citizens featured as “hard-working, family-minded *paterfamilias*.”²⁸ The first article of the Italian Constitution declares that “Italy is a democratic republic founded on labor.” In that light youths who were said not to have embraced the work ethic at the heart of post-Fascist Italy and who were ceding to homosexual temptations, ran the risk of losing their place in the national community and being denied “full citizenship.”

My work shows how heterosexuality was an essential discriminatory factor in the definition of citizenship in post-Fascist Italy. The end of the war meant the construction of a new citizenship that was supposed to be not only anti-Fascist but also strictly and ostensibly heterosexual. Anti-homosexuality was a unifier in the newly emerging post-Fascist

²⁷ For bio-power and “social body” see, for example, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Book Edition, 1980); Martin Hewitt, “Bio-Politics and Social Policy: Foucault’s Account of Welfare,” *Theory Culture Society*, 2, 67 (1983): 67-84; Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire. Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Kathleen Canning, “Social Policy, Body Politics: Recasting the Social Question in Germany, 1875-1900,” in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*, Laura Frader and Sonya Rose eds. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996): 211-237; Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Edward Ross Dickinson, “Bio-politics, Fascism, Democracy: Some Reflections on Our Discourse about ‘Modernity’,” *Central European History* 37, no. 1 (2004): 1-48; Id., *Sex, Freedom, and Power in Imperial Germany, 1880-1914*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar, *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

²⁸ Anne Bruch, “Meglio di ieri. Educational Films, National Identity and Citizenship in Italy from 1948 to 1968,” *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 8, no. 1 (2016): 84. See also Mark Hayward, “Good Workers: Television Documentary, Migration and the Italian Nation, 1956-1964,” *Modern Italy* 16, no. 1 (2011): 3, 4, 12.

community, which felt the need to restore the dignity of the Italian state, presented by some journalists and writers as a demasculinized prostitute exploited by victorious foreigners. Though constructing their new citizenship in the name of political equality and inclusivity, Italians immediately “banned” homosexuals who were constructed as second-class citizens and excluded from the new collective Italian identity.

Perceived crises and moments of social, political and cultural change triggered redefinitions of citizenship; moral panics distinguished “good” and “bad” citizens, thereby reinforcing the wall between the inner and the outer sections of the “charmed circle.”²⁹ The Italian media, as my research will document, defined the *normative* by pathologizing and criminalizing the *deviant*. Magazines and newspapers, exposing the “homosexual” as “anti-Italian,” were among the first dispositifs to repress sexual deviance and outline the ideal profile of the “new post-Fascist citizen.” The sexual hierarchy between heterosexuality and homosexuality was maintained through the celebration of some identities, and through repressive practices that aimed at demeaning and isolating some others. Such practices created the idea of heterosexuals and homosexuals as antithetical human types and enforced the normative status of the “pure” *heterosexual citizen* opposing the “polluted” and polluting *homosexual anti-citizen*.³⁰ Sexual practices, together with family structures and social mores, determined the degree to which individuals were welcomed – or not – into the polity.³¹

Scandals and murders happening in particular moments of political and social reconfiguration mobilized “respectable citizens” and political parties against deviant and non-conformist subjects who, already stripped of their sexual citizenship, were accused of being “sexual devils” who warped the Italian society and, above all, the future generations.³² The

²⁹ Gayle Rubin in her essay “Thinking Sex” introduced the concept of the “charmed circle” of sexuality. Sexual behaviors and practices privileged by a society are inside the circle, while other sexual practices are outside of the “circle” or in opposition to it. Rubin notes that looking at what is inside and outside of the “circle” we can understand the hierarchical valuation of sex acts in a society. See Rubin, “Thinking Sex,” 109.

³⁰ See Seidman, “From Identity to Queer Politics,” 321-322.

³¹ Evans and Freeland, “Rethinking sexual modernity,” 324.

³² See Bellè, Peroni, Rapetti, “Fighting About (Sexual) Citizenship,” 76.

Cold War exacerbated anti-homosexual practices and attitudes. For decades the Italian Communists, seeking to prove their loyalty and devotion to the state, asserted their right to be considered full-fledged Italian citizens by denigrating homosexuals and accusing the Italian government, led by the Christian Democrats, of failing to protect the new generations. Ultimately, despite the lack of legal persecution, Italian homosexuals were regarded as “partial citizens.” Only in the early 1970s did the activists of the newly-formed Italian Homosexual Front make the first steps necessary to redefine the parameters of social and sexual citizenship in Italy. By disassociating homosexuality from male-male prostitution and by aiming more generally at the “normalization” of homosexuality, they fought for the inclusion of homosexuals in the Italian national community.

Not a Crime

Same-sex practices have been legal in Italy since the 19th century. In 1791, the French Constituent Assembly abolished the criminalization of “sodomy.” In 1810, the Napoleonic Code, validating the distinction between law on one side, and religion and morality on the other, confirmed the resolution voted by French revolutionaries twenty years before. The Italian territories under Napoleonic power adopted the principle according to which sexuality belonged to the private sphere. Once they regained their independence in 1815, the Italian states maintained the *Code Napoléon*. The Kingdom of Sardinia, which had preserved its independence from Napoleon’s rule, upheld its own norms. Among them there was article 425 of the Sardinian code, which “inflicted severe punishment on any kind of unnatural libidinous act committed with violence or that caused a scandal or even with no sign of the aforementioned.”³³

In 1861, with the unification of Italy under the Kingdom of Sardinia, the legislation of this state was expected to be extended to the rest of the country. Nevertheless, a Commission

³³ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 89.

of Deputies, specifically designated to manage the legislative integration of the nation, decided that article 425 was not going to be implemented in the territory of the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, where sodomy had not been a crime since 1819. This situation caused great ambiguities: in the North same-sex sex between consenting adults was punished, while in the South the same acts were legal. The legislative Commission motivated the decision as follows:

Events of incontinence are not punishable unless the law has been violated, public decency has been offended, or violence has been committed against one's personal decency, such as in case of rape abduction, or an attack on decency. Yet, the commission, pointing to the traditions of our previous legislation for this last type of crime, warns that it will have to divest of juridical effectiveness the penalty established by the code for unnatural libidinous acts when they are not accompanied by violence and refer to the punishment for rape with violence when there has been violence.³⁴

In so doing, the Commission seemed to acknowledge the “peculiarity” – and subtly insinuate the “racial” otherness – of the Italian Southerners who were deemed to be more “flexible” in regard to same-sex experiences.³⁵ The legislative inconsistency between North and South was definitively resolved in 1889 when the new Penal Code – *Codice Zanardelli* – decriminalized same-sex practices throughout the nation: the law no longer punished libidinous acts without scandal or violence. Homosexuality in Liberal Italy was a “disgusting” vice that, if practiced in private between consenting adults, was not criminally relevant. In 1909, the *Enciclopedia di diritto penale italiano* (Encyclopedia of Italian Criminal Law) affirmed: “However repulsive such events are, they should not be recorded and punished. For it is preferable for

³⁴ “Relazione presentata a S.A.R. il Principe Luogotenente dalla Commissione per gli studii legislative, istituita con decreto del 6 Febbraio 1861,” Quoted in Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 90.

³⁵ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 90. For “sex tourism” in the Italian South see Aldrich, *Seduction of the Mediterranean*; Chiara Beccalossi, “The ‘Italian Vice’: Male Homosexuality and British Tourism in Southern Italy,” in *Italian Sexualities Uncovered, 1789-1914*, Valeria P. Babini, Chiara Beccalossi and Lucy Rial eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 185-206.

public morality that they remain buried in darkness and ignored.”³⁶ Nonetheless, Italian sexologists and sensational journalists profusely talked about homosexuality.³⁷

When in 1925 Benito Mussolini, in power since 1922, decided to replace the Zanardelli Code with a new Fascist one, the problem of homosexuality’s legal status came up again. In 1927, in the first draft of the new Fascist Penal Code, known as *Codice Rocco*, same-sex sex was criminalized (article 528). In the final version, however, the article – which provided for a penalty only in case of public scandal – vanished. According to the commission that was revising the Code, it was not necessary to provide a measure for this crime because “fortunately” in Italy “this abominable vice [was] not so widespread ... to justify legislative intervention.” Moreover, the commission continued, in similar cases it was possible “to resort to, and apply the most severe punishment for such crimes as rape, corruption of minors and insult to decency.”³⁸ The new criminal code, voted in on October 19, 1930 – and became effective on July 1, 1931 – did not mention homosexuality as a “crime.” Fascists, like liberals, opted for silence, as if homosexuality did not exist or did not occur

³⁶ P. Tuozzi, “I delitti contro il buon costume e l’ordine delle famiglie,” in *Enciclopedia di diritto penale italiano* (Milan: Società Editrice Libreria, 1909), 172 quoted in Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 94.

³⁷ For Italian sexology and homosexuality in late nineteenth and early twentieth century see, for example, Lorenzo Benadusi, “Il lecito e l’illecito. Nascita della Sessuologia e Invenzione delle Perversioni nell’Italia tra Otto e Novecento,” *Zapruder* 6 (2005): 28-43; Id., “Società, Amore e Cultura Omosessuale nell’Ottocento,” *Storia e Problemi Contemporanei* 39 (2005): 119-127; Chiara Beccalossi, “The Origin of Italian Sexological Studies: Female Sexual Inversion, ca. 1870–1900,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 1 (2009): 103-120; Id., “Female Same-sex Desires: Conceptualizing a Disease in Competing Medical Fields in Nineteenth-century Europe,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 67, no. 1 (2012): 7-35; Id., *Female Sexual Inversion: Same-Sex Desires in Italian and British Sexology, ca. 1870–1920* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Id., “Madness and Sexual Psychopathies as the Magnifying Glass of the Normal: Italian Psychiatry and Sexuality c.1880–1910,” *Social History of Medicine* 27, no. 2 (2013): 303–325. For homosexual scandals, beside the notorious case of Friedrich Alfred Krupp (see, for example, “Capri-Sodoma,” *La Propaganda-Quotidiano Socialista*, October 15, 1902 and “Gli scandali di Capri-La beneficenza di Krupp-La corruzione nell’isola-Imperatore ed ambasciatore di Germania,” *La Propaganda-Quotidiano Socialista*,” October 20, 1902), particularly famous were also the case of the male boarding school of Varazze (Savona) where a group of Salesian teachers were accused of sexual harassment and violence (see, for example, “Atti nefandi in un asilo di pseudo-monache. L’arresto di don Riva a Torino,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, July 20, 1907; “Gli scandali nell’educatorio di Alassio,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, July 28, 1907; “Scandalo a Varazze,” *Il Popolo*, July 31, 1907; “Scoperta di fatti scandalosi nel Collegio Salesiano di Varazze,” *Il Caffaro*, July 3, 1907), the case of the telegraph boys of Bologna who prostituted themselves with male clients (see “Il triste argomento,” *Il Resto del Carlino*, July 21, 1908; “Degenerati,” *Il Resto del Carlino*, July 22, 1908; “Turpitudini. Dalla puerizia all’età matura,” *Il Resto del Carlino*, July 23, 1908, “L’inchiesta sui fattorini telegrafici,” *Il Resto del Carlino*, July 29, 1908), and the case of 23 firemen prostituting with men in Milan (see “Lo scandalo di Milano,” *La Stampa*, March 23, 1909; “Uno scandalo nel corpo dei pompieri,” *Il Corriere della Sera-Corriere Milanese*, March 23, 1909; “Lo scandalo vergognoso di alcuni pompieri e parecchi signorotti,” *Il Secolo*, March 24, 1909; “Lo scandalo dei pompieri,” *La Stampa*, March 24, 1909; “Lo scandalo dei pompieri a Milano,” *La Tribuna*, March 26, 1909). Moreover, the journalist and writer Paolo Valera published two sensationalist books *Milano Sconosciuta* and *Amori Bestiali* in which he talked, among other topics, also of homosexuality and male prostitution. See Paolo Valera, *Milano Sconosciuta* (Milano: C. Bignami, 1879) and Id., *Amori bestiali* (Roma: A. Sommaruga, 1884).

³⁸ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 104.

amongst Italians.³⁹ Articles of the Fascist Penal Code covered same-sex rape, assault, and abuse, whereas the 1926 public security laws would provide police with sufficient powers to control and repress same-sex activities.

Despite the silence of the *Codice Rocco*, Fascists could resort to a variety of repressive means to regulate homosexuality: 1) forced hospitalization in mental asylums; 2) *confino* (exile to small villages in the Italian South or internment on island colonies for a renewable period of one to five years); 3) *ammonizione* (probation requiring individuals to adhere to a curfew, report to the police every morning, and not arouse “suspicion”); and 4) *diffida* (a warning that a person was under investigation). Italian Fascists wanted homosexuals to keep their condition secret, therefore asylums, *confino*, *diffida*, and *ammonizione* emerged as the best instruments to punish “deviants” avoiding dangerous and unnecessary publicity. The “homosexual vice” was unspeakable and such it had to remain. The regime censured homosexual behaviors covertly, without the intervention of a court, isolating homosexuals or threatening them. Article 528, if approved, would have punished both men and women performing “libidinous acts on persons of the same sex.” But, in the end, in Fascist Italy only (noticeably) homosexual men were punished. Their stories have been discussed in recent years by scholars and writers.⁴⁰

Even if Fascists did not criminalize homosexuality, they still censored and repressed effeminacy and any other manifestations of gender non-conformity. Italian Fascists castigated the exterior absence of virility rather than covert same-sex behaviors. According to Lorenzo Benadusi, in Fascist Italy “the sedentary bourgeois man, the English dandy, or the refined and elegant Parisian represented the negative stereotype of the nonvirile male much more than a

³⁹ Ibid., 104, 110.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Lorenzo Benadusi, “Gli Omosessuali al Confino,” *Rivista Storica dell’Anarchismo* 1 (2004): 25-42; Gianfranco Goretti and Tommaso Giartosio, *La città e l’isola. Omosessuali al confino nell’Italia fascista* (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2006); Michael Ebner, “The Persecution of Homosexual Men under Fascism 1926-1943,” in *Gender, Family, and Sexuality: The Private Sphere in Italy 1860-1945*, Perry Wilson ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 139–156; Luca de Santis and Sara Colaone, *In Italia sono tutti maschi. Una graphic novel sul confino degli omosessuali durante il fascismo* (Bologna: Kappa Edizioni, 2010); Michael Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 193-197; Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 111-167; Sarah Day, *Mussolini’s Island* (London: Tinder Press, 2017); Cristoforo Magistro, *Adelmo e gli altri. Confinati omosessuali in Lucania* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2019).

tough *squadrista* [member of the Fascist militia] who was attracted to young boys.” An effeminate man, not necessarily homosexual, “was despised and derided because he symbolized the negative counter-type to the new Fascist man, who was self-confident, strong and tough.”⁴¹ Masculine men engaging in same-sex intercourse who did not cause scandal and lived their lives without provoking too much noise had a chance of enjoying their own sexual experiences without running up against Fascist repression.⁴²

In Fascist Italy the *Codice Rocco* did not mention homosexuality, the press did not talk about it, and literary representations of same-sex love and desire were avoided.⁴³

Homosexuality was instead the object of scientific analysis and discussion, even if not all opinions and approaches were tolerated. Aldo Mieli’s *Rassegna di studi sessuali* (The Sexual Studies Review), founded in 1921 and valiantly talking about homosexuality until the late 1920s, had to modify its editorial line. In 1927 the journal changed indeed its name into *Rassegna di studi sessuali, demografia ed eugenica* (Journal of Sexual, Demographic and Eugenic Studies) giving more space to topics regarding demographics, eugenics, and race, and becoming an instrument of “scientific propaganda” used by the regime to praise Mussolini’s health and welfare policies. In 1928 the founder and director of the *Rassegna*, who used the journal to disseminate Magnus Hirschfeld’s works and call for an end to sexual persecution and discrimination, was forced to move to France. If scientist and “homosexual

⁴¹ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 270.

⁴² See Aldrich, *Seduction of the Mediterranean*; Lorenzo Benadusi, “Private Life and Public Morals: Fascism and the ‘Problem’ of Homosexuality,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 2 (2004): 171-204.

⁴³ For censorship of textual representations of same-sex desire under the Fascist regime see Charlotte Ross, “‘La carezza incompiuta’: Queer Aesthetics, Desire, and Censorship in Ticchioni’s *Il suicidio di un esteta*,” *The Modern Language Review* 111, no. 2 (2016): 390-412. For the struggle to represent same-sex desire during the *ventennio* see: Francesco Gnerre, *L’eroe negate: omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 2000); Claudio Gargano, *Ernesto e gli altri: omosessualità nella narrativa italiana del Novecento* (Rome: Riuniti, 2002); Daniela Danna, “Beauty and the Beast. Lesbians in Literature and Sexual Science from Nineteenth to the Twentieth Centuries,” in *Queer Italia: Same-Sex Desire in Italian Literature and Film*, Gary Cestaro ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 117-132; Sergio Parussa, “Reluctantly Queer: In Search of the Homoerotic Novel in Twentieth-Century Italian Fiction,” in *Queer Italia*, 173-186; Derek Duncan, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality: A Case of Possible Difference* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 64-82; *Fuori dalla norma: storie lesbiche nell’Italia della prima metà del Novecento*, Nerina Millelletti and Luisa Passerini eds. (Milan: Rosenberg&Sellier, 2007); Paola Guazzo, “Al ‘confine’ della norma: r/esistenze lesbiche e fascismo,” in *R/esistenze lesbiche nell’Europa nazifascista*, Paola Guazzo, Ines Rieder, and Vincenza Scuderi eds. (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2010), 104-126; Charlotte Ross, *Eccentricity and Sameness: Discourses on Lesbianism and Desire between Women In Italy, 1860s-1930s* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), 189-266; Id., “‘Donne nate male,’ ‘amicizie colpevoli’ e quelle ‘profonde come una parentela.’ Marise Ferro’s Queerly Desiring Women,” *Italian Culture* 34, no. 2 (2016): 63-80.

activist” Aldo Mieli was “exiled,” the regime prominently supported professor Nicola Pende. Pende, a eugenicist and endocrinologist, believed that homosexuals needed to be studied and classified on the basis of functional and morphological characteristics, and – he claimed – they could be cured by administering hormones. He considered masculinity, femininity, and sexual orientation malleable and prone to be manipulated or changed. In his opinion sexual perversions were “constitutional,” but he was also firmly convinced that it was possible to alter the “essence” of a human being. The Fascist regime hindered Mieli, who insisted that homosexuals were not “perverted” but simply different, and backed Pende, who promised to improve the Italian stock and fix “sexual anomalies” producing in his laboratory the Fascist “new man” Mussolini desired.⁴⁴

In post-Fascist Italy, homosexuality as well as male prostitution continued to exist in a legal void. The introduction of the “Merlin Law” at the end of the 1950s – a measure we will talk about extensively – did not mandate the prosecution of male and female prostitutes, but criminalized sexual exploitation and the aiding and abetting of prostitution. Law proposals for the criminalization of homosexuality re-emerged in the 1960s as a reaction to the alleged spread of same-sex practices. All the proposals called for the punishment of scandalous behaviors, and specifically targeted minors for special protection. However, as we will see, the Italian Parliament never debated these bills. Homosexuals could be charged for public indecency, and police measures – such as *ammonizione*, *diffida* and *confino* – were still

⁴⁴ For Aldo Mieli and the *Rassegna* see Cristina Chimisso, “Fleeing Dictatorship: Socialism, Sexuality and the History of Science in the Life of Aldo Mieli,” *History Workshop Journal* 72, no. 3 (2011): 30-51; Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 62-78. For Nicola Pende see Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 50-51; Chiara Beccalossi, “Italian Sexology, Nicola Pende’s biotypology and hormone treatments in the 1920s,” *Historie medicine et santé*, 12 (2017): 73-97. For the idea of creating a Fascist “new man” see Alessio Pozio, *Shaping the New Man. Youth Training Regimes in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015). According to Chiara Beccalossi many sexologists, Hirschfeld included, believed that homosexuality was caused in some cases by hormonal imbalances. Hormonal therapies, aimed at treating sexual and gender “dysfunctions,” were not particularly deployed in the United Kingdom, whereas the Austrian Eugen Steinach studied the effect of gonadal transplant on the development of masculine and feminine behaviors. Beccalossi maintains that in Southern Europe and Southern America doctors experimented hormones to “cure” forms of “inversion.” She argues that Nicola Pende’s methods – such as opotherapy (the treatment of disease with extracts made from animal endocrine organs) and phototherapy (the stimulation and inhibition of internal gland secretions through x-rays) – had a profound impact on doctors working on sexology especially in Spain, Argentina, and Brazil. See Chandak Sengoopta, *The Most Secret Quintessence of Life. Sex, Glands, and Hormones, 1850-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Chiara Beccalossi, “Latin Eugenics and Sexual Knowledge in Italy, Spain and Argentina: International Networks across the Atlantic, 1916-’46,” in *A Global History of Sexual Science, 1880-1950*, Veronika Feuchtnner, Douglas Haynes, and Ryan Jones eds. (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 304-329; Beccalossi, “Italian Sexology,” 75-76.

deployed against them. Nonetheless, the Italian state never criminalized homosexuality per se. The silencing of homosexuality in Italy is also reflected in the rather scarce historiography regarding this topic.

Neglected Histories

Scholars have largely neglected the history of homosexuality in Italy, as a simple bibliographical review will show. One of the primary reasons for this neglect is the resistance of the Italian academy to integrate gender and sexuality studies into university curricula. In 2004, the Italian government proposed introducing advanced graduate-level courses on “Women, Politics, and Institutions” into 35 Italian universities. But, years later, these courses have still not been offered. In the academic year 2011/2012, only 16 public universities out of 57 offered one class somehow related to gender studies.⁴⁵ As a recent article in the *Journal of Homosexuality* emphasizes, “non-recurring workshops or training courses on LGBTQ+ topics can be found inside and outside” Italian academia but “the only university course on related themes, *Storia dell’omosessualità* (History of homosexuality) held at the University of Turin, first started in 2017. This undergraduate-level class is currently the only one that allows Italian university students to have access to [the history of] masculinities, LGBTQ+ and sexual orientation content within a formal university framework.”⁴⁶ Despite institutional resistance, several researchers have been paying attention to issues related to women, gender and sexuality, and have been producing sophisticated scholarship.

Since the second half of the 2000s, theoretical and sociological works related to gender and queer studies have been published in Italy, and some classics of queer theory have

⁴⁵ See Paola Di Cori, “Atena uscita dalla testa di Giove. Insegnare ‘studi delle donne’ e ‘di genere’ in Italia,” in *Gli studi delle donne in Italia*, Paola di Cori and Donatella Barazzetti eds. (Roma: Carocci, 2011), 15-43; Tommaso Scaramella, “La storia dell’omosessualità nell’Italia moderna,” *Storicamente. Laboratorio di Storia*, no. 12 (2016): 4; Marta Prandelli, Greta Meraviglia, Ines Testoni, Barbara Biglia, “Educating New Generations: Standpoints in Women’s and Gender Studies and Implications for the Inclusion of LGBTQ Studies in Italian University Courses,” *Journal of Homosexuality* (2019) DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2019.1582219, 6.

⁴⁶ Prandelli, Meraviglia, Testoni, Biglia, “Educating New Generations,” 1, 2.

been translated into Italian.⁴⁷ Even if academic institutions, with their reluctance to address the “mundane” issue of human sexualities, have been resistant to supporting women, gender and sexuality studies, many young Italian university professors and independent scholars – often trained abroad or with international experiences – have launched important transnational and interdisciplinary initiatives to support the development of queer, feminist, postcolonial, and intersectional studies in Italy.⁴⁸ While sociological and literary queer studies are beginning to flourish, the publication of works about Italian queer history is still scarce.⁴⁹ Most academic books published about the history of gender and sexuality in Italy center on the pre-1945 period. Monographs, essays and articles about early modern Italy are especially interested in analyzing the history of male “sodomy” and the ways in which male-male sexual behaviors were understood.⁵⁰ Court records have been used as the main evidence of such

⁴⁷ Laura Scarmoncin, “Studi lgbtq, politica e cultura in Italia,” *Contemporanea* 15, no. 4 (2012): 692-694. For translations into Italian of queer “classics” see Eve K. Sedgwick, *Stanze private. Epistemologia e politica della sessualità*, Federico Zappino ed. (Roma, Carocci, 2012); Jack Halberstam, *Maschilità senza uomini: saggi scelti*, Federica Frabetti ed. (Pisa, Ets, 2010), Judith Butler, *Parole che provocano. Per una politica del performativo*, Sergia Adamo ed. (Milano, Cortina, 2010). For other translations see also three volumes of *Omosapiens* published by Carocci and edited by Domenico Rizzo (2006), Silvia Antosa (2007) and Luca Trappolin (2008). For recent LGBTQ+ publications in Italian see, for example, Marzio Barbagli, Asher Colombo, *Omosessuali moderni. Gay e lesbiche in Italia* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2001); *Fuori della norma; Il movimento delle lesbiche in Italia*, Monia Dragone ed. (Milano, Il Dito e la Luna, 2008); *Transessualità e scienze sociali*, Elisabetta Ruspini, Marco Inghilleri eds. (Napoli, Liguori, 2008); *R/esistenze lesbiche nell'Europa nazifascista*; Laura Schettini, *Il gioco delle parti. Travestimenti e paure sociali tra Otto e Novecento* (Milano, Le Monnier-Mondadori, 2011); *Le cinque giornate lesbiche in teoria*, Liliana Borghi, Francesca Manieri, Ambra Pirri eds. (Roma, Ediesse, 2011); Cirio Rinaldi, *Alterazioni. Introduzione alle sociologie delle omosessualità* (Milano, Mimesis, 2012); Id., “‘Rimani maschio finché non ne arriva uno più maschio e più attivo di te.’ La costruzione delle maschilità omosessuali tra normalizzazione, complicità e consumo,” *Ragion Pratica*, 2 (2015): 443-462; Lorenzo Bernini, *Le teorie queer: un'introduzione* (Udine: Mimesis, 2017); Id., *Apocalissi queer: elementi di teoria antisociale* (Pisa: ETS, 2018).

⁴⁸ See, for example, the following queer networks: CIRQUE (*Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerca Queer-Inter-University Center for Queer Research*) - <https://cirque.unipi.it/en/> – and GIFTS (*Rete di studi di Genere, Intersex, Femministi, Transfemministi e sulla Sessualità*-Network of scholars working on issues related to gender, sexuality, feminism, and transfeminism) – <https://www.ingenero.it/news/nasce-gifts-rete-studi-genere-sessualita>.

⁴⁹ Cristina Galasso, “I siti web italiani di storia e cultura omosessuale,” in *Omosapiens. Studi e ricerche sugli orientamenti sessuali*, Domenico Rizzo ed. (Roma: Carocci, 2006), 200-204; Marco Pustianaz, “Studi gay e lesbici,” in *Gli studi delle donne in Italia*, 235-257; Scarmoncin, “Studi lgbtq, politica e cultura in Italia,” 695; Prandelli, Meraviglia, Testoni & Biglia, “Educating New Generations,” 1. See also, even if dated, Maya De Leo, “Omosessualità e studi storici,” *Storica*, 27 (2003): 27-60.

⁵⁰ Giovanni Scarabello, “Devianza sessuale e interventi di giustizia a Venezia nella prima metà del XVI secolo,” in *Tiziano a Venezia. Atti del convegno di studi* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1980): 75-84; Patricia Labalme, “Sodomy and Venetian Justice in the Renaissance,” *The Legal History Review* 52, no. 3 (1984): 217-254; Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Michael Roque, “Il controllo dell’omosessualità a Firenze nel XV secolo: gli Ufficiali di notte,” *Quaderni storici* 66, no. 3, (1987): 701-723; Gabriele Martini, *Il “vizio nefando” nella Venezia del Seicento. Aspetti sociali e repressione di giustizia* (Roma: Jouvence, 1988); Romano Canosa, *Storia di una grande paura. La sodomia a Firenze e Venezia nel Quattrocento* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1991); Nicholas S. Davidson, “Theology, Nature and the Law: Sexual Sin and Sexual Crime in Italy from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century,” in *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy*, Trevor Dean, K. J. P. Lowe eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 74-98; Michael Roque, *Forbidden Friendships. Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Ugo Zuccarello, “La sodomia al tribunale bolognese del torrione tra XVI e XVII secolo,” *Società e storia* 22, no. 87 (2000): 37-51; Nicholas S. Davidson, “Sodomy in Early Modern Venice,” in *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*, Tom Betteridge ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002): 65-81;

historical analyses, and there are also scholars who have relied on literary sources and artifacts in order to write the history of same-sex sexualities in early modern Italy.⁵¹

In all these works female same-sex sexualities remain understudied. The history of female-female loves, desires and friendships in modern Italy is also still largely unexplored, and my research too studies male same-sex sexualities only. The main focus of my work (scandals and murders) and the principal sources I use (press and police files) did not allow me to shed light on women who loved and desired other women in the second half of the twentieth century. Women's more secluded sociality made their same-sex sexualities more secretive, less scandalous, and more difficult to explore. Conducting interviews and adopting an oral history methodology might be the best way to write the history of Italian female same-sex sexualities in the second half of the twentieth century. Scholars such as Chiara Beccalossi and Charlotte Ross have begun studying the history of pre-1945 Italian queer women only in recent years.⁵² Beccalossi's work *Female Sexual Inversion* analyzes the ways in which sexological discourses produced between the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century in Italy and Britain conceptualized female same-sex desires. Her book is not an analysis of how and when a modern "lesbian identity" emerged, but it is an engaging historical review of Italian and British medical literature about female sexual "deviance." Ross's monograph *Eccentricity and Sameness* is a fascinating account of the representations of women loving women in Italian medical literature, fiction, and press between 1860s and 1930s. The author demonstrates that, contrary to widely held assumptions, discourses about female same-sex

Massimo Cattaneo, "'Vizio nefando' e Inquisizione romana," in *Diversità e minoranze nel Settecento*, Marina Formica and Alberto Postigliola eds. (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006): 55-77; Cesarina Casanova, "Meglio non dire che punire: la sanzione penale dei crimini nefandi," in *Storie di invisibili, marginali ed esclusi*, Vinci Lagioia ed. (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2012): 33-42; Umberto Grassi, *L'Offizio sopra l'onestà. Il controllo della sodomia nella Lucca del Cinquecento* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014); *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti, pederasti, femminelle, ermafroditi ... per una storia dell'omosessualità, della bisessualità e delle trasgressioni di genere in Italia*, Umberto Grassi, Vincenzo Lagioia, Gian Paolo Romagnani eds. (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2017), 19-146; Umberto Grassi, *Sodoma. Persecuzioni, affetti, pratiche sociali (secoli V-XVIII)* (Roma: Carocci, 2019).

⁵¹ See for example Laura Giannetti, "Devianza di gender nella commedia e nella cultura del cinquecento italiano," *Acta Histriae* 15, no. 2 (2007): 399-414; Paolo Pucci, "Tra atto sessuale e marchio d'identità: aspetti della sodomia in alcune novelle dal XIV al XVI secolo," *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 25, no. 2 (2007): 25-39; Domenico Conoscenti, "Boccaccio, Dante e l'omosessualità nella cultura del Trecento," *Allegoria*, 59 (2009): 27-41.

⁵² For the scarcity of studies on Italian female same-sex sexualities see Maya De Leo, "'Una parola scritta con l'inchiostro invisibile.' Per una storia della storiografia sull'omosessualità femminile," *Genesis* 6, no. 1 (2007): 225-243.

desires were pervasive in the years between the Italian unification and the consolidation of the Fascist regime. Beccalossi and Ross, a historian of medicine and a literary scholar respectively, have enriched with their works our knowledge of the history of sexuality in late 19th-early 20th century Italy, but they have also showed the urgency of studying the lived experiences of women who loved other women, and of understanding when and how Italian “lesbian” subcultures emerged.⁵³

The history of male and female homosexualities under Mussolini has been object of analysis in a small number of articles, essays, and monographs.⁵⁴ Lorenzo Benadusi’s book *The Enemy of the New Man* published in Italian in 2005 and in English in 2012, is the first monograph ever written about the history of male homosexuality during the Fascist regime. In this path-breaking work Benadusi argues that male homosexuality represented the antithesis of the Fascist “new man,” and that homosexuals were seen as a threat to the success of the “anthropological revolution” carried out by Mussolini.⁵⁵ The scholar, using police files and sexological sources, details the ways in which the regime tried to repress homosexual behaviors, and offers the best available reconstruction so far of the difficulty of being a man desiring other men in Italy in the first half of the twentieth century.

⁵³ See Beccalossi, *Female Sexual Inversion* and Ross, *Eccentricity and Sameness*. For other works of these two scholars see: Beccalossi, “The Origin of Italian Sexological Studies”; Id., “Madness and Sexual Psychopathies as the Magnifying Glass of the Normal: Italian Psychiatry and Sexuality c.1880–1910,” *Social History of Medicine* 27, no. 2 (2013): 303–325; Charlotte Ross, “Italian Medical and Literary Discourses around Female Same-Sex Desire, 1877-1906,” in *Italian Sexualities Uncovered, 1789-1914*, Valeria P. Babini, Chiara Beccalossi and Lucy Rial eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 228-248; Id., “‘La carezza incompiuta’;” Id., “‘Donne nate male’;” Id., “Dalla patologizzazione all’amore per gli ‘anormali’: la rappresentazione del desiderio dissidente tra donne in testi (pseudo-)scientifici del tardo Ottocento e del primo Novecento,” in *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti*, 155-171. For other essays about queer sexualities in late 19th and early 20th century Italy see Maria Pasotti, “‘Brutta sì, ma donna’. Virginia Mauri alias Zefthe Akaira: un celebre caso di ermafroditismo nell’Italia di fine Ottocento,” in *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti*, 173-190; Marco Reglia, “Omoaffettività tra le pieghe delle fonti giudiziarie,” in *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti*, 191-208.

⁵⁴ Ebner, “The Persecution of Homosexual Men under Fascism 1926-1943”; Benadusi, “Private Life and Public Morals,” 171-204; Id., “Gli omosessuali al confino,” 25-42; Id., “Per una storia dell’omosessualità nell’Italia del Novecento: gli studi psicanalitici,” *Storia e problemi contemporanei*, 37 (2004): 183-203; Id., “Turismo, omosessualità e fascismo,” *Storia e problemi contemporanei*, 43 (2006): 55-80; Id., “Comisso, Rosai e de Pisis: l’arte di vivere nell’Italia fascista,” in *Omosapiens. Studi e ricerche sugli orientamenti sessuali*, Domenico Rizzo ed. (Roma: Carocci, 2006), 135-152; *Fuori dalla norma*; Guazzo, “Al ‘confine’ della norma”; Ebner, *Ordinary Violence*, 193-197; Lorenzo Benadusi, “Omofobia e repressione dell’omosessualità: il caso dell’Italia fascista,” in *La violenza normalizzata. Omofobie e transfobie negli scenari contemporanei*, Cirus Rinaldi ed. (Turin: Kaplan, 2013), 58- 84; Laura Schettini, “Tra controllo sociale e repressione fascista,” *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti*, 149-154.

⁵⁵ For an analysis for the Fascist anthropological revolution see Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Ponzio, *Shaping the New Man*.

My research begins where Benadusi's work ends. The book by the journalist Gianni Rossi Barilli, *Il Movimento Gay in Italia*, has been for many years the reference point for all those interested in understanding the development of gay activism in Italy.⁵⁶ The most significant academic historical publications about post-WWII Italy include: the research of Dario Petrosino, focused on anti-homosexual repression; Massimo Prearo's publications, mainly centered on 1970s gay activism; and the works about homosexuality in the Italian cinema by Mauro Giori.⁵⁷ Lately, Italian gay activists have been publishing non-academic books and articles about homosexuality in post-Fascist Italy, but they have only offered superficial accounts. Their works offer valuable information about facts and events. What is needed, however, is interpretative clout.⁵⁸ My research therefore offers a deeper analysis of the history of post-Fascist male same-sex sexualities and of the inextricable relationship between male homosexuality and male prostitution by focusing on the ways in which (homo)sexual knowledge emerged and became public through scandals and media, highlighting connections and discontinuities between liberal, Fascist and post-Fascist sexualities, questioning the linearity of "sexual liberation," emphasizing the effects of the Cold War and of the "economic miracle" on Italian gender and sexual dynamics, and rethinking the meaning of sexual citizenship in Italian history.

⁵⁶ Gianni Rossi Barilli, *Il movimento gay in Italia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999).

⁵⁷ Dario Petrosino, *La repressione dell'omosessualità nell'Italia repubblicana e nei paesi del Patto Atlantico. Da uno studio sulla documentazione conservata presso l'Archivio centrale dello Stato*, http://www.storiaefuturo.com/it/numero_10/laboratorio/5_repressione-omosessualita-italia-repubblicana--patto-atlantico~168.html; Id., *La repressione dell'omosessualità nell'Italia repubblicana e nei paesi Nato: Italia e Francia, casi a confronto (1952-1983)*, Dissertation, Università degli studi della Tuscia – Viterbo, 2014; Id., "Il comune senso del pudore. La repressione dell'omosessualità nell'Italia repubblicana (1947-1981)," in *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti*, 219-238; Massimo Prearo, "Elementi di critica della liberazione omosessuale: per una politica del fare movimento," in *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti*, 257-274; Mario Mieli, *la gaia critica. Politica e liberazione sessuale negli anni settanta. Scritti (1972-1983)*, Paola Mieli and Massimo Prearo eds. (Padua: Marsilio, 2019); Mauro Giori, *Homosexuality and Italian Cinema: From the Fall of Fascism to the Years of Lead* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Id., "Cinema e omosessualità in Italia tra la seconda Guerra mondiale e la nascita del FUORI," in *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti*, 239-256. Sandro Bellassai, a professor at the University of Bologna, has devoted much of his scholarship to analyzing post-Fascist masculinity. But, even if Bellassai pays so much attention to gender issues, he has not paid attention to male same sex sexuality. He is most interested in looking at the history of the Italian masculine, heterosexual breadwinners. See Sandro Bellassai, *La Mascolinità Contemporanea* (Roma: Carocci, 2004); Sandro Bellassai, *La legge del desiderio. Il progetto Merlin e l'Italia degli anni Cinquanta* (Roma, Carocci, 2006); Sandro Bellassai, *L'Invenzione della Virilità: Politica e Immaginario Maschile nell'Italia Contemporanea* (Roma: Carocci, 2011).

⁵⁸ See, for example, Pini, *Quando eravamo froci*; Giovanni Dall'Orto, *Tutta un'altra storia. L'omosessualità dall'antichità al secondo dopoguerra* (Roma: Il Saggiatore, 2015), 540-550; Andrea Pini, "L'Italia contemporanea," in *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti*, 211-217; Myriam Cristallo, *Uscir Fuori. Dieci anni di lotte omosessuali in Italia: 1971-1981* (Roma: Sandro Teti editore, 2017).

The “non-criminalization” and the “privatization” of homosexuality have been major obstacles for scholars working on the Italian history of same-sex practices and desires.⁵⁹ Using documentation mainly produced by Fascist officials and coeval sexologists, Benadusi scrutinized sexual repression and regulation during the *ventennio*.⁶⁰ Like Benadusi, I rely upon police files but also draw extensively on media sources that did not exist before because Fascist censorship forbade the publication of news covering sexual crimes, scandals, and “deviance.” With the end of the dictatorship, journalists were free and eager to talk about previously unmentionable topics. The discursive explosion triggered by magazines and newspapers propelled public discussions and contributed to the circulation of ideas, taxonomies, and representations, which in turn had the potential of producing effects on identities and behaviors. My research, scrutinizing those moments when Italian media made homosexuality visible, not only seeks to understand how homosexuality and homosexuals were perceived and represented by magazines and newspapers, but also sheds light on anti-homosexual attitudes of state, political, and religious institutions and the homosexual resistance to these forces.

Scandalous Practices: Homosexuality, Male Prostitution, and Sexual Citizenship in Post-Fascist Italy argues that discourses around same-sex scandals and murders brought debates about the nature of sexual mores to the fore and allowed new types of knowledge about sexuality to circulate publicly, thus reconfiguring the boundaries of what could be expressed and redefining the relationship between *normative* and *queer*. Scandals break out when social norms are transgressed. They have the potential to show cracks in socio-cultural systems, to undermine authority – possibly cause political crises, stimulate verbal engagement, raise uncomfortable questions, and blur the line between private and public. Scandals are major assets in analyzing how sexual identities and behaviors are represented,

⁵⁹ See Duncan, *Reading and Writing Italian Homosexuality*, 1-7.

⁶⁰ The word *ventennio* refers to the twenty years of the Italian Fascist regime: 1922-1943.

conceptualized, and shaped. My work claims that magazines, newspapers and later on TV generated sexual panics and favored the outbreaks of political anti-homosexual persecutions, but it also shows how they helped homosexuals understand that they were not alone. Sensationalism around homosexuality scandalized some readers, but it also stimulated public discussions of homosexuality. For many homosexuals acrimonious newspaper articles ended up being priceless sources of information. Same-sex scandals were not only indicative of the existence of numerous queer homosocial milieus, but they also produced discourses that nurtured further the proliferation of homosexual communities. Yellow journalism, I contend, played a major role in making many “men like that” aware of themselves, of their desires, and their needs. Anti-homosexual sensationalism and mechanisms of sexual repression turned homosexuals into subjects of concern, but they also favored circulation of discourses that allowed self-identification and mutual solidarity. The discursive obsession with “the” normal bred “the” deviant. By trumpeting deviations, the media promoted “perverse” imitations.

Sensational magazines had an extraordinary educational function. By talking about scandals, they promoted new words and new categories, favoring the standardization of sex language. The circulation of “tabloid discourses” made homosexuality intelligible to many individuals who did not know what homosexuality was, or were not able to make sense of their own identities. In conflating male prostitution and homosexuality, sensationalist discourses also opened an arena in which a burgeoning activist movement could divorce and contrast the two phenomena, condemning the former and embracing the latter. The media emerge in my research as decisive producers of both inclusion and marginalization.

Magazines and newspapers, verbalizing the anti-homosexual attitude prevailing in the Italian society, had a significant function – together with the Italian state, the Italian political parties, and the Catholic Church – in defining who was a socially and sexually acceptable citizen and who was not, but they also allowed marginal individuals to resist through visibility and learn

how to use the discourses and rhetoric of their oppressors to assert their right to exist and give shape to their own subjectivities. Scandals, while blaming or shaming *deviant* sexual behaviors, did not just repress them, they also nurtured and publicized them.⁶¹

Popular media, creating a shared public language by reporting about “sexual deviance,” fostered sexual knowledge across social strata and offered languages and discourses to conceptualize sexual “non-normativity.” Regulatory regimes excited the production of sensational, anti-homosexual, scientific, and humanitarian discourses, stimulated the policing of sexual practices, but they also pushed some homosexuals to speak for an entire social category and resist marginalization. The power of media was recognized by the Italian gay movement in the 1970s. They opposed discourses produced for profit by tabloids and mainstream magazines, and began to publish their own periodicals with their own views, opinions, debates, discussions, and terms. Social control and homosexual resistance nurtured each other. For many Italians the “naming process” ended up being empowering, and even “insults” turned out to be powerful categories of self-identification.⁶²

The homosexual scandals I explore in my work happened in critical moments of modern Italian history: the end of the Second World War, the emergence of the Cold War, the economic miracle (late 1950s-early 1960s), the deregulation of female prostitution (late 1950s), and the “acceleration” of the “sexual (r)evolution” (late 1960s). Political, institutional, economic, and social changes, I claim, stimulated the tightening up of the Italian (hetero)sexual citizenship. In order to protect heterosexuality from the “deviating” homosexual menace, media and state nurtured the panic necessary to defend the youths – future citizens and “new men” of the Italian democracy – from the homosexuals – “anti-citizens” and “enemies” of the Italian democratic “new man” in the making. Looking at the ways in which male-male prostitution and male homosexuality were understood in post-

⁶¹ Canning, “Class vs. Citizenship,” 241-243.

⁶² See, for example, Didier Eribon, *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self* (Duke, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

Fascist Italy brings the continuities with Mussolini's regime into full relief. Between 1945 and the early 1970s homosexuals were conceptualized as those who did not deserve inclusion and support, as amoral and unworthy individuals, as contagious bodies that had to be quarantined, and as dangerous forces who opposed "reproductive futurity" "infecting" the youths and even (allegedly) killing them – as in the case of Ermanno Lavorini.⁶³ Nonetheless, I argue, the visibility of same-sex sexualities in the Italian media after the end of World War II spurred many homosexuals to construct new identities and subjectivities, and challenge their exclusion from the national community.

My work is organized in five chapters and a conclusion. In chapter one I analyze how Italian homosexuals and male-male prostitution were presented in media, novels and police files in the years immediately following the end of World War II. Here I highlight continuities and discontinuities between the Fascist and the democratic regimes in the representation and regulation of non-normative sexual behaviors. In particular, I scrutinize the role and significance of sensationalism in portraying homosexuality as a social danger that needed to be contained. After years of silence under Mussolini's regime, homosexuality and its inseparable companion – male prostitution – gained visibility in the Italian media. The police did not react forcefully to such visibility. Only after the end of the anti-Fascist coalition and the emergence of the Christian Democratic party as the ruling party in 1947-1948, did the Italian state become more determined in policing gender and sexualities.

In chapter two, I dissect anti-homosexual discourses produced by media and analyze the repressive activities carried out by the police in the 1950s, but I also emphasize the contextual emergence of *reverse discourses* that solicited the sexual and social legitimization

⁶³ Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Citizen and Enemy as Symbolic Classification: On the Polarizing Discourse of Civil Society," in *Where Culture Talks: Exclusion and the Making of Society*, Michèle Fournier and Marcel Lamont eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 291-292. See also Lee Edelman, *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke Press, 2004).

of homosexuals, and started talking about young hustlers not as victims of corrupting queers but rather as victimizers. Whereas in the 1940s homosexuals had come across as effeminate individuals, in the 1950s many media emphasized that homosexuals could also be rather masculine, more difficult to “detect,” and thus more “dangerous.” The circulation of polyvalent discourses, I claim, made homosexuals more visible, more intelligible, more fearsome, but also more appealing. Even if at first glance 1950s Italy appears a conservative country, a more careful analysis reveals a much more complex sexual texture: homosexual men were forced to discretion, but, repression notwithstanding, they were able to carve out their own spaces, find opportunities to live their own experiences, and experiment with new subjectivities. The anti-sex backlash of the 1950s was less effective and more contested than commonly assumed. Repression and resistance were two forces operating simultaneously and from opposite ends.

In chapter three, I show how the closure of the state-licensed brothels in 1958, following the approval of the “Merlin Law,” stimulated fears about the spread of immorality, sexual diseases, and homosexuality among Italian youths. Moreover, I emphasize how a series of homosexual scandals that happened in the early 1960s engendered an extraordinary anti-homosexual wave that prompted the presentation of law proposals to criminalize homosexuality. Media depicted the alleged sexual “corruption” of Italian youths not only as a side effect of the social, cultural, and economic transformations Italy was experiencing, but also as an indicator of the inadequacy of the Italian new generations to lead the nation. Scandals favored the proliferation of anti-homosexual articles talking about the spread of contagious “deviant” behaviors, but they also nurtured the emergence of more self-confident homosexual voices. In the early 1960s tabloids and mainstream magazines began to publish their first “letters to the editor” giving voice to homosexual and non-homosexual readers unabashedly expressing their opinions about same-sex sexualities.

In chapter four, I analyze the trials against Aldo Braibanti (1968-1969) and the media campaign that followed Ermanno Lavorini's murder (1969). I demonstrate how, in spite of the "sexual (r)evolution," state institutions and several magazines and newspapers continued to see homosexual men as dangerous corruptors and child molesters. Media and conservative forces used these two cases such as justifications to condemn homosexuality, oppose "sexual liberation," and close ranks to protect the Italian youths. Nonetheless, sexual conservatism and anti-homosexual hostility, I contend, nurtured a cognizant homosexual counter-reaction that favored the emergence of the gay liberation movement in Italy.

Chapter five is devoted to the foundation of FUORI (*Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano*-Italian Revolutionary Homosexual United Front). I highlight how the creation of the first Italian gay organization was a consequence of the social, cultural, and political context of the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the same time I emphasize how transnational impulses influenced FUORI's creation. I show how the gay activists of the Italian Front used their periodical to present their own "truth," and manufacture their own identity. After years of "misrepresentations," the members of FUORI expressed the desire to be the narrators of their own "story." The *Fronte Omosessuale* not only provided an empowering sense of belonging, but it also enhanced self-awareness and gave an unknown sense of pride to its budding activists. One of the first initiatives of FUORI was disassociating itself from *marchettari*. Male prostitution was minimized in the official publication of the Italian Homosexual Front. FUORI presented a new image of the homosexuals as young, proud, and able to cultivate significant affective relationships. The *Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano*, in rejecting the stereotypes of the homosexuals as corruptors of minors and drawing a demarcation line between homosexuals and *marchette*, set out to "normalize" homosexuality and challenge the status of homosexuals as sexual pariahs, thereby laying claim to the sexual citizenship of homosexual individuals.

Chapter 1

Sensational Visibility. Anti-homosexual Representations in Post-Fascist Italy

(1945-1949)

Between Ponte Sisto and Ponte Garibaldi there was almost no one passing by anymore, but Ricetto remembered what used to happen around there when he was a boy, immediately after the end of the war. Along the parapet, sitting as he was now, there would be at least twenty young lads, ready to sell themselves to the first comer; the *froschi* (the fags) used to come by in bunches, singing and dancing around, bald and bleached, some of them still very young and some of them old, but all acting crazy, not giving a damn about the people walking by or riding by in the trams, loudly calling to each other by name - Wanda! Bolero! Ferroviaria! Mistinguette! – when they spotted each other from a distance, hurrying to meet and kissing each other gently on the cheeks, the way ladies do so as not to spoil each other's makeup. And when they gathered all together in front of the *maschi* (males) who, leaning against the parapet, looked at them, shouting vulgarities, they began to dance, some sketching out a ballet step, some doing the can-can, and now and then, in the midst of this moments of craziness, they'd shout: 'We're free! We're free!'¹

In this fascinating vignette from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Ragazzi di vita* (1955) the central characters of this chapter loom decidedly: the *froschi*, enjoying the supposed new sexual freedom guaranteed by the end of the Fascist regime, and the young *maschi*, offering themselves to the best bidders. After the liberation from Nazi-Fascism, as the journalist Giorgio Bocca wrote remembering those days, "it seemed like physical love corresponded to love for life."² The homosexuals portrayed by Pasolini impeccably embodied such *joie de vivre*. Their exuberant, fearless, and loud euphoria was a manifestation of their desire to exist out in the open.

In his book about male homosexuality under Mussolini, Lorenzo Benadusi underlines that homosexuals were rather active during the *ventennio* and that Italy was still considered, like in previous decades, a "paradise for 'eccentric love'" and a major destination for

¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Ragazzi di vita* (Milano: Garzanti, 1955), 205-206.

² Marta Boneschi, *Senso. I costume sessuali degli Italiani dal 1880 a oggi* (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), 194. See also Luca Gorgolini, *L'Italia in movimento. Storia sociale degli anni Cinquanta* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2013), 1.

“homosexual tourism.”³ Nonetheless, he emphasizes, homosexuals could have their sexual experiences as long as they did it discreetly. Communists – and from 1938 Jews – were manifestly despised by regime propaganda, but homosexuals were rarely mentioned. Fascists adopted a “strategy of concealment” regarding homosexuality. Silence was for them the best way to protect men and youths from “contagion.” Media were not allowed to discuss same-sex sexualities, and the Fascist state censured deviant behaviors only when “inversion” was scandalously visible. The Fascist myth of “the new man,” and the aggressive “hypervirility” programmatically displayed by the regime implicitly turned homosexuals into menacing “socio-political enemies.”⁴

In the years immediately following the end of the war, as we will see, media went through major changes. The appearance of sensationalist magazines searching for the unusual, the odd, the queer, and the titillating was an element of discontinuity with the past. This favored a marked proliferation of discourses about “deviant” sexual behaviors and catalyzed the emergence of a novel visibility of homosexuality. These discourses portrayed homosexuals in grotesque and defamatory terms, while promoting virile masculinity as the ideal to attain – an ideal even more urgent to achieve now that the disastrous war experience had brought into question Italian manliness.⁵ After 1945 the Italian sensationalist press put on

³ Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 6-7, 190. See also Lorenzo Benadusi, “Comisso, Rosai e de Pisis: l’arte di vivere nell’Italia fascista,” *Omosapiens. Studi e ricerche sugli orientamenti sessuali*, Domenico Rizzo ed. (Roma: Carocci, 2006), 135-152 and Gabriella Romano, *Il mio nome è Lucy. L’Italia del XX secolo nei ricordi di una transessuale* (Roma: Donzelli editore, 2009), 15-33. For homosexual tourism in Italy see: Robert Aldrich, *The seduction of the Mediterranean. Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Lorenzo Benadusi, “Turismo, omosessualità e fascismo,” *Storia e problemi contemporanei*, 43 (2006): 55-80; Chiara Beccalossi, “The ‘Italian Vice’: Male Homosexuality and British Tourism in Southern Italy,” in *Italian Sexualities Uncovered, 1789-1914*, Valeria P. Babini, Chiara Beccalossi and Lucy Rial eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 185-206; Sean Brady, “John Addington Symonds, Horatio Brown and Venice: Friendship, Gondoliers and Homosexuality,” in *Italian Sexualities Uncovered*, 207-227.

⁴ Emilio Gentile, “Foreword,” *Enemy of the New Man*, ix-xvii. See also Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 23, 24, 47, 77, 93, 94, 110, 131, 134, 140-141, 270, 271, 275, 282, 285, 299.

⁵ For a definition of sensationalism see Jay Courtney Fikes, “Sensationalism,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008); 442-444; Christopher H. Sterling and Anthony R. Fellow, “Sensationalism,” *Encyclopedia of Journalism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009): 1281-1283; Paul Hendriks Vettehen, “Sensationalism,” *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, Wolfgang Donsbach ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley&Sons, 2015) doi:10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecs030.pub2. For post-war masculinity in Italy see Enrica Capussotti, *Gioventù perduta. Gli anni Cinquanta dei giovani e del cinema in Italia* (Firenze: Giunti, 2004), 55; Sandro Bellassai, *La Mascolinità Contemporanea* (Roma: Carocci, 2004), 99-100; Id., *La legge del desiderio. Il progetto Merlin e l’Italia degli anni Cinquanta* (Roma: Carocci, 2006), 40-89; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “Unmaking the Fascist Man: Masculinity, Film and the transition from Dictatorship,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 3 (2005): 338; Sandro Bellassai,

paper what many Fascists had thought – and often written in confidential documents – but never plainly declared in popular media: homosexuals were youth corruptors that endangered inexperienced young men, and jeopardized the institution of the family and the future of the nation.⁶

In post-1945 Italy anxieties about homosexuals overlapped with worries about the youths. For twenty years the Fascist regime had put the youth at the center of its ideological myths and concrete policies. After the end of the war youths were still deemed essential for the future of the Italian state. They had to revitalize the nation, and be the initiators of a new socio-political era. Both young hoodlums and corrupting homosexuals, regarded as opposite to the ideal hard-working heterosexual breadwinner, were seen as social threats.⁷

Homosexuals in particular were a problem because they failed to procreate, refused to live up to ideals of tough masculinity, but also, and above all, because they were the origin of a vicious circle of perversion menacing the new Italian generations. The youths were deemed savable, as long as they were plucked off the street, and snatched from the jaws of the queers.⁸

Homosexuals were the real risk for male sexuality. They were not atomized and lonely individuals, but were perceived as members of larger groups and organizations with a rising

L'invenzione della virilità: politica e immaginario maschile nell'Italia contemporanea (Roma: Carocci, 2011), 9, 18, 24, 99, 107-113; Elena Dell'Agnese and Elisabetta Ruspini, "Introduction," in *Mascolinità all'Italiana: Costruzioni, Narrazioni, Mutamenti*, Elena Dell'Agnese and Elisabetta Ruspini eds. (Torino: UTET, 2007), xx and Barbara Bracco, "Belli e fragili. Mascolinità e seduzione nel cinema italiano del secondo dopoguerra," in *Mascolinità all'Italiana*, 65-78.

⁶ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 133, 145, 150.

⁷ Emanuela Scarpellini, *Italia dei consumi: dalla Belle époque al nuovo millennio* (Roma: Laterza, 2008), 180. We can observe similar anxieties abroad. See, for example, Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton-NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 101-140; Alison Oram, "Love 'Off the Rails' or 'Over the Teacups'? Lesbian Desire and Female Sexualities in the 1950s British Popular Culture," in *Queer 1950s. Rethinking Sexuality in Postwar Years*, Heike Bauer and Matt Cook eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 41, 44; Chris Brickell, "Moral Panic or Critical Mass? The Queer Contradictions of 1950s New Zealand," in *Queer 1950s*, 95-98; Clayton J. Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality in West Germany. Between Persecution and Freedom, 1945-69* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 16, 52-60. For youth as metaphor of the Italian post-Fascist rebirth see Charles L. Leavitt IV, "'An entirely new land?' Italy's post-war culture and its Fascist Past," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 21, no. 1 (2016): 10-11.

⁸ In a book published in 1949 Antonio Gandin made a completely different argument. He underlined that homosexuals had to be cured not persecuted, and suggested to take repressive measures against young hustlers and blackmailers. They were the real problem. Antonio Gandin, *L'amore omosessuale, maschile e femminile. Male, cause, rimedi* (Milano: Fratelli Bocca, 1949), 181-189, 274-276.

consciousness.⁹ They were presented, as we will see, in Masonic and religious terms while searching for new proselytes and trying to give shape to homosexual countercultures.¹⁰

Many scholars, focusing their attention on political and institutional history of post-1945 Italy, have underlined how Mussolini's regime was not a parenthesis in Italian history, and have proved the existence of ruptures and continuities between Fascist and post-Fascist Italy.¹¹ Using male homosexuality as a category of historical analysis to dissect the years following the end of WWII, it is evident that, while imagining a future after Fascism, many Italians were still manifesting signs of their attachment to Fascist stereotypes, values, and experiences.¹² While desirous of disassociating themselves from Mussolini, political forces

⁹ Chris Waters, "The Homosexual as a Social Being in Britain, 1945–1968," *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 3 (2012): 686.

¹⁰ Gandin, *L'amore omosessuale*, 46-47.

¹¹ For continuity and discontinuity between Fascist and democratic Italy see, for example, Claudio Pavone, *Alle origini della Repubblica. Scritti su fascismo, antifascismo e continuità dello Stato* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995), 160-184; David Forgacs, "Post-War Italian Culture: Renewal or Legacy of the Past," in *Reconstructing the Past: Representations of the Fascist Era in Post-War European Culture*, Graham Batram, Maurice Slawinski, and David Steel eds. (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996) 49–63; Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 6; Robert Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy: Culture and Politics in the Italian Election of 1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della memoria. La Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2005), 37-53; Pietro Scoppola, "Momenti e aspetti della riflessione storiografica," in 1945–1946. *Le origini della Repubblica. Vol. 1. Contesto internazionale e aspetti della transizione*, Giancarlo Monina ed. (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2007): 5-22; Chiara Fonio and Stefano Agnoletto, "Surveillance, Repression and the Welfare State: Aspects of Continuity and Discontinuity in post-Fascist Italy," *Surveillance & Society* 11, no. 1-2 (2011): 74-86; Linda Risso, "18 April 1948: Italy Between Continuity and Rupture," *Modern Italy* 16, no. 2 (2011): 101-104; Leo Goretti, "Truman's bombs and De Gasperi's hooked-nose: images of the enemy in the Communist press for young people after 18 April 1948," *Modern Italy* 16, no. 2 (2011): 159-177; Philip Cooke, *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 111-113; Leavitt IV, "An entirely new land?," 4-18; Jonathan Dunnage, "The Legacy of Cesare Lombroso and Criminal Anthropology in the Post-war Italian Police: A Study of the Culture, Narrative and Memory of a Post-fascist Institution," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 22, no. 3 (2017): 365-384; Rosario Forlenza, *On the Edge of Democracy. Italy, 1943-1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Continuity was favored by the failed *epurazione* (purge) of Fascist officials from the state and the judiciary system. In the beginning the desire to punish the Fascists prevailed over forgiveness. But in the end nothing came from the *epurazione*: both Communists and Christian Democrats opted for a general pacification. See, for example, Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1991); Id., *Alle origini della Repubblica*; Domenico Roy Palmer, *Processo ai fascisti* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1996); Hans Woller, *I conti con il fascismo: l'epurazione in Italia 1943–1948* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997); Guido Melis, "Percorsi di continuità: l'epurazione nei Ministeri" in *La Resistenza tra storia e memoria: Atti del Convegno*, Nicola Gallerano ed. (Milan: Mursia, 1999), 298–329; Romano Canosa, *Storia dell'epurazione in Italia: Le sanzioni contro il fascismo 1943–1948* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1999); Guido Melis, "Note sull'epurazione nei ministeri, 1944–1946," *Ventesimo secolo* 2, no. 4 (2003): 17–52.

¹² In the years between 1943 and 1948 Italy went through a series of crucial events. On July 25, 1943 Mussolini was voted out of power by the Fascist Grand Council and arrested. General Pietro Badoglio, appointed Prime Minister, carried out secret negotiations, and on September 8, 1943 announced the signing of the armistice between Italy and the Allies. Germany became an enemy and the Nazi troops occupied the Northern part of the country. After the rescue of Mussolini by a team of German paratroopers the former Duce was appointed leader of the Italian Social Republic. The state exercised sovereignty in Northern and Central Italy but was largely dependent on German military protection. After the liberation of Rome, carried out by allies and the Italian partisans in June 1944, Badoglio was replaced by Ivanoe Bonomi, representative of the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (National Liberation Committee, CLN). The Committee, formed on September 9, 1943, included several parties: Christian Democracy, Italian Socialist Party, Italian Communist Party, Italian Liberal Party, Action Party, and Labor Democratic Party. By April 1945 Allied troops, CLN and Resistance liberated Northern Italy from the Nazi-Fascist control. The Committee led the Italian governments until the first post-war general elections in 1946 when the Italians voted for the deputies to the Constituent Assembly. On the same day, June 2, a constitutional referendum took place, and the Italian electors chose to turn Italy into a republic. The elections for the first republican Parliament, held on April 18, 1948, were

and media strove to reaffirm gender dynamics and sexual behaviors that the Fascist regime had supported and that the war and its aftermath seemed to have severely put in crisis.

Similarly to historians who have studied sex after fascism in the German context, I contend that it is necessary to argue for a more “fluid understanding of continuity and change” in the post-war years.¹³

In the next pages I will analyze how Italian homosexuals were represented in the years following the end of World War II, and I will show how the Italian state – the Ministry of Interior and the police in particular – reacted to such representations. In this chapter I offer glimpses into male same-sex sexualities emerging from an array of diverse documents produced in the second half of the 1940s. Historical sources exist in different forms and in this chapter, as well as in others, besides using police records, correspondence, and journalistic reports I resort to more literary sources such as works of fiction and fictionalized memoirs. As Mario T. García underlines, “all narratives possess a historical context and therefore directly or indirectly speak to their historical period.” Novelists and autobiographers document history, and their writings can “represent very well their historical moment.” A literary writer, García continues, not only “can provide us with historical evidence” but can also proffer “a personal insight into history that more formal documents cannot” – especially

influenced by the Cold War confrontation between USSR and US. The Christian Democrats won the elections, and began their political dominion that lasted until the 1990s.

¹³ Bruno P.F. Wanrooij, *Storia del pudore. La questione sessuale in Italia 1860-1940* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1990), 97-131; Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 80-81, 286-287. See for a reflection upon sexual practices of heterosexual Italian males also Jonathan Dunnage, “Police and ‘Women of Ill Repute’: A Study of Male Sexual Attitudes and Behavior in Fascist Italy,” *European History Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2016): 72-91. For continuity and change in German postwar sexuality see, for example, Robert G. Moeller, “‘The Homosexual Man Is a ‘Man,’ the Homosexual Woman Is a ‘Woman’’: Sex, Society, and the Law in Postwar West Germany,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4, no. 3 (1994): 395-429; Annette F. Timm, “The Legacy of ‘Bevölkerungspolitik’: Venereal Disease Control and Marriage Counseling in Post-WWII Berlin,” *Canadian Journal of History/Annales Canadiennes d’Histoire* 33, no. 2 (1998): 173-214; Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*; Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth-Century Berlin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); *Histories of the Aftermath. The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller eds. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Jennifer V. Evans, *Life among the Ruins: Cityscape and Sexuality in Cold War Berlin* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Elizabeth Heineman, *Before Porn Was Legal: The Erotica Empire of Beate Uhse* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Donna Harsch, “Eroticism, Love, and Sexuality in the Two Postwar Germanys,” *German Studies Review* 35, no. 3 (2012): 629-630; *Gender and the Long Postwar. The United States and the Two Germanys. 1945-1989*, Karen Hagemann and Sonya Michel eds. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press: 2014).

when our analyses are directed towards marginalized communities and individuals.¹⁴ Often literary works are not able to purvey exact and accurate information, but they can offer “insights into common opinions and attitudes, everyday life in the streets, in houses, apartments, and hovels.” Moreover, they allow us to gain “insight into states of mind, conscious and unconscious assumptions, attitudes, opinions, prejudices, and the emotions of the people that lived then.”¹⁵ Fiction offers a glance on moments, situations, feelings, and emotions that police files and official documents produced by ministerial officials cannot – or do not want to – capture or describe thoroughly. Novels and memoirs can be essential sources of knowledge when police records, trial reports, and files collected by institutional archives offer nothing more than deafening silence. I am persuaded that the literary sources I use in this chapter, thanks to their affective connotation, give depth to my historical narrative, and allow me to offer a more complex and nuanced image of the ways in which homosexuals and homosexuality were imagined and perceived in post-war Italy.

In this chapter I will first focus my attention on two big cities – Naples and Rome – in the months immediately following the end of the conflict. The sources I use in this section – mainly documents produced by the Ministry of Interior and Curzio Malaparte’s *La Pelle* – not only highlight how the arrival of the Allies seemed to bolster the deviant behaviors of the famished local populations, but they also show how media, taking advantage of the newly acquired freedom of speech, immediately started presenting homosexuality as an epitome of the defeated and *emasculated* Italian nation. Then I scrutinize the role and significance of “*stampa scandalistica*” (yellow journalism) in portraying homosexuality as a social danger. Both Malaparte – with his explicit outburst against democracy, Communism and sexual deviance – and media – that used against homosexuals the same scornful and disparaging language deployed in the past against the “enemies” of the Fascist regime – reveal how in

¹⁴ Mario T. García, *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in the Chicano and Latino Experience* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016) 3, 5.

¹⁵ Allan H. Pasco, “Literature as Historical Archive,” *New Literary History* 35, no. 3 (2004): 373, 388.

post-Fascist Italy lingered vestiges of the pre-1945 mindset. In the end, I conclude my chapter focusing on the American writer John Horne Burns. His work and his letters act as a counterweight to the overwhelming anti-homosexual discourses circulating in 1940s Italy. In contrast to narratives and tropes offered by Malaparte and sensationalist media, which painted the “homosexual world” as a homogeneously disgusting space, Burns reveals the manifold facets of the Italian homosexual milieu and the diversity of the men inhabiting those spaces.

Italian homosexuals, after years of silence under Mussolini’s regime, gained an unprecedented and constantly growing visibility in the media. Many Italian sensationalist tabloids showed a vitriolic anti-homosexual fervor. Their aim was to incite repressive measures, and obtain concrete punitive actions from the state. Such visibility did not provoke immediately a muscular reaction of the police. In the years following the end of the war, when the shortage of basic necessities was causing social tensions and public unrest, when the political situation in Italy was fluid and uncertain, when the Constitutional Assembly was working to design the fundamental rules of the new democratic system, and the political parties were trying to collaborate in spite of their ideological disagreement, in those years the police did not contain homosexuality through broad repressive measures. When the Italian democracy took its final shape and heterosexuality was definitively sanctioned as a compulsory institution for the well-being of the nation and as necessary feature of the Italian citizens, the intervention of the police against homosexuals, after an initial moment of bewilderment, became more and more determined as part of the process of post-Fascist state-building. Establishing and maintaining binaries (man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, normal/pathological) seemed to be essential to a country that was beginning a new political course. Even though sensational magazines had tried to engender a social panic through the circulation of anti-homosexual representations since 1945, the police appeared to intervene more resolutely against homosexuals only between the late 1940s and the early 1950s when

the power of the Christian Democrats was consolidated, and Italy was undoubtedly part of the anti-Communist and anti-homosexual Western Bloc. I am not saying that before that the police remained inactive when a homosexual was killed or when other criminal activities involving homosexuals were registered by local authorities, but I would argue that in the first years following the end of the war the police were rather resistant to indulging the overheated imagination of the sensationalist press. The repression of homosexuality was for them a prophylactic action to protect Italy's youth. Their regular law enforcement practices were enough, and they did not think that there was an oncoming "homosexual epidemic." Only in the 1950s, as we will see later, the wild and obstinate circulation of sensationalist discourses, coupled with the moral principles proclaimed by the Catholic Italian government, affected the police that would begin to regard homosexuality as a phenomenon needing extraordinary attention and requiring exceptional measures on a national level.¹⁶

"Serving" Allied Soldiers (1944-1946)

Illegal prostitution has assumed alarming proportions that cause more than justified concerns for the Allied Authorities, because of the harmful consequences for the troops. Such state of affairs, that is also offending the moral sentiments of the Italian population, has to be addressed with adequate countermeasures. It is therefore imperative that the Police intervene with both preventive and repressive measures, in order to supplement the already arranged prophylactic and sanitary ones.¹⁷

On March 3, 1944 the Minister of Interior sent this communication to the Prefects of Southern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia. The Minister explained that the Allied forces were particularly worried about the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁸ To stop the potential outbreak of dangerous epidemics Italian officers and representatives of the Allied forces were planning to

¹⁶ For an analysis of the impact of crime reports on the police see, for example, Jon Wiltenburg, "True Crime: The Origins of Modern Sensationalism," *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 5 (2004): 1377-1404. For the relationship between press, public opinion and policy change see Julia Laite, "Justifiable Sensationalism," *Media History* 20, no. 2 (2014): 126-145. For heterosexuality as essential feature of citizenship after World War 2 see, for example, Margot Canaday, *The Straight State. Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Letter sent by the Chief of Police of Salerno to the Minister of Interior on March 3, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Vigilanza.

¹⁸ See, for example, the letter sent by the Minister of Interior to the Minister of Justice on April, 8 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Vigilanza.

work together to arrest and hospitalize illegal prostitutes caught soliciting soldiers on the streets. A couple of weeks later the Minister sent an addendum to this communication. To save the honor of the Italian population, as the Minister explained, it was necessary to take care also of another “dangerous and common drawback” caused by the state of war. Too many ragged and filthy children crammed the streets pestering Allied soldiers. They begged for sweets and cigarettes, but above all they indicated where GIs could find illegal brothels or buy liquors. These children, as the Ministry of Interior put it, were offering an embarrassing sight. They were insulting the Italian national dignity and, therefore, they had to be removed from the streets.¹⁹ As a journalist of *Libera Voce* underlined in September 1944, the youths of “our ravaged Italy” had become a “miserable ragbag of [female] prostitutes and *accattoni* [male tramps].” In Naples more and more young women were infected with various venereal diseases, whereas in every major town of the South it was impossible to avoid the “show of half-naked and barefoot kids” offering “their services to Allied soldiers.” According to this article, the Italian authorities had to demand that the Allies control their troops who, willingly or not, because of the amount of money they had at their disposal, were corrupting an entire nation.²⁰

Between 1944 and 1945 the Ministry of Interior asked the Italian Prefectures to provide monthly and weekly dossiers related to illegal prostitution and minors’ corruption. In

¹⁹ See letter of the Minister of Interior to the Prefectures of Salerno, Bari, Brindisi, Lecce, Taranto, Potenza, Matera, Reggio C., Catanzaro, Cosenza, Palermo, Catania, Messina, Siracusa, Ragusa, Trapani, Caltanissetta, Enna, Agrigento, Cagliari, Sassari, Nuoro, Salerno March, 18, 1944, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Circolari; letter of the Minister of Interior to the Prefectures of Salerno, Bari, Brindisi, Lecce, Taranto, Potenza, Matera, Reggio Calabria, Catanzaro, Cosenza, Palermo, Catania, Messina, Siracusa, Ragusa, Trapani, Caltanissetta, Enna, Agrigento, Cagliari, Sassari, Nuoro, Salerno March, 30, 1944, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Circolari; letter of the Royal Prefecture of Pisa to the Ministry of Interior, October 19, 1945, Illegal Prostitution, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Pisa.

²⁰ “Per la ricostruzione morale,” *Libera Voce* (Lecce), September 19, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 338, Prostituzione clandestina, Lecce. About prostitution, juvenile delinquency and venereal diseases see newsletter of the Ministry of Interior to the General management of public security, December 1, 1944, Napoli epidemia, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Napoli. A similar argument about the dangers for the moral rebirth of the nation is made by the Prefect of Salerno, see letter of the Prefecture of Salerno to the Ministry of Interior, September 15, 1944, Illegal Prostitution, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Salerno-Prostituzione clandestina. For the consequences of the encounter between American troops and European women see also David Ellwood, “The American Challenge in Uniform: the Arrival of America’s Armies in World War II and European Women,” *European Journal of American Studies* 7, no. 2 (2012): 1-13. For the relationship between Italian women and Allied troops see also Maria Porzio, *Arrivano gli Alleati! Amori e violenze nell’Italia liberate* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2011).

these documents, the Italian Prefects reported cases of female prostitutes who were held in custody or hospitalized. They also listed cases of arrested male youths who, violating the police curfew, approached Allied soldiers trying to procure female prostitutes or asking for gifts.²¹ The curfew, according to which minors were prohibited from being outside after 5:30 pm, was introduced to avoid contacts between boys younger than 16 years of age and Allied soldiers who, in the evening, were massively present on the streets.²² The authorities were called upon to pay particular attention to those male youths who, begging in the vicinity of temporary barracks and hangouts of the Allies, provided “their services” to the GIs.²³ Juvenile delinquency was particularly prevalent, it was said, because parents themselves were often pushing their children to theft, fraud, and prostitution.²⁴ The local *Questure* (police headquarters) and the Allied Military Police conducted thorough searches, above all in areas where Allied soldiers were present, arresting youths suspected of “immoral activities.” These youths were usually then transferred to their families and relatives – if reliable – or placed in re-education centers – where they existed.²⁵

Female prostitutes, procurers, and young beggars often followed the Allied troops moving from South to North in order to offer “the most modest and the most degrading services.”²⁶ When Prefects in Southern Italy and Sardinia started celebrating the decrease of illegal prostitution and juvenile mendicancy, thanks to the gradual departure of the Allied troops from their areas, other Prefects in the Centre and in the North of the country started

²¹ See, for example, dossier of the Royal Prefecture of Lecce sent on December 12, 1944 to the Ministry of Interior, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 338, Prostituzione clandestina, Lecce; dossier of the Royal Prefecture of Catanzaro sent on May 1, 1944 to the Ministry of Interior, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 338, Prostituzione clandestina, Catanzaro; letter of the Prefecture of Siena to the Ministry of Interior, November 18, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Siena; letter of the Prefecture of Naples to the Ministry of Interior, September 5, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Napoli.

²² Dossier of the Royal Prefecture of Bari sent on November 18, 1944 to the Ministry of Interior, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 338, Prostituzione ed altre forme di mal costume, Bari.

²³ Letter of the Minister of Interior to the Prefectures of liberated Italy, November 5, 1944, Prostituzione e altre forme di malcostume, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Circolari. See also Letter of the Prefecture of Salerno, August 9, 1944, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Salerno.

²⁴ Report of the General Headquarter of the Carabinieri to the Ministry of Interior, September 11, 1944, ACS, MI, Gab., FP, b. 198, Campania; Report of the Province of Naples-November 1944 (no date), ACS, MI, Gab., FP, b. 199, Campania.

²⁵ Dossier of the Royal Prefecture of Benevento sent to the Minister of Interior on August 23, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 338, Prostituzione ed altre forme di mal costume, Catanzaro.

²⁶ Letter of the Prefecture of Livorno to the Ministry of Interior, August 20, 1945, Prostituzione e altre forme di malcostume-Servizio di vigilanza e repressione, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Livorno.

complaining about the spread of illegal prostitution and juvenile corruption caused by the arrival of American troops. Prostitutes and minors were often arrested and sent back to their hometowns. Once in the South they continued to break the law. Because of the “deplorable state of abandonment in which the youths liv[ed]” they often became “participants in the most depraved activities.”²⁷

The language used by the Ministry and its officials to talk about the miserable conditions of liberated Italy was bureaucratically allusive and vague. Female prostitution was clearly mentioned, whereas the nature of the “services” offered to the American soldiers by the Italian male youths was rather ambiguous. The Italian police and the Ministry of Interior did not want to state explicitly what was going on between GIs and Italian young beggars. However, when Curzio Malaparte published his book about Naples under the Allies he left nothing to the imagination. A Fascist from day one, a dissident since 1933, an open supporter of Pietro Badoglio – Mussolini’s successor – in September 1943, and a close collaborator of the Allies in 1944, Malaparte wrote a neo-realistic novel in which brutal descriptions of everyday life verged on the surreal, the macabre, and the grotesque.²⁸

²⁷ Excerpt of the reports of the Carabinieri and of the Prefects about the general conditions of Campania in the month of August 1945, ACS, MI, Gab, FP, b. 198, Campania. Well after the end of the war the Prefecture of Naples sent bi-weekly reports about prostitution and juvenile delinquency to the Ministry of Interior. See, for example, biweekly reports about prostitution of May 4, 1946, November 5, 1946, February 24, 1948, April 21, 1948, November 10, 1948, December 21, 1948, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Napoli. For the situation in other parts of Italy see letter of the Prefecture of Matera to the Ministry of Interior, May 4, 1944, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Matera; letter of the Prefecture of Messina to the Ministry of Interior, November 25, 1944, Prostituzione e altre forme di mal costume, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Messina; letter of the Prefecture of Palermo to the Ministry of Interior, August 5, 1945, Vigilanza sul meretricio clandestino, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Palermo; letter of the Prefecture of Sassari to the Ministry of Interior, November 23, 1944, Prostituzione e altre forme di mal costume, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Sassari; letter of the Prefecture of Pisa to the Ministry of Interior, August 20, 1945, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Pisa; letter of the Prefecture of Livorno to the Minister of Interior, August 20, 1945, Prostituzione e altre forme di malcostume-Servizio di vigilanza e repressione, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Livorno; dossier of the Royal Prefecture of Benevento sent to the Minister of Interior, August 23, 1945, Prostituzione ed altre forme di malcostume, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 338, Prostituzione ed altre forme di mal costume, Catanzaro; letter of the Prefecture of Pisa to the Ministry of Interior, September 5, 1945, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Pisa; letter of the Prefecture of Pisa to the Ministry of Interior, November 8, 1945, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Pisa; report of the Prefecture of Pisa to the Ministry of Interior, December 29, 1945, Prostituzione clandestina. Relazione quindicinale, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Pisa; report of the Prefect of Foggia to the Ministry of Interior, December 2, 1946, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 342, Prostituzione clandestina, Foggia; note of the General management of public security of the Ministry of Interior, June 22, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 342, Prostituzione clandestina, Livorno.

²⁸ For Curzio Malaparte see for example Giordano Bruno Guerri, *L'Arcitaliano, vita di Curzio Malaparte* (Milano: Bompiani, 1980); *Malaparte scrittore d'Europa. Atti del convegno (Prato 1987) e altri contributi*, Gianni Grana ed. (Prato:

La Pelle or the Homosexual Plague

La Pelle (*The Skin*), Malaparte's most successful work, was published – first in France and then in Italy – as part of a trilogy dedicated to the material and moral decadence of Europe. The trilogy began with *Kaputt* (1944), continued with *La Pelle* (1949), and ended with *Mamma Marcia* (*Rotten Mom*, 1951-1952, but published posthumously in 1959). *La Pelle*, which Malaparte started writing in 1946, focuses on the collapse of Italy after World War II. It is a work about hunger, corruption, loss of innocence, and defeat. The novel – acclaimed by readers in Italy and abroad – received mixed reviews. Despite a few positive appraisals the general response, according to Franco Baldasso, was rather critical. The book was so scandalous that the Vatican banned it, and put it on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* in 1950 because of the sexual lewdness in its pages. Moreover, in the same year, the municipality of Naples declared the author *persona non grata*.²⁹ Malaparte wrote this book to show the misery, the prostration, and the political debacle of post-Fascist Italy, to warn against the Communist menace and, above all, to denounce the immoral behavior of American GIs and homosexuals who, at the end of World War II, took advantage of Italian women, men, girls, boys, and children. In his book, portraying homosexuality as a social danger, Malaparte made use of expressions deployed by Fascists who had described homosexuals as degenerates.³⁰

The original title of the book was *La Peste* (*The Plague*) and the author decided to keep it as the title of the book's first chapter.³¹ As Malaparte explains, the “plague” had broken out in Naples when the Allied armies had entered “that disgraced city as liberators.”³²

Marzorati Editore, 1991); Giuseppe Pardini, *Curzio Malaparte. Biografia politica* (Milano: Luni Editrice, 1998); Luigi Martelli, *Curzio Malaparte. Una sofferta scrittura dentro la storia* (Greve in Chianti: Edizioni Feeria, 2010); Giuseppe Panella, *L'estetica dello choc. La scrittura di Curzio Malaparte tra esperimenti narrativi e poesia* (Firenze: Editrice Clinamen, 2014); Franco Baldasso, “Cuzio Malaparte and the Tragic Understanding of Modern History,” *Annali di Italianistica*, 35 (2017): 279-303.

²⁹ For the reception of the book see Guerri, *L'Arcitaliano*, 236-239, 241; Edda Ronchi Suckert, *Malaparte. Volume VIII. 1948-1949* (Firenze: Ponte delle Grazie: 1994), 515-518, 529, 659-665; Id., *Malaparte. Volume IX. 1950-1951* (Firenze: Ponte delle Grazie: 1994), 9-430; Pardini, *Curzio Malaparte*, 295, 322-323, 339; John Gatt-Rutter, “Liberation and Literature: Naples 1944,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2 (1996): 246-247, 249; Baldasso, “Cuzio Malaparte,” 296-297.

³⁰ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 36, 41-42, 48-49, 57, 59, 114. For the Allies in Naples see Porzio, *Arrivano gli Alleati*. For Lombrosian remnants in post-Fascist Italy see also Dunnage, “Legacy of Cesare Lombroso,” 365-384.

³¹ Malaparte changed the title after the publication of Camus' *La Peste* in 1947. Pardini, *Curzio Malaparte*, 317.

³² Curzio Malaparte, *La Pelle* (Roma-Milano: Aria d'Italia, 1949), 38.

This modern disease did not corrupt the body, but rather the soul. The American soldiers, apparently surrounded by an aura of purity, were actually the main carriers of this “sickness”: everything they touched was immediately corrupted. In a language laden with metaphors, Malaparte posits that, as soon as the miserable inhabitants of Naples grasped the hands of their liberators, “they began to fester and stink.”³³ The GIs offered money and goods to a hungry population that was ready to do everything to save its own skin. In December 1944, the Italian Minister of Interior had already described in these terms what Malaparte would have later fictionalized: “With the arrival of the Allies and with the occupation of the territory the sad plague [illegal prostitution] spread rapidly like an epidemic, hitting also those people believed to be until then of irrefutable morality.” The plague originated from the wealth of the Allies who asked for sex in exchange of food and other essentials.³⁴ Naples in 1944 was in such a terrible condition that, according to Malaparte, women were prostituting themselves for a pack of cigarettes, lads were ready to sell themselves for a box of candies, mothers were selling out their own kids to Moroccan, Indian, Algerian, and Madagascan soldiers, and men were willing to prostitute themselves to other men “for some crust of bread.”³⁵ Military defeat and foreign invasion, Malaparte argued, had engendered a masculinity crisis. Italian men were losing control of their sexuality and, with it, they were risking their role as citizens, husbands, and fathers. Homosexuals in particular were presented in *La Pelle* as catalysts of demasculinization, as enemies of the Italian nation, and as vultures ready to feast upon the bodies of men and youths fallen victims to the “plague.”³⁶ Nonetheless, as Benadusi

³³ Ibid., 43-44.

³⁴ Newsletter of the Minister of Interior sent to the General management of public security, December 1, 1944, Napoli epidemia, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Napoli. See also Gigi Di Fiore, *Controstoria della Liberazione* (Milano : Rizzoli, 2012), 251-260.

³⁵ Malaparte, *La Pelle*, 55.

³⁶ Ibid. 19, 40, 43, 58, 75, 158. In the book Malaparte particularly criticized the sexual behavior of the French colonial troops (*Corp Expeditionnaire Français*, CEF). The Moroccan soldiers became sadly notorious during WWII for acts of sexual violence committed against women in central Italy in 1944. See, for example, Fabrizio Carloni, *Il corpo di spedizione francese in Italia, 1943-1944* (Milano: Mursia, 2006); Di Fiore, *Controstoria della Liberazione*, 148-219; Eliane Patriarca, *Amère liberation. Italie 1944, la douleur insensée du passé* (Paris: Arthaud, 2017). For sexual violence of French colonial troops on children, women and men see Norman Lewis, *Naples '44: A World War II Diary of Occupied Italy* (New York: Open Road Media, 2013), 245-247. For sexual violence of colonial troops and Allied soldiers see Porzio, *Arrivano gli Alleati*, 73-89.

emphasizes in his book, it is necessary to stress that already during the Fascist regime police records showed cases of street boys and children agreeing to same-sex intercourse for cigarettes, sweets, food or a few lire. The war exacerbated the phenomenon but, we need to emphasize, young men had prostituted themselves before the *ventennio*, during the dictatorship and, as we will see, they would keep doing it also in post-Fascist Italy.³⁷

Several sections of Malaparte's book dwell on homosexuality. The fourth chapter of *La Pelle* begins with a hyperbolic and surreal description of homosexuals descending on Naples from all over Europe like an avid horde attracted to the multitude of potential prey:

At the first news of the liberation of Naples, as if summoned by a mysterious voice, as if guided by the sweet smell of new leather and Virginian tobacco, that smell of cig which is the smell of the American army, the languid legion of homosexuals, not from Rome and Italy only, but from all over Europe, had crossed the German lines on foot, advancing over the snow-clad mountains of the Abruzzi and through mine fields, braving the fire of the patrols of the *Fallschirmjäger*, and had flocked to Naples to meet the armies of liberation.³⁸

“The international of the inverts,” as Malaparte bombastically named it – maybe inspired by the Futurist writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti – turned Naples into the capital of homosexuality in Europe, “the most important ‘carrefour’ of the prohibited vice in the world,” the “great Sodom where all the inverts of the planet were going to.”³⁹ While in Central and Northern Italy soldiers were still fighting against the Nazi-Fascists, “delicate ranks of Narcissuses,” as Malaparte re-baptized the homosexuals, “promenaded in the streets of Naples, swaying their hips and turning to gaze greedily at the handsome, broad-shouldered, pink-faced American and British soldiers.” These feminine men, in Malaparte's representation, were not only seducing the victorious Allies, but also corrupting the Neapolitan working class youths. These “proletarian ephebes with curly and jet-black hair, red lips, and dark shining eyes who until sometime before the war would never have dared to

³⁷ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 149, 189-190.

³⁸ Malaparte, *La Pelle*, 107.

³⁹ In 1918 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti talked about Italian and foreign homosexuals gathering in Capri as representatives of a new “*internazionale*” (international). See Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Bruno Corra, *L'isola dei baci. Romanzo Erotico Sociale* (Milano: Studio Editoriale Lombardo, 1918), 87-102, 119-126.

associate in public with these noble Narcissuses” were now their companions. According to Malaparte such pairings between young workers and effeminate better-off men laid bare the social promiscuity of the vice, that could infect indiscriminately the “haute noblesse” and the lumpenproletariat.⁴⁰ But most homosexuals, Malaparte claimed, wanted more than the bodies of the “proletarian epebes.” Being members not only of the “the international of the inverts,” but also of the “Communist international,” they wanted to win the youths over to Communism, subjugating them sexually, ethically, and politically.⁴¹ *La Pelle* presented homosexuality and Communism as two paired evils years before the American “Lavender Scare” swept across the Western Bloc. For Malaparte – and here his Fascist past seemed to shine through – there was no distinction between homosexuals and Communists. By corrupting the new Italian generations, they were both carrying out an attack against the nation.

Homosexuals, according to Malaparte’s novel, were particularly intrigued by poor beggars surviving on the streets of Naples. Every morning on the sidewalks of *Piazza San Ferdinando* a crowd of miserable young men gathered. They were thin and pale, and wore tatters or ragged uniforms. Most of them were officers or men of the disbanded and humiliated Italian army. Unable to find a job they were dying of hunger. These young men, these future husbands and fathers – the only hope Italy had for its resurrection – were imperiled by “invert corruptors.”⁴² Among those unhappy men, according to Malaparte, wandered “noble Narcissuses” intent on taking advantage of these youths “who had no roof, no bread, and were stunned by despair.” Seducing these working-class lads was for homosexuals, in Malaparte’s view, a way to accomplish two goals: overcome class divisions in the name of Communism, and satisfy their sexual urges. Possessing a savage, a real

⁴⁰ Malaparte, *La Pelle*, 111.

⁴¹ Ibid., 112, 114. The relation between Communism and homosexuality that Malaparte underlines in his work could be also a consequence of the looming Cold War atmosphere characterizing Italian politics when he was writing *La Pelle*.

⁴² Ibid., 115.

maschio, was an arousing erotic fantasy: “Perhaps it was their wild appearance, their bristly beards, their eyes, bright from fever and lack of sleep, and their tattered garments that awoke in the noble Narcissuses strange desires and refined cravings.”⁴³

In Malaparte’s novel, product of a cultural-ideological environment still exuding Fascist sexism and anti-Communism, homosexuals were not only a lost group of Communist and effeminate men lusting after working class youths, or orgiastic creatures unable to restrain their lewdest urges towards males; they also molested children.⁴⁴ Carrying out an attack on men, boys, and children, homosexual men emerge in *La Pelle* as a dangerous threat. They were, for Malaparte, a menace looming over the new nation that was trying to rise from its own ashes. Everyone was in danger, though. Describing one of the homosexuals he met on the streets of Naples, Malaparte himself slips towards homoerotic tones. The young homosexual, as described by the writer, had a pale face “resplendent with that delicate yet virile beauty which is peculiar to scions of certain families of the great Italian aristocracy.” He had “the head of Antinoüs, carved in ivory marble, and the long ephebic body of an Alexandrine statue.” His hands “were short and white, his eyes proud and sweet, his gaze was dark and lustrous, his lips were red, his smile was vile.” His smile, sorrowful and bitter, was a sour note spoiling his Greek beauty.⁴⁵ His body had a dangerous drawing power, and Malaparte described his attractiveness almost to warn his readers against the poisonous charm that homosexuals were able to exert even on someone like him who seemed to deeply despise them. *La Pelle*, brimming with several disparaging representations of sexually “deviant” behaviors, was an acrimonious denunciation against the alleged wave of immorality that was looming over post-Fascist Italy. In this book child abuse, juvenile exploitation, famine, poverty, prostitution, and homosexuality were all presented as symptoms of a country adrift. However, the “homosexual menace” was an issue of particular importance to Malaparte who

⁴³ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 146-148, 183-186.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 121-122.

extensively wrote about it also in his following book, *Mamma marcia*. Homosexuality was, in his opinion, the ultimate “plague” because it imperiled the reproductive potency of a nation that was struggling for its physical and moral rebirth.

The Roman Cour des Miracles

According to the press the “moral decadence” described by Malaparte was not a feature of Naples only. In post-war Rome as well there was an active sex market, and places such as the *Galleria Colonna* were particularly renowned for this kind of trade. On October 25, 1945 the Minister of Interior asked the police to take action against people engaging in the Galleria in “immoral and indecent practices” as described in an article titled “*Le piaghe di Roma*” (Roman scourges).⁴⁶ According to this piece, published by the newspaper *Ricostruzione* on August 19, 1945, the situation in the Gallery was “catastrophic and loathsome.” The indecent behaviors occurring in the Galleria, the journalist maintained, were a byproduct of the war and of the chaos it had produced. Even if people would prefer to gloss over this phenomenon, the author of the article argued that indecency could not remain unspoken. It was necessary instead to examine, analyze, and denounce what was happening, and fight such behaviors vigorously. Reporting what was occurring in the Galleria was the first step to confronting the problem. The article denounced that over the past months in the areas around the Galleria there had been healthy male adolescents and youths, between the age of 10 and 20, who blatantly offered their “vile services” (*bassi servizi*) to the Allied soldiers, who often competed for the prey. The author of the article asked himself, and asked the readers: “When this miserable and chaotic period will end, now that these youths are used to earning every day hundreds of lire at the cost of dignity and modesty, what will they do? Can we hope, can we expect that after having stooped so low, they will start working?” Moreover, these Allied

⁴⁶ Note of the General management of public security of the Minister of Interior, October 25, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Vigilanza.

soldiers, who supposedly were corrupting the new generations, would go back home to their country bringing with them a distorted image of the Italian nation and of its youths. Trying to read between the lines of this article we can see how for the journalist the human trade of the Galleria was a threat to masculinity from two perspectives: it was undermining the work attitude and the work ethic of the future Italian breadwinners, and it was emasculating the figure of the Italian man ready to sell his body to the war-winners. As the article explained the police had to intervene, seize these “new improvised traders,” take them off the streets, and force them into re-education programs. The journalist was rather optimistic about the capacity of the police to prevent such commerce. But Rome did not have the financial resources to help these youths: the assistance to the abandoned youths of the capital was nearly nonexistent. The authorities did not have the means to take care of boys and girls working in the black market and crawling around the barracks of the Allied soldiers. The police were carrying out their battle against “juvenile deviance” but re-educating the youths was a completely different issue.⁴⁷

In Rome, as in Naples, the arrival of the Allied troops meant rapid spread of illegal prostitution and mendicancy. The generalized unemployment and the miserable living conditions of many Romans favored these phenomena. Juvenile crime and begging were rampant.⁴⁸ Between August and October 1944, for example, 129 kids were arrested “caught

⁴⁷ *Le piaghe di Roma* attached to the note of the General management of public security of the Minister of Interior, October 25, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Vigilanza. Domenico Rizzo talks about young male “prostitutes” in Rome already in the late nineteenth century, see Domenico Rizzo, “‘Per due soldi’. Carriere sessuali di bambini e adolescenti nella Roma di fine Ottocento,” in *Le nuove frontiere della storia di genere II*, Laura Guidi and Maria Rosaria Pelizzari eds. (Salerno: Collana di Studi e Ricerche dell’Università di Salerno, 2013), 517-525. For the police actions in Rome see Royal Questura of Rome, August 2, 1945, answer to a note sent on June 9, 1945. See also the monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior about political and economic conditions, and public order (March 1945), April 5, 1945. Both documents in ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma.

⁴⁸ For prostitution see letter of the Ministry of Interior to the *Questore* of Rome and the Prefect, July 27, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, 1944-1946, b. 329; monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, September 3, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, November 30, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, 1944-1946, b. 329. It is not by chance that in the movie *Paisà* (1946) Roberto Rossellini chose prostitution as the them for the Rome episode. A girl full of hope at the end of the war becomes by the end of the episode a prostitute, unrecognizable to the American soldier she had offered welcome refreshments a few months before. For mendicancy see monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, October 22, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma. For unemployment, juvenile crime and begging see monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, October 15, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior about political and

on the streets, completely left alone, close to places where the Allied forces lodged and hung out” ready “to offer the most nasty services or buy cigarettes, matches and other objects, which they would later re-sell at exorbitant prices.”⁴⁹ On January 29, 1945 the prefect introduced a curfew according to which minors under 15 years of age could not walk on the streets after 8 p.m. In spite of this measure the spread of juvenile delinquency did not decrease.⁵⁰ The easy profits they could make thanks to the GIs made the youths daring and indifferent to rules. As a result, the number of youths arrested for *adescamento* (soliciting), violation of the curfew, and procuring skyrocketed. Moreover, the absence of efficient re-education centers meant that youths held in custody were set free, most of the time, shortly after their arrest. As a consequence, juvenile delinquency, as well as prostitution, continued to be broadly common. The “*fanciulli della strada*” (street kids) were often victims, according to the police, of parents and relatives who forced them to earn money in every possible way, legal or illegal, moral or immoral.⁵¹ The prefect of Rome, albeit ascribing the moral crisis of

economic conditions, and public order, December 5, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; weekly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, November 3, 1944, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma.

⁴⁹ Letter of the Prefecture of Salerno to the Minister of Interior, November 19, 1944, Prostituzione clandestina e altre forme di mal costume, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 339, Prostituzione clandestina, Salerno. See also other documents reporting the same kind of activities: monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior about political and economic conditions, and public order, May 1945, June 5, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; weekly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, September 10, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior about political and economic conditions, and public order, October 1945, November 1, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma.

⁵⁰ See letter of the Carabinieri to the Minister of Interior, July 19, 1945, Roma. Circolazione dei minori degli anni 15 dopo le ore 20, ACS, MI, Gab., 1946, b. 299; monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior about political and economic conditions, and public order, February 1945, March 5, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma. For youth arrested while loitering in the vicinity of Allied soldiers see also: note of the Prefect Persico sent to the Minister of Interior, June 25, 1945, Malcostume Minorile, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Vigilanza.

⁵¹ For violation of the curfew and procuring see letter of the Minister of Interior to the head of the police, April 15, 1945, Prostituzione clandestina-Ricoveri, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Vigilanza; letter of the Questore of Rome to the head of the police, April 15, 1945, Prostituzione clandestina-Lenoncinio, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Vigilanza. For the absence of education centers see monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior about political and economic conditions, and public order, March 1945, April 5, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma. After January 1945 the arrests were rather sporadic see: weekly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, April 16, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; weekly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, April 23, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma. For juvenile delinquency and prostitution see monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior about political and economic conditions, and public order, June 1945, July 4, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma. For street kids as victims of parents and relatives see note of the General management of public security (Vicedomini) sent to the Cabinet of the Minister of Interior, May 29, 1945, Prostituzione clandestina-ricoveri, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Vigilanza. For the “*fanciulli della strada*” see also “Questi fanciulli cenciosi,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 1, 1945, 2.

the city to the massive presence of Allied troops, was worried about the consequences of their gradual repatriation. He was persuaded that the disappearance of easy profits would worsen the safety conditions in the capital. He was worried about the youths who were at this point used to undignified jobs and illicit activities.⁵²

Unemployment, miserable living conditions, and economic depression were worsened by the population increase in Rome. The city, full of Allied soldiers, had become the final destination for many of those who wanted to make easy money. Every day the civil registry recorded more than 1,000 new arrivals and such population growth implied difficult supplying, growth of black market and prostitution, lack of houses, and deterioration of public order. Most of the delinquent youths living in the capital came from displaced families who had no jobs and no homes. To cope with the crisis the Prefect of Rome ordered on November 24, 1945 that from the following December no one would be allowed to remain in the city unless the person demonstrated to have a job. In this way he hoped to stem the arrival of new evacuees and refugees. But putting into effect the order was anything but easy.⁵³

Homosexuals in Postwar Rome

Delinquency, prostitution, and mendicancy remained rampant even after the departure of the Allies. Overpopulation and severe economic discomfort favored criminal activities.⁵⁴ At the same time, in post-war Rome another phenomenon seemed to become more and more noticeable: male same-sex sexuality. The visibility of men-having-sex-with-men, and the idea

⁵² Monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior about political and economic conditions, and public order, July 1945, August 2, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma.

⁵³ See note of the General director of public security to the General management of public security, September 5, 1945, Assistenza all'infanzia-Ricoveri, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 337, 1942-1958, Vigilanza; monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior about political and economic conditions, and public order, September 1945, October 7, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; order of the Prefect of Rome, November 24, 1945 and letter sent by the Prefect to the Minister of Interior, November 29, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, b. 131. For the necessity of expelling non-registered people in Rome see also newsletter of the Roman Questura to the Minister of Interior, October 23, 1946 "Rimpatri e ordine pubblico," ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, b. 131.

⁵⁴ Weekly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, February 2, 1946, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 34, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; weekly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, March 18, 1946, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 34, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, September 1946, October 5, 1946, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 34, Relazioni prefettizie Roma.

that they banded together with criminals, worried the police. As we know from a note sent by the Roman *Questura* (police headquarters) to the Italian chief of police in September 1945, as a consequence of complaints about “the presence of pederasts, by night, at the Pincio,” a raid was organized on the night of September 19. The police arrested ninety-eight men “suspected of such activity.” After a careful exam all of them were set free because, given that homosexuality was legal, the police could not file any charges against them. However, the *Questura* ordered to delve into the private lives of some of them. A list with names of twenty-nine men destined for further investigation was attached to the note. The youngest in this list was 18, the oldest 56. Most of them were office workers (ten), but there was also a teacher, an architect, a hairdresser, a waiter, a pharmacist, an engineer, a lawyer, a journalist, two opera singers, six unemployed men, and three university students. The document also classified these men according to their alleged sexual role, dividing them into fifteen “*attivi*” and fourteen “*passivi*”. The document did not specify how this distinction was made.⁵⁵

But male same-sex sexuality was not confined to the dark alleys of the Pincio. It was also represented on the stage of one of the most illustrious theaters of Rome. In October 1945, Luchino Visconti directed a play by Marcel Achard entitled *Adamo* at the *Teatro Quirino*. The piece was about a love triangle with two men involved in a same-sex relationship. According to Ermanno Contini, the author of a review, Achard’s works were always about love and this piece – being about something so “inhuman and tart” as homosexuality – did not seem to be in line with his previous production. Contini explained that watching the play it was possible to feel the pain of all the protagonists but, at the same time, he underlined that the drama put on stage would be unfamiliar to many. The story represented by Achard’s

⁵⁵ The *Pincio* – the Pincian Hill, a park overlooking Piazza del Popolo in central Rome – seemed to be the center of male-male cruising and hustling. See warning from the *Questura* (signed Ciro Verdiani) to the head of police, April 26, 1946, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 329, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma. See also warning from the *Questura* di Roma to the head of the police, September 20, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 329, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma; “Dal Pincio al Commissariato sui camion della Polizia,” *Epoca*, September 20, 1945; “Tristi amori interrotti al Pincio,” *l’Avanti!*, September 20, 1945; “Di giorno idillio, di notte tregenda,” *Epoca*, September 21, 1945 (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 329, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma); Stefano Neri, “I ginecei all’aperto dei maschi-femmine,” *Pubblico*, September 27, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 329, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma.

work, according to the reviewer, was not common and thus the feelings of the two homosexual men were alien to the audience. However, Contini argued, it was necessary to acknowledge that the play “was rich of subtle and penetrating remarks that bravely enlighten the most secret tangles of the shady situation.” The death of the husband, torn between his wife and his male lover, seemed to bring new balance. *Adamo* was nothing more than a well-written play, according to Contini, and it did not deserve “the idiotic racket that a few boors staged during the show.” To his opinion, “the peremptory and vibrant reaction of the audience was a clear objection against the hecklers and, above all, against the ridiculous position assumed by this minority representing an out-of-line self-righteousness.” Contini sounded pleased when, wrapping up his review, wrote: “Six curtain calls after the first act, eleven after the second, and more than forty at the end.”⁵⁶ Reading this review it is possible to perceive Contini’s condemnation and repulsion at the actions represented on stage, but his disapproval of the bigots in the audience who were unable to engage with the drama emerges at least as clearly. The representation of *Adamo* and the publication of this review would have been unimaginable a few months before. They were a sign of discontinuity with the previous political regime, and a clear clue that censorship was relaxing its grip.

In the months following the premiere of *Adamo* the Roman newspapers would talk again about homosexuality not in the cultural pages this time, but in the crime columns. The death of two men at the end of 1945 pushed the police, as the Prefect of Rome explained, to intervene in “an environment of shady morality,” and contain a form of “sexual perversion” that was “burgeoning also in Italy,” a country that until then had supposedly remained “almost completely immune to it.”⁵⁷ Luigi Zappalà, killed in his office in Via Borgognona in November 1945, was a fifty-year-old merchant dealing in numerous goods but, above all, in

⁵⁶ Ermanno Contini, “‘Adamo’ al Quirino,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, October 31, 1945, 6.

⁵⁷ See weekly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, November 19, 1945 and weekly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, December 27, 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 24, Relazioni prefettizie Roma.

jewelry and, allegedly, cocaine. The Roman newspapers immediately plunged into the victim's "sexual abnormality." Zappalà was presented as an effeminate man who did not have relationships with women, and who had been held in custody by the police multiple times for public indecency. According to the press then Zappalà was killed by an "*intimissimo*" (an intimate male friend). But the possibility that the murder might have been a vendetta for his alleged illicit traffics was not totally abandoned. Zappalà lived in "*un ambiente equivoco*" (a shady milieu), on the edge between cocaine trade and "forbidden pleasures," used to silence and connivance, and therefore the determination of a motive looked difficult. *Il Tempo* reported that to ascertain Zappalà's sexuality, and have therefore a better sense of the reason behind the murder, the coroner was going to carry out a careful examination of the intestines and the rectum of the victim. In this way, according to the newspaper, it would be possible to have "a more precise definition of Zappalà's sexual anomaly."⁵⁸ It seemed like the victim's anus was the key to his sexuality. The same situation would emerge when news of Adriano Micheletto's death hit the headlines.

On the night of December 16, 1945 in the elegant Prati neighborhood, in the studio of two renowned sculptors, the corpse of Micheletto, a set designer, was found. The victim was a thirty-one-year old man from Vicenza of little or no means. He did not have a place to stay and, therefore, he was temporarily sleeping in the atelier owned by his friends. According to the police, the murderer was sleeping there too.⁵⁹ At first *Il Giornale del Mattino* did not direct its attention to Micheletto's sexuality. *Il Tempo* instead began immediately to cast doubts on the victim's masculinity. His "feeble voice, almost womanish" was presented as a clue of his "inversion." People did not know how he was making ends meet and the journalist,

⁵⁸ "Dopo il delitto di Via Borgognona. Il viaggio di Zappalà a Milano oggetto di particolare attenzione della polizia," *Il Tempo*, November 18, 1945, 2. For the murder of Zappalà see also "Il delitto di Via Borgognona nella ricostruzione della polizia. Loschi traffici e dissensi d'affari hanno provocato il delitto. La figura dell'ucciso," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 17, 1945, 2; "Il delitto di Via Borgognona. L'assassino di Luigi Zappalà rimane per ora avvolto nel mistero," *Il Tempo*, November 17, 1945, 2; "Il delitto di Via Borgognona. Le indagini proseguono con difficoltà. Numerosi fermi tra gli amici dell'ucciso," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 18, 1945, 2; "Il delitto di Via Borgognona. La polizia su una nuova pista," *Il Tempo*, November 20, 1945, 2.

⁵⁹ "Misterioso delitto in Via Vodice. Scenografo assassinato nello studio di due scultori," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 18, 1945, 2.

emphasizing that the police had found in the atelier a picture of him in trunks with two telephone numbers on the back, seemed to suggest that hustling might have been his source of income.⁶⁰ On December 19 the police definitely classified the case as a homosexual murder. The “abnormal figure of Micheletto” had emerged from several interrogations.⁶¹ His old university colleagues, for example, said that they did not have doubts about the victim’s *simpatie sessuali* (sexual tastes). But, once again, the press underlined that the autopsy would have the task of confirming the victim’s “sexual inversion in the strict sense.”⁶²

Benadusi stresses how during the Fascist regime it was common practice for the police to subject “all those accused of pederasty to a medical examination, in order to ‘objectively’ confirm they were homosexuals.”⁶³ The scholar explains further that in Mussolini’s Italy homosexuality was not understood as an identity, but as a practice. Sexual passivity was read as full-fledged homosexuality and, thus, the rectum was understood as the place where sexual perversion resided. The shape of a man’s anus had the final say about who this man was sexually. Being penetrated would make a man an invert “in the strict sense.” Even if medical experts denied the existence of a connection between shape of the anus and homosexuality, the police continued to inspect the rectum of those suspected of “sodomy.” Once a man was assumed to be a “pederast,” the police made every effort to find some form of confirmation in his body. Anal scars and fistulas were often regarded as incontrovertible proof of the “vice.” In my research I have not come across other documents explicitly focusing on rectal inspections. I cannot definitively assess whether this practice was discontinued, but documents produced by Questure and Prefetture, which routinely refer to “further inspections” on pederasts “held in custody,” suggest that police were still carrying out the procedures implemented during the *ventennio*. Furthermore, historian Jonathan Dunnage,

⁶⁰ “Fitto mistero sull’assassinio dello scenografo ucciso a martellate,” *Il Tempo*, December 18, 1945, 2.

⁶¹ “Gli assassini di Micheletto arrestati a Torino,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 13, 1946, 2.

⁶² “Ancora un caso Zappalà,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 19, 1945, 2. For the case see also “Un biglietto intriso di sangue,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 20, 1945, 2.

⁶³ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 134.

after having analyzed Italian police literature (journals, manuals, etc.) during the late 1940s and the 1950s, suggests that there might have been continuity in the ways in which the Italian police treated homosexuals during and after Fascism. He explains indeed that “a notable proportion of policemen entrusted with the repression of homosexuality in the post-war period would have undergone their training during the Fascist regime” learning “theories developed at the *Scuola Superiore di Polizia* (Scientific Policing Institute)” and originally inspired by the work of the criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso.⁶⁴

Micheletto’s case, unlike Zappalà’s, was solved at the beginning of 1946.⁶⁵ Two minors had killed the set designer: Sergio Quartesan, sixteen years old, and Renato Pesce, eighteen. The murder was, according to the newspaper, “[a]n alarmingly brutal story” because it showed how the Italian new generation was drifting, seduced by the lowest instincts, and blinded by gross greediness. Quartesan and Pesce had left Turin and Padua in July 1945. They were two of the many people who, having moved to Rome in search for a better future, found themselves broke and desperate. Through their acquaintances they ended up in the “sad world of the homosexuals.” Hanging out in “the dark alleys of the Pincio” they met Micheletto. These two youths and the set designer became intimate. Quartesan and Pesce slept in the atelier from time to time, until they started spending their nights there more and more regularly. Quartesan, Pesce, and Micheletto, needing money, decided to start blackmailing a common friend who, “infected with the same vice,” had habitual intercourse with the two youths. After the failure of this plan, the two hustlers decided to rob Micheletto and disappear. But the robbery went wrong and the two kids killed their habitual client/friend. Before

⁶⁴ For anal inspections during the Fascist regime see Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 44, 45, 135, 189. See also Dunnage, “Legacy of Cesare Lombroso,” 377-380 and Chiara Beccalossi, “Italian Sexology, Nicola Pende’s biotypology and hormone treatments in the 1920s,” *Historie medicine et santé*, 12 (2017): 74-75.

⁶⁵ See “Gli assassini di Micheletto arrestati a Torino;” “Gli assassini di Micheletto arrestati dalla Squadra Mobile,” *Il Tempo*, January 13, 1946, 2 and “L’assassinio dello scenografo Micheletto nella confessione dei precoci criminali,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 15, 1946, 2.

running away they stole a gold watch, a pair of shoes, a suit, and some shirts. The day after the two killers left and went back to Turin.⁶⁶

In the beginning, the authorities were inclined to dismiss Micheletto's case. According to the Roman police, crimes happening "in the world of the perverts" remained largely unpunished "given the character of the people involved and the absolute discretion of the homosexuals." However, a chain of fortuitous clues, intuitions, and interrogations allowed the police to follow the tracks to Turin, where Quartesan and Pesce were found and arrested.⁶⁷ The journalist of *Il Tempo* confessed to be shocked by the indifference of these two kids, who did not seem to care about their crime. *Il Giornale del Mattino* never classified the sexuality of the two killers. *Il Tempo* instead described them as exploiters of homosexuals. Quartesan and Pesce "were two inverters" and their inversion was of the worst kind. Unlike those who were abnormal by nature, they had "abandoned themselves to such unspeakable acts" voluntarily, with the only goal of "earn[ing] money."⁶⁸ The journalists of both Roman newspapers, building on Lombrosian theories and criminal anthropology, described Quartesan and Pesce as if they wanted to find signs of their moral defect in their complexion. If Micheletto's anomaly was in his anus, doctors were going to search the taint of these two depraved adolescents through an "anthro-bio-psychological exam" that would have allegedly allowed them to understand the "nature" of these two youths and make sense of their crime.⁶⁹ According to Giorgio Boschero, who wrote during the trial against these two young men an article for *Crimen*, a criminology magazine, Quartesan and Pesce "represented thousands of deviant youths pushed to crime by post-war misery, lack of education, and evil dark forces."⁷⁰ Innate traits and environmental factors seemed to resonate with each other.

⁶⁶ "L'assassinio dello scenografo Micheletto nella confessione dei precoci criminali."

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "I due assassini sul luogo del delitto," *Il Tempo*, January 15, 1946, 2.

⁶⁹ See "I due assassini sul luogo del delitto;" "L'assassinio dello scenografo Micheletto nella confessione dei precoci criminali;" "Gli assassini di Micheletto sottoposti a visita medica," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 16, 1946, 2.

⁷⁰ Giorgio Boschero, "Gioventù malata," *Crimen*, January 14-21, 1946, 12.

Giuseppe Modugno, writing two articles in *Il Tempo*, argued that the young generation in Italy was facing a moral disaster. The journalist, patently concealing the existence of male prostitution already before 1945 and presenting same-sex sexuality as a calamity, wrote that Micheletto's killers, and "the frighteningly diffused pederasty among the minors in Taranto and Naples" were clear signs of the inability of the new democratic state to take care of its children. Public institutions were not able to face the problem and there were no private organizations that could deal with abandoned youths and juvenile delinquents. The fight had to be intensive and relentless. The post-Fascist state needed to do something concrete to contrast such "generational downfall." Besides the creation of institutions aimed at re-educating the youths, it was necessary to reform the family and the educational system.⁷¹ Michele Majetti, in an article published by *Crimen* in October 1946, showed his concerns about a generation without hopes, grown up in misery, without moral rules, and used to violence. They were "*fanciulli-adulti*" (adult-kids) lost on the road to delinquency.⁷² During the war and in its aftermath youths got used to stealing, scamming, procuring, trading in the black-market, and hustling. When the post-war crisis came to a close, they were not used to regular jobs and to a social system ruled by legal norms.⁷³ The state had to intervene and help a lost generation. Fascism, five years of war, two of postwar, and "a lot of hunger" had affected the "minds and souls" of the Italian youths in "unexpected and evil, mysterious and terrible" ways.⁷⁴

The murders of Zappalà and Micheletto resulted in the Roman police stepping up their efforts to observe and keep tabs on homosexuals. The "homosexual world" was one of crime, blackmail, prostitution, and corruption that needed to be kept under control because it was

⁷¹ See Giuseppe Modugno, "Necessità di risolvere il problema dell'infanzia abbandonata," *Il Tempo*, January 24, 1946, 2; Giuseppe Modugno, "La rieducazione dei minorenni abbandonati e travati," *Il Tempo*, February 1, 1946, 2.

⁷² Michele Majetti, "Infanzia senza luce," *Crimen*, 8-15 October, 1946, 6.

⁷³ See A.B., "La corruzione minorile. Le grandi inchieste di Crimen. Venezia," *Crimen*, March 25-April 1, 1947, 3-4; Osvaldo Pagani, "La corruzione minorile. Le grandi inchieste di Crimen. Milan," *Crimen*, April 1-8, 1947, 11-12; A.G. Parodi, "La corruzione minorile. Le grandi inchieste di Crimen. Genova," *Crimen*, April 8-15, 1947, 11-13.

⁷⁴ Nera Comei, "Gioventù sviata. Uccide amico nel sonno e poi lo bacia..." *Crimen*, 8-15 July 1947, no page

negatively affecting the youth. Media emphasized the association between homosexuality and criminality, and the stories reported by the crime news strengthened such conviction. Both the Prefect and the *Questore* (police commissioner) of Rome sent reports to the Ministry of Interior about the number of “sexual inverts” arrested every month. Such numbers were mentioned in the section related to “female prostitution and vagrancy.” Homosexuals, prostitutes, and vagrants were understood by the Roman police as different facets of one single phenomenon: post-war anomie. These data showed that the repressive activity of the Roman police was supposedly successful, as the number of homosexuals hustling in the Roman parks seemed to decrease over the course of 1946. The police clampdown on homosexuality was an immediate response to Zappalà’s and Micheletto’s assassinations. Other “homosexual murders” caused similar reactions. But the national offensive of the police against the alleged “homosexual epidemic,” as chapter two will show, would begin only a few years later.⁷⁵

Sexual Perversions and Sensationalist Tabloids

The Fascist regime carried out a war against pornography and “immoral literature,” censored encyclopedias and journals dedicated to the study of sexuality, and dismantled the *cronaca nera* (crime news) arguing that yellow journalism hindered the emergence of a positive image of the new Italian state. Starting in January 1926 Mussolini had maintained that the nation would be reformed also through a moralization of the press and a strict censorship against “vice” and “perversion.” The regime dictated a list of offenses that could not be publicized by media. This list included crimes against public morality and decency, as well as crimes against the family and the integrity and health of the *stirpe* (race). Newspapers could not

⁷⁵ See monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, April 1946, May 5, 1946, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 34, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; weekly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, May 7, 1946, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 34, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; monthly report of the Prefect of Rome to the Minister of Interior, May 1946, June 4, 1946, ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, 1944-1946, b. 34, Relazioni prefettizie Roma; report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, October 1, 1946, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma.

report disturbing events and could not mention pederasty, infanticide, or “vices” linked to the sexual sphere. The press could not mention either tragic acts of passion nor news that were excessively gruesome and disgusting. Also advertisements had to follow the same rules, and refrain from publicizing medicines or cures for impotency and other sexual dysfunctions. Crimes disappeared from novels, whereas “vices” and “sexual perversions” could only be treated when set in other countries, or in distant and “exotic” land of the Orient.⁷⁶

Once the regime was over, and the Italian press was free again, newspapers and magazines began talking with gusto of stories and topics that had been forbidden for twenty years. The Italian press boomed and a new style of journalism, sensationalist and morbid, emerged. Individuals and activities that held a negative moral, political, and social value, ended up holding a high commercial one. A remarkable amount of space was given to crime and, as Stephen Gundle underlines, “a whisper overheard in a café was the next day’s headline.”⁷⁷ Browsing magazines and newspapers in the second half of the 1940s it seemed that Italy was rife with robberies, murders, urban banditry, prostitution, sexual perversion, and violence, all as an aftermath of the war years. Publishers felt that, after years of censorship, readers of magazines and newspapers might have been particularly interested in crimes. They knew that they could capitalize on sensationalist news filled with indecent details presented in a particularly colorful narrative. There were even sensationalist magazines that asked their own readers to become informants and helped them find profitable scandals.⁷⁸ Defamation, circulation of false, exaggerated, and biased news, and publication of articles “contrary to public morality” were still regulated by pre-1945 laws. However, the general category of “public morality” gave ample discretion to police and judges, and journalists published their articles hoping to avoid legal consequences.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 282-285.

⁷⁷ Stephen Gundle, *Death and the Dolce Vita. The Dark Side of Rome in the 1950s* (London: Canongate, 2011), 26-27.

⁷⁸ Scandalo, “Niente denunce anonime,” *Scandalo del Giorno*, October 12, 1947, 4.

⁷⁹ See Capussotti, *Gioventù Perduta*, 49-53; Mauro Forno, *La stampa del Ventennio. Strutture e trasformazioni nello stato totalitario* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005), 125-126; Paolo Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano* (Bologna: Il

Between the end of 1946 and the beginning of 1947 anti-homosexuality became a rather apparent feature of many magazines. Some tabloids began to report on the alleged existence of same-sex brothels all over the country. Here, it was said, orgiastic parties were organized with the participation of homosexual men – often in drag – and young hustlers.⁸⁰ The incapacity of these journalists to understand the dynamics of queer sociality did not allow them to comprehend how these male same-sex gatherings were organized. Their ignorance of the queer milieus and of their inner rules pushed these journalists to describe such parties as “brothels” even if, for those participating in such soirees, cruising and having sex may have been as important as socializing and meeting potential lovers. However, journalists seemed to be more interested in highlighting how homosexuals and youths meeting at these parties often developed dangerous relationships that ended up in violence, blackmailing, and murders. The assassinations of several men in 1946 (Zappalà and Micheletto in Rome, Guido Gambaro and Gino Pavanato in Turin, Carlo Mazzoletti in Genoa, and Pietro Vonghia in Milan), all allegedly killed by young male hustlers, were exhibited by the press as evidence of the dangerousness intrinsic to the “homosexual world.”⁸¹

Homosexuality was described by sensational tabloids as a social problem that was derailing youths already deeply damaged by the war.⁸² Homosexuals were invariably

Mulino, 2006), 147, 149; Mauro Forno, *Informazione e potere. Storia del giornalismo italiano* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2012), 98, 106, 149; Barbara Bracco, *La saponificatrice di Correggio. Una favola nera* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2018). For the high commercial value of sensationalism see Justin Bengry, “Profit (f)or the Public Good?,” *Media History* 20, n. 2 (2014): 146-166.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Dario Liverani, “Impressionante crescendo di assassini di omosessuali. Lo scandalo di ‘Madame Royale’,” *Cronaca Nera*, December 14, 1946, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Milano; “Il mondo sotterraneo degli ‘uomini strani’,” *La Repubblica d’Italia*, April 19, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma; “‘Club Primavera’ al Quadraro. Vita sotterranea degli ‘uomini strani’,” *La Repubblica d’Italia*, April 22, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma; Garvin, “Anche a Catania gl’invertiti si organizzano,” *Scandalo*, December 7, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 341, Prostituzione clandestina, Catania, Catania-Invertiti; article without title about Bologna, *Scandalo*, December 28, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 340, Prostituzione clandestina, Bologna, Bologna-Pederasti.

⁸¹ For the murders of Pavanato and Gambaro see: “Dodici mazze sulla testa hanno finito il rag. Pavanato,” *La Stampa*, July 30, 1946, 2; “Un sensazionale arresto. Si tratta dell’assassino del Pavanato?,” *La Stampa*, August 3, 1946, 2; “L’assassinio era premeditato,” *La Stampa*, August 9, 1946, 2. See also Luigi Silvestri, “Perché fu ucciso Romano Pavanato,” *Assise*, n. 37, 1947, 2, APLLL. For Mazzoletti see A.G. Parodi. “La corruzione minorile. Le grandi inchieste di Crimen. Genova,” *Crimen*, April 8-15, 1947, 13; Everest, “Un dramma tra invertiti,” *Crimen*, May 6-13, 1947, 5-6. For Vonghia see “Impressionante crescendo di assassini di omosessuali.”

⁸² But young men also prostituted themselves to women. I found one document at the National State Archive about such phenomenon in 1940s Rome. It is an article published by *Scandalo* in September 1947, signed Gi.Ba, and entitled “S’incettano maschi a Piazza Colonna. Non solo dollari...” (“Raking up men in Piazza Colonna. Not dollars only...”). The

presented as sick and as members of organized sects with national and international connections aimed at unsettling the social order.⁸³ Even if youths hanging out with homosexuals were depicted as criminals, the first ring of the chain of perversions was the “invert.”⁸⁴ He lured the poor young male who – sensationalist journalists argued – broke and corrupted by the war and its aftermath, was unable to resist. The newspaper *La Repubblica d’Italia*, for example, maintained that homosexuality and related criminal activities were booming because of the recent conflict. In “normal times” there were many *costituzionali* (innate inverts). But the war had caused the emergence of several young *occasionalisti* (occasional homosexuals). The latter had no scruples, and they lived their lives blackmailing and taking advantage of the *costituzionali*. Both *costituzionali* and *occasionalisti* were socially dangerous because they favored criminal activities. The *costituzionali*, compelled to satisfy the economic needs of the *occasionalisti*, would do anything to find the money they needed to pay them. The *occasionalisti* in turn, who were “criminals by nature,” incited the *costituzionali* to commit offenses. It was a vicious cycle. The *costituzionali* “produced” the *occasionalisti*, and

author of this article explained that everybody knew about the female white slave trade, but people seemed to ignore the existence of the *tratta dei bianchi* (male white slave trade). *Piazza Colonna* in Rome was the center of this peculiar trade and, as Gi.Ba. argued, there were already many poor young Roman men sold to rich old women living abroad. The veracity of such news remains unproven, but news like this were part of that moment of post-war frenzy in which yellow journalism was invested in denouncing an allegedly rampant moral crisis (Gi. Ba., “S’incettano maschi a Piazza Colonna. Non solo dollari...,” *Scandalo*, September 21-28, 1947, 1-2, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma). I also found some documents about male hustlers for women in two spa towns, Montecatini and Salsomaggiore Terme, in 1947-1948. As reported by the Prefects of Pistoia and Parma, the provinces where these two towns are located, initially the police thought that these young men – between 18 and 25 years of age – were hired by some hotel owners to prostitute themselves to rich female tourists (Note of the Ministry of Interior to the Prefects of Pistoia and Parma, October 10, 1947. Montecatini e Salsomaggiore-Giovani ingaggiati da albergatori, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Pistoia, Montecatini e Salsomaggiore-1947-Giovani ingaggiati da albergatori a scopo di prostituzione). Two months later the Prefect of Parma confirmed that in Salsomaggiore there were several young males who sold themselves to older rich women, however it was not proved that hotel owners hired these kids to that aim. The Prefect attached a list with the names of eight male prostitutes. Seven were Italian, from Salsomaggiore, and one was Czechoslovak. The youngest was born in 1926, the oldest in 1914. They were all unemployed. One was married and one had a university degree (See Prefecture of Parma to the Ministry of Interior, December 16, 1947, Salsomaggiore-Giovani ingaggiati da albergatori and report of the Ministry of Interior, January 18, 1948, Leblovic Pietro di Giuseppe e di Brill Alice-suddito cecoslovacco, dottore in filologia, poliglotta, both documents in ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Pistoia, Montecatini e Salsomaggiore-1947-Giovani ingaggiati da albergatori a scopo di prostituzione). In June 1948 the Prefect of Parma communicated that all the young suspects found a stable job and left Salsomaggiore (Prefecture of Parma to the Ministry of Interior, June 28, 1948, Salsomaggiore-Attività immorale giovani, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Pistoia, Montecatini e Salsomaggiore-1947-Giovani ingaggiati da albergatori a scopo di prostituzione).

⁸³ “Il mondo sotterraneo degli ‘uomini strani’,” “‘Club Primavera’ al Quadraro,” “Anche a Catania gl’invertiti si organizzano.”

⁸⁴ “‘Club Primavera’ al Quadraro.”

the occasionali committed crimes. Since the costituzionali were “incurable,” the only way to break the circle was to save the youths through education and economic stability.⁸⁵

The press, inspired by Lombroso’s theories, aimed at suggesting that there was something inherently criminal about same-sex practices and desires.⁸⁶ The publication of numerous articles in which the trope of the corrupting homosexual was repeated regularly aimed at making the connection between same-sex activities and crime tighter than it probably was, and at prompting the police to react. The stories narrated by *Cronaca Nera*, *La Repubblica d’Italia*, and *Scandalo* often defied credibility and were not confirmed by the investigations of the police.⁸⁷ Articles published by these newspapers and magazines presented time and again stereotyped homosexual *characters* always playing the same *roles*. They seemed to be figments of the reporters’ imagination, rather than truthful descriptions of real people and events. However, real or not, for many readers these articles represented the truth. Imagined realities and invented stories were powerful in generating panic and stirring up emotions. Once put out there, once unleashed, these more or less true stories would circulate freely. Accuracy and truthfulness seemed to take a back seat, whereas sexual “perverts” were shamed and presented as dangerous corruptors of the new post-Fascist generations. Such media turned homosexuals into a threat to societal values and interests causing a *moral panic* around them.⁸⁸ The alleged homosexual danger came across as a

⁸⁵ “Il mondo sotterraneo degli ‘uomini strani’.”

⁸⁶ Benadusi, *Enemy of the New Man*, 36, 41, 42, 48, 49, 156, 191.

⁸⁷ See Gino De Sanctis, “Per Roma Dieci in Condotta,” *Oggi*, May 13, 1947, 11, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma; Prefecture of Catania to the Ministry of Interior, January 3, 1948, Catania-Organizzazione di invertiti sessuali, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 341, Prostituzione clandestina, Catania, Catania-Invertiti; Note of the Prefect of Bologna to the Ministry of Interior, February 6, 1948, Bologna: Invertiti sessuali, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 340, Prostituzione clandestina, Bologna, Bologna-Pederasti. See also Note of the Prefecture of Bologna to the Ministry of Interior, February 16, 1948, Segnalazioni del periodico *Scandalo*, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 340, Prostituzione clandestina, Bologna.

⁸⁸ For the concept of “moral panic” see Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers* (London: MacGibbon&Kee, 1972); George Chauncey, “The Postwar Sex Crime Panic,” in *True Stories from the American Past*, William Graebner ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 160-178; Estelle Freedman, “‘Uncontrolled desires’: The response to the sexual psychopath,” in *Passion and Power. Sexuality in History*, Peiss Kathy and Christina Simmons eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 199-225; Geoffrey S. Smith, “National Security and Personal Isolation: Sex, Gender, and Disease in the Cold-War United States,” *The International History Review*, 2 (1992): 307-337; Philip Jenkins, *Moral Panic. Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Neil Miller, *Sex Crime Panic. A Journey into the Paranoid Heart of the 1950s* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2002); Fred Fejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic. The Origins of America’s Debate on Homosexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008);

national issue that would inevitably endanger the future of Italy. The stories, credible or not, real or not, produced monsters, and favored the spiraling escalation of the threat itself.

Sensationalist tabloids were the voice of those who feared that the new democratic system, not opposing homosexuality effectively, could jeopardize the new generations.⁸⁹

After the murder of Pietro Vonghia, found dead in his apartment on October 30, 1946, the world of the *invertiti* in Milan was put under surveillance.⁹⁰ The weekly magazine *Cronaca Nera* published an article by Dario Liverani about the ways in which the “homosexual vice” and the Milanese “criminal underworld” “proceed[ed] close to one another and often merge[d] into each other.”⁹¹ The publication of this article was noticed by officials of the central Italian government, who asked the Prefect of Milan to report in details about the homosexual activities described by the journalist.⁹² At that point, as the Prefect explained, the Questura started paying particular attention to the “sick activities” of “such perverts” in order “to repress ... indecent and immoral behaviors that in this city had assumed scandalous proportions.”⁹³ As a result of several raids the police discovered the existence of three alleged male-male illegal brothels. One of them was managed by Enrico Piovella, a set designer known as “Madame Royale,” who had been the main protagonist of Liverani’s anti-homosexual article.⁹⁴ His piece, illustrated with several pictures of men in drag, can be considered as an example of how homosexuals were represented by sensationalist tabloids. Sensationalism was based on the repetition of more or less believable stereotypes aimed at

Moral Panics, Sexual Panics: Fear and Fight over Sexual Rights, Gilbert Herdt ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2009); *Moral Panics, Social Fears, and the Media*, Nicholas Siân and Tom O’Malley eds. (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁸⁹ See, for example, the “Maiden Tribute” and its consequences: Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight. Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 81-134.

⁹⁰ Note of the Ministry of Interior to the General management of public security, December 2, 1946, Provvedimenti per combattere l’immoralità, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Milano.

⁹¹ Liverani, “Impressionante crescendo di assassini di omosessuali.”

⁹² See note from the Ministry of Interior to the Prefect of Milan, Milano Pederastia, January 31, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Milano.

⁹³ Letter of the Prefecture of Milan to the Ministry of Interior, January 13, 1947, Provvedimenti per combattere l’immoralità, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Milano.

⁹⁴ For Piovella see also letter of the Prefecture of Milan to the Ministry of Interior, January 13, 1947, Provvedimenti per combattere l’immoralità, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Milano. In 1970 Vittorio Caprioli directed a movie starring Ugo Tognazzi entitled *Splendori e miserie di Madame Royale* (Madame Royale’s Glory and Misery). The plot, despite some overlappings with the case of Enrico Piovella, does not resemble his story. However, I would not exclude the possibility that Caprioli was inspired by this 1940s scandal to create his own “Madame Royale.”

stimulating common emotions, and at inviting reactions of shock, outrage, offense, and horror. The article, reporting on one night in the “male-male brothel” apparently run by Madame Royale, gives us a paradigmatic example of how male same-sex sex was presented to the public by yellow journalism.⁹⁵ The goal of this piece, in Liverani’s intention and in the intention of other sensational reporters, was to expose the “sick perversion” and the dangerousness of the “homosexual world.” Here, according to Liverani, “the love everybody knows” did not exist. Homosexuals were only destined to “sterile and melancholic bargaining.”



Figure 1.1. Homosexual man in drag singing at a private party. From Dario Liverani. “Impressionante crescendo di assassini di omosessuali. Lo scandalo di ‘Madame Royale’,” *Cronaca Nera*, December 14, 1946.

We do not know exactly how Liverani was able to be present (and if he was actually present) at one of these supposed homosexual parties/orgies, and we do not know how he came into possession of the pictures the magazine published.⁹⁶ His piece, like other articles about homosexuality published by sensational magazines, seemed to be more of a fantasy than a description of real events, but this rather grotesque fantasy was supported by visual evidence.⁹⁷ Liverani’s article, similarly to others published around the same time, wanted to

⁹⁵ In 1947 *Scandalo* published an article describing a gathering place for homosexuals that was very similar to Madame Royale’s house. See article without title, *Scandalo*, December 28, 1947.

⁹⁶ How reporters of sensationalist magazines were able to go to these alleged male-male brothels remains a mystery. See, for example, also the very detailed description of a night at the “*Club Primavera*” in Rome. ““*Club Primavera*’ al Quadraro.”

⁹⁷ See “Il mondo sotterraneo degli ‘uomini strani’,” ““*Club Primavera*’ al Quadraro,” “Anche a Catania gl’invertiti si organizzano,” article without title, *Scandalo*, December 28, 1947.

present this space as an orgiastic and dangerous one.⁹⁸ Madame Royale's parlor was for the readers of this tabloid a "squalid place" of social and sexual deviance where lost youths were seduced and corrupted by "repulsive" men in drag. The night described by Liverani was displayed as an accurate account of homosexual abjection. For the readers, this account, whether it was real, fictional, or an embellished half truth, became not only the description of a typical night at Madame Royale's house, but also – more generally – the paradigm of the ways in which homosexuals spent their lascivious nights.⁹⁹

In this piece the journalist argued that what happened in Madame Royale's abode was "despicable filthiness" that should "disgust everyone still sane enough to perceive its offensiveness." Liverani was particularly concerned about "the ostentation" of the "inverts." In the past they "hid their 'vice' as a source of shame" but now they seemed to be pleased with it. Their "drag nights" were masquerades that offended every sane person, and that allowed these sick people "to cope with a way of being that otherwise would lead them to suicide." Homosexuals were mentally unstable and, most of the time, we read in this piece, suffered from schizophrenia or dementia praecox.

Their insanity, according to the article, was evident in the ways they dressed, danced, and behaved. Liverani was particularly interested in describing the dresses homosexuals wore, in order to highlight their effeminacy, and he lingered on physical details so as to emphasize the old age of these predators. He wanted his readers to understand how these men in drag were "lunatics, unable to perceive, in their performed delirium, the tragic falsehood of their acts and their words." Madame Royale, according to the article, spent the night sitting on a throne, surrounded by "damsels" who addressed him as "Queen" and "Her serene highness." "He" was wearing a wig, a tiara, a "lavish and grotesque" Renaissance dress made of silk and

⁹⁸ See "Il mondo sotterraneo degli 'uomini strani'," "Club Primavera' al Quadraro," "Anche a Catania gl'invertiti si organizzano."

⁹⁹ See "Il mondo sotterraneo degli 'uomini strani'," "Club Primavera' al Quadraro," "Anche a Catania gl'invertiti si organizzano."

satin, and “was adorned with jewels from his wrinkled and sagging neck to his gnarled fingers” (Figure 1.2.).



Figure 1.2. “Madam Royale” in drag. From Dario Liverani. “Impressionante crescendo di assassini di omosessuali. Lo scandalo di ‘Madame Royale’,” Cronaca Nera, December 14, 1946.

His valets wore night gowns unable to hide their virile calves, their gnarled knees, and their male hips that contrasted “melancholically” with their jewelry, the flowers in their hair, their painted lips, and their “feminine and provoking smiles.” The author of the article seemed to be disgusted by one man in particular. He was “an old *cinedo* wearing floating veils” through which were “tragically” visible “the hairy thinness of his naked arms,” and his bones, “irredeemably compromised by arthritis” (Figure 1.3.)¹⁰⁰



Figure 1.3. *Cinedo*. From Dario Liverani. “Impressionante crescendo di assassini di omosessuali. Lo scandalo di ‘Madame Royale’,” Cronaca Nera, December 14, 1946.

The final act of the night, a typical trope of sensationalist anti-homosexual articles of the time, was the orgy.¹⁰¹ The guests started dancing. Slowly “the ‘ladies’ loosen[ed] up in the arms of their ‘knights’.” The atmosphere, according to Liverani, became “saturated with shady

¹⁰⁰ *Cinedo* from Latin *Cinaedus*: a man who desires to be penetrated anally.

¹⁰¹ See also “‘Club Primavera’ al Quadraro.”

carnality.” There was a melancholic song playing and the lights were dimmed. In the room there were many pillows where men in drag could have intercourse with masculine companions. The pictures published in the article tried to draw attention to the presence of many men who looked rather masculine compared to those in drag. Those pictures seemed to be there to alarm readers about the frailty of everyone’s masculinity.



Figure 1.4. Man in drag. From Dario Liverani. “Impressionante crescendo di assassini di omosessuali. Lo scandalo di ‘Madame Royale’,” *Cronaca Nera*, December 14, 1946. The caption of this picture published in Liverani’s article reads: “‘Lolita’ is really an example – almost perfect – of androgynism. The smiling mouth, the suavely feminine face. The white ribbon through the fake nicely wavy hair: but all this is just semblance, because Lolita is a well known foreign male dancer.”

According to Liverani his article uncovered a “repugnant” and “tragic” world. A “world of perversions” inhabited by men in drag, who should have been under psychiatric treatment, and by other men who were there because of their “shady interests” and “unspeakable connivance.” There was an “interdependent link” that could no longer be ignored “between these acts against nature and the murders that, inevitably, followed.” Homosexuals were unfortunate individuals that “catalyzed murders.” There were many men who spent time with them to enjoy “an easy and comfortable life without work.” These men, who suffered from some form of “mental anomaly” according to the article, willingly satisfied the sexual needs of the “inverts,” until violent crimes happened. Homosexuality, according to Liverani, was “more of a social danger than an offense to morality.” Morality certainly had to be protected, but that was not the only goal: it was “much more important to kill the evil at the roots rather than getting rid of, or even worse, merely hide its consequences.” This article seemed to produce its effect. The police in Milan, as I noted before, paid particular attention to this

publication and intensified further, in the course of 1947, its activity to track down and arrest “sexual inverts and perverts.”¹⁰²

The nexus between sensationalist media and Italian police was not consistent. The Milanese Questura seemed to be more keen on following the leads suggested by the press, but in Rome, Bologna, and Catania the police were more resistant to sensationalist pieces.¹⁰³ They suggested to keep homosexuals under control while avoiding alarms. Also more “respectable” newspapers tended to play down the clamor raised by sensationalist ones. The Roman *Il Messaggero* and *Il Popolo*, for example, argued that certainly the war had led many youths astray and had caused a dangerous moral relaxation, but portraying the eternal city as a new Sodom – as many sensationalist newspapers were doing – was a mere fantasy.¹⁰⁴ *La Repubblica d’Italia*, feeling under attack, rejected the accusation of having fabricated a defamatory campaign against Rome, and of having concocted fantasies. The journalists of this newspaper maintained that the articles they had published about “filthy aspects of the Roman secret life” had been written “on the basis of reliable testimonies.”¹⁰⁵

A few weeks after *Il Messaggero* and *Il Popolo* published their articles, a major Italian tabloid, *Oggi*, decided to take a stand against all those sensationalist magazines that were turning Rome into the center of female white slave trade, sexual inversion, pornography, minors’ corruption, illegal prostitution, satanic occultism, and coke trafficking.¹⁰⁶ The author of the article, Gino De Sanctis, interviewing the Roman Questore Saverio Polito, tried to

¹⁰² Several documents of Questura and Prefecture mentioned the article as evidence of sexual and moral corruption in Milan. See note from the Ministry of Interior to the Prefect of Milan, Milano Pederastia, January 31, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Milano; note from the Prefecture of Milan to the Ministry of Interior, February 13, 1947, Milano-Pederastia, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Milano; note of the General management of public security to the Cabinet of the Ministry of Interior, February 23, 1947, Provvedimenti per combattere l’immoralità, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Milano. Moreover, for the intensification of the repressive activity in Milan see, for example, phonogram from the Questura of Milan to the Ministry of Interior, September 3, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 343, Prostituzione clandestina, Milano.

¹⁰³ See note 113.

¹⁰⁴ “Roma non è Sodoma come sostiene ‘la Repubblica’,” *Il Popolo*, March 30, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma. For this see also “Scandali, ‘riti,’ oscenità frutto di pura fantasia,” *Il Messaggero*, March 30, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma.

¹⁰⁵ “Scandali Romani,” *La Repubblica d’Italia*, April 1, 1947, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma. See also “Il mondo sotterraneo degli ‘uomini strani’.”

¹⁰⁶ Gino De Sanctis, “Per Roma Dieci in Condotta,” *Oggi*, May 13, 1947, 11, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma.

understand his take on morality and immorality in the capital.¹⁰⁷ Polito believed, as already declared to *Il Messaggero* one month before, that the uproar whipped up by some newspapers was not based on facts and that magazines, intent on turning Rome into Babylon, Sodom, and Gomorrah, were selling fantasies. Audience and journalists, according to Polito, were coming out of a long time of censorship and war. They were like pupils coming into a new, unknown world: the world of the free press. They wanted to try all the emotions. Moreover, there were clandestine magazines and books, coming from abroad, that with their pornographic, scandalous, and perverted stories were inspiring young journalists. Such publications, more than Roman real life, were behind risqué articles. And through these articles the chain began: the audience believed in these imaginative journalists, the magazines that stimulated the curiosity of the “virgin public” increased their sales, and thus, the directors of the magazines pushed their journalists to be even more creative.¹⁰⁸ The journalists were writing what people liked. But the audience was not able to realize that it was actually reading what it was “dictating” to the journalists. De Sanctis concluded by saying that the journalists working for sensationalist tabloids were “nothing more than a pressure gauge measuring the audience’s tension.”¹⁰⁹ Male-male sexuality, *Oggi* explained, had become one of the most favorite topics of third-rate tabloids.¹¹⁰ The magazine argued that certainly the “phenomenon of male corruption [had] to be taken into consideration with pity,” because it was “a real disease, unfortunately incurable.” But the police were already carrying out their necessary and “ruthless repression” in the “shadiest milieus” where there were men making a living “exploiting such human unhappiness, with blackmail, extortion, or worse.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ About media commodification see Bengry, “Profit (f)or the Public Good?”

¹⁰⁹ De Sanctis, “Per Roma Dieci in Condotta.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. For the interview of Polito in *Il Messaggero* see “Scandali, ‘riti,’ oscenità frutto di pura fantasia.”

The fabrication of news, De Sanctis argued, was not benefitting the reputation of Rome and failed to do justice to the hard work of the police.¹¹² They were doing their job, and they did not need media to fabricate alarmist and untrue news. Even if Italian Prefects and Questori often denied the veracity of the news published by sensationalist tabloids, they did not stop their regular vigilance activity.¹¹³ The authorities did not rule out that homosexuals existed, but they bucked the idea that there was a homosexual emergency.¹¹⁴ According to the Prefect of Catania, who made use of Fascist arguments against the publication of crime news, the more or less real accounts published by sensationalist magazines “even if done with the praiseworthy intention of correcting and preventing evil” were deeply affecting “the spirit of the youths,” in particular of all those boys and girls who, “lacking culture and a sound education,” learned through these publications how to satisfy “their vile instincts.” *Cronaca nera*, *Crimen*, *Scandalo* and other magazines of this kind were “a steady danger for the youths.” Yellow journalism was luring some young readers to committing the crimes it described: such grimy articles ended up being tempting rather than appalling. Sensationalist tabloids were making many sexual *deviations* become publicly known. They were educating

¹¹² De Sanctis, “Per Roma Dieci in Condotta.”

¹¹³ Note of the Prefect of Bologna to the Ministry of Interior, December 5, 1946, “Precisazione sull’articolo ‘Un ritrovamento di pervertiti’ scoperto dalla squadra del ‘Buon Costume’ apparso sul numero di ‘Rinascita’ del 2 dicembre 1946,” ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 340, Prostituzione clandestina, Bologna, Bologna-Pederasti; Prefecture of Catania to the Ministry of Interior, January 3, 1948, Catania-Organizzazione di invertiti sessuali. ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 341, Prostituzione clandestina, Catania, Catania-Invertiti. Also the reports sent from the Roman Questura to the Ministry of Interior show that the police were working fervently. In 1947 a relatively high number of “pederasts (or suspected to be) were held in custody for further verifications”: 42 in June, 123 in July, 24 in September, 56 in October, 72 in November, and 32 in December (see report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, July 3, 1947, report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, August 3, 1947, report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, October 1, 1947, report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, November 1, 1947, report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, December 1, 1947, report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, January 1, 1948, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma). In 1948 as the police continued its moralizing battle against every form of prostitution and juvenile corruption (see “Oltre settencento fermi operati dalla Polizia,” *Il Messaggero*, November 21, 1948; Ugo Martegani, “Gli amanti del Colosseo,” *Il Momento*, November 22, 1948; note of the Questore of Rome Saverio Polito to the head of the police, November 23, 1948; “Notti Romane,” *Momento Sera*, November 23, 1948, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma), the number of “pederasts” arrested seemed to decrease. The “pederasts held in custody” were 48 in January, 11 in March, 8 in April, 3 in May, and 1 in June (see report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, February 1, 1948, report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, April 1, 1948, report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, May 1, 1948, report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, June 1, 1948, report of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, July 1, 1948, Prostituzione clandestina, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 344, Prostituzione clandestina, Roma).

¹¹⁴ Note of the Prefect of Bologna to the Ministry of Interior, February 6, 1948, Bologna: Invertiti sessuali, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 340, Prostituzione clandestina, Bologna, Bologna-Pederasti. See also Note of the Prefecture of Bologna to the Ministry of Interior, February 16, 1948, Segnalazioni del periodico *Scandalo*, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 340, Prostituzione clandestina, Bologna.

their audience on *perversions*, and were teaching their homosexual readers strategies to meet other “pederasts” and avoid police round-up actions.¹¹⁵ Popular media enticed readers with sex while presenting themselves as defenders of family values. They displayed their adherence to some forms of “traditional” morality, and tried to unite their readership against all those individuals defying respectability, but they also satisfied public curiosity by describing transgressions that some readers might have found alluring rather than repulsive. As long as normative and – above all – non-normative sex continued to sell, sensationalist journalists were happy to exploit it even if that meant to defame an entire group of people indiscriminately.¹¹⁶

In the first years of the republic the loud voices of the tabloids counterbalanced the suggestions made by some high officials of the Italian police to keep being silent about same-sex desires and behaviors. And those voices also offset the instrumental silences that many homosexuals were trying to keep about themselves and their milieus. In a society that regarded homosexuals as immoral corruptors, living “in the closet” was for many men the only way to live their lives to the fullest. Loud voices and silences were part of the discursive system of power that characterized post-war Italy. By understanding what is concealed and what is said, examining the different ways in which people do not say something, by looking at how those who can and those who cannot speak are distributed, and by analyzing what kind of discourses are authorized or what forms of discretion are required, we can come to realize how silences are actually statements reverberating on discourses and thus on power structures. Not saying something can be a form of repression and a form of resistance. Silence – what we decline to say, what is forbidden to name, and the discretion required between different speakers (or willingly adopted by them) – is not absence of power, it is one of its manifold

¹¹⁵ Prefecture of Catania to the Ministry of Interior, January 3, 1948, Catania-Organizzazione di invertiti sessuali. ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, AG, b. 341, Prostituzione clandestina, Catania, Catania-Invertiti.

¹¹⁶ For this see Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life and the British Popular Press, 1918-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13-14.

expressions. In the new democratic regime, like under Mussolini, secrets, lies, silences, coded languages, and concealed places were for homosexuals powerful technologies that allowed them to live their own lives.¹¹⁷

Escaping Clear-cut Categorizations

John Horne Burns' *The Gallery* was published in the US in 1947 with considerable critical acclaim. Burns, child of a Catholic upper-middle-class New England family, graduated from Harvard, and taught English at a boys' boarding school, before serving in the Army in Italy. Never near the front lines, he spent his time censoring letters from the Italian prisoners.¹¹⁸ Burns began writing his novel on June 18, 1945. He knew its title, its themes, and its narrative structure. As he wrote in one of several letters sent to his American friend, the former student David MacMackin, *The Gallery* "would focus on a single place: the *Galleria Umberto I*" and "it would contain another, separate gallery – a gallery of characters passing through it."¹¹⁹ His experiences in Naples, including those within several homosexual communities he was part of, became the raw material of his novel. The Galleria Umberto I was an indoor arcade full of shops selling stolen goods, black market restaurants, and low bars primarily catering to prostitutes, pimps, mobsters, and thieves. Here the American soldiers went to sell US government clothing, supplies and food, and trade stolen objects for sex with the "liberated" Italians.¹²⁰

In *The Gallery* this American writer presented, according to his biographer David Margolick, "an unflinching and unsanitized account of the conduct of American soldiers in

¹¹⁷ For the discursive power of silence see: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 27; Robin Patric Clair, *Organizing Silence. A World of Possibilities* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998); Harry G. Cocks, *Nameless Offenses. Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris&Co, 2003), 5, 10; Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room. Silence and Denial in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Steven L. Bindeman, "Foucault on Silence as Discourse," *Silence in Philosophy, Literature, and Art*, Steven L. Bindeman ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2017): 143-146.

¹¹⁸ For the life of John Horne Burns see David Margolick, *Dreadful. The short life and gay times of John Horne Burns* (New York: Other Press, 2013).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹²⁰ Paul Fussell, "Introduction," in John Horne Burns, *The Gallery* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2004), viii.

occupied Naples in 1944 and 1945.” He documented their contempt for the locals. Like Malaparte, he recounted the questionable behavior of Americans who took advantage of local misery through black market and prostitution.¹²¹ Furthermore, Burns paid particular attention to juvenile misery. In his book he explained that the Galleria “was always full of Neapolitan children – children begging, children selling, children looking, children shuffling barefoot ... children pimping.”¹²² For the American writer this was the real tragedy. This was a generation “born and passing their formative years under a rain of bombs, keeping alive by catering to the desires of soldiers.”¹²³ Also in this novel homosexuality emerges as an important theme. This is so even though homosexuals, unlike the ones imagined by Malaparte, are not child molesters, Marxist corruptors, or “plague-spreaders.” Burns presented a diverse gallery in which several homosexual characters appeared as proud, lonely, arrogant, unpleasant, sensitive, ironic, offensive, lovable, feminine, and masculine.¹²⁴

The novel is divided into nine *portraits* – dedicated to seven American soldiers and two Italian women – and eight *promenades* – the personal reflections of the narrator.¹²⁵ In the following pages I will focus my attention on how male-male sexualities emerges in *The Gallery* through the portrait dedicated to Momma, the female proprietor of a men-only bar situated in the Galleria. This place is presented as a sort of speakeasy, as an open secret tolerated by the authorities as long as its regular clients were able to enjoy their time there discreetly. Momma opened the bar right after the arrival of the Allies. There hung out homosexual soldiers who, according to Momma, were completely different from “other” men. They “had an air of being tremendously wise,” and they understood one another in spite of coming from different parts of the world. Momma admired their “refinement of manner.” Their conversations were “flashing, bitter, and lucid” and she loved how more than other men

¹²¹ Margolick, *Dreadful*, 5 and John Horne Burns, *The Gallery* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1947), 259, 265-266.

¹²² Burns, *Gallery*, 212.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹²⁴ Margolick, *Dreadful*, 6.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 182-183. For the novel see also Gatt-Rutter, “Liberation and Literature,” 253-255.

they laughed together. To her eyes they were “extraordinarily handsome, but not as other men were handsome.” She loved the “acuteness in their eyes” and the “predatory richness of the mouth as though they’d bitten into a pomegranate.” Momma, Burns underlines, “dreamed that she was queen of some gay exclusive club.”¹²⁶ She loved her soldiers because they were gentle. She wanted her place to be “a clean bar where people could gather with other congenial people.” Her patrons “had something that other groups hadn’t. Momma’s boys had an awareness of having been born alone and sequestered from other men by some deep difference. For this she loved them.”¹²⁷

“Momma” was not a bar for foreigners only: here hung out also some Italians who sat around mimicking one another, sniggering, and checking out the Allied soldiers.¹²⁸ Burns’ portraits of these men countervail simplistic representations of homosexuals sketched by Malaparte and sensationalist magazines. Among them was Armando, who worked in a dry goods store. He had with him a shepherd dog that was his lure for introduction to many people. Armando “had tight curls like a Greek statue’s, a long brown face, and an air of distinction learned from the films.”¹²⁹ It is fascinating how both Burns and Malaparte described in their books the Italian homosexuals as beautiful Greek statues. In this way they seemed to draw connections between modern homosexuality and ancient pederasty, and underline how the Greek tradition seemed still to permeate the modern Magna Graecia. Another Italian patron at Momma’s was Vittorio, “with the blue eyes of a doll and gorgeous clothes.” He worked as a typist. He was arrogant and bitter. He was the leader of the Italians, and he had clear plans about the future: he was going to work until he was thirty and then he would “marry a *contessa* and retire to her villa at Amalfi.”¹³⁰ There also was Enzo who had been a *carabiniere* before the liberation and who was now living a rather mundane life thanks

¹²⁶ Burns, *Gallery*, 130.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

to his clients. He strolled the town in a t-shirt, inviting his friends to coffee in the afternoon.¹³¹ There was also Giulio “a tiny *sergente maggiore* of the Italian Army.” He always arrived with the other Italians, but he kept a distance from the others.¹³² Usually the last Italian to arrive was Gianni, a *conte*, who lived in a spacious apartment in the Vomero and who was “dying of love” for an English soldier.¹³³ However, the Italians were often perceived like vultures hovering above their prey before lunging at them. After all most of them were there to find clients to squeeze. Thus, at Momma’s there were also moments of tension between them and the Allied soldiers as a British sergeant made rather clear screaming at Enzo:

You go straight to hell! ... Why do you come here at all, you sordid little tramps in your dirty old finery? Do you think we feel sorry for you? Go on Via Roma and peddle your stuff and stop trying to act like trade ... We see through you, two-shilling belles. All of you get out, do you hear? Nobody here wants anything you’ve got. The Allies are quite self-sufficient, thank you. We did alright before Naples fell ... Why the nerve of you wop queans! Glamor?! Why you’ve all got as much allure as Gracie Fields in drag ... Go find some drunken Yank along the port ... But get the hell out of here!¹³⁴

One essential aspect Burns tried to underline in his work was the complex relationship between femininities, masculinities, and same-sex behaviors and desires that emerged at “Momma’s.” In *The Gallery* there is an important scene in which such complexity emerges powerfully. The arrival of a group of soldiers and sailors in the bar alarms Momma: “From the way they shot around their half-closed eyes she knew that this wasn’t the place for them. They had an easiness and a superiority about them as though they were looking for trouble with infinite condescension.” Her sixth sense was telling Momma that “there was trouble brewing.”¹³⁵ But some of the Italians, more than scared, seemed to be particularly attracted by the four newcomers and “paddled” towards them. The Italians were “cajoling and tender and satiric and gay.” They lit “cigarettes for the parachutists and the sailors, and took some

¹³¹ Ibid., 139.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 140. Gracie Fields was a British actress who worked during World War II for the Entertainments National Service Association to provide entertainment for the British Armed Forces. In the Italian version of the book the sentence “Why you’ve all got as much allure as Gracie Fields in drag...” is translated as “*Avete garbo quanto un elefante che balla su un filo...*” (“You have as much grace as an elephant dancing on a cord”).

¹³⁵ Ibid., 142.

themselves.” At that point the conversation among them “became a swirling ballet of hands and light and rippling voices and the thickened accents of the sailors and the parachutists.” One of the newcomers told Vittorio: “Jesus, baby, those bedroom eyes!” and one of the sailors added: “I hateya and I loveya, ya beast.” And one of the British sergeants stated: “Coo, it teases me right out of my mind So simple and complex. Masculine and feminine. All gradations and all degrees and nuances.”¹³⁶ Momma looking at that scene realized that she was not going to have any trouble from the parachutists and the sailors. At this point in the chapter Burns uses Momma to complicate clear-cut sexual and gender divisions, and distance himself from oversimplifications. Looking at the masculine newcomers and at the Italians who “were lazily drinking and mooing at one another” Momma realizes that thinking in terms of “good” versus “bad” was not productive, and she comes to the conclusion that “the older she got and the more she saw, the less clear cut boundaries became to her.” Momma

could only conclude that these boys who drank at her bar were exceptional human beings. The masculine and the feminine weren’t nicely divided in Momma’s mind as they are to a biologist. They overlapped and blurred in life. This trait was what kept life and Momma’s bar from being black and white. If everything were so clear cut, there’d be nothing to learn after the age of six and arithmetic.¹³⁷

Momma’s bar is presented as a queer space inhabited by the most diverse men who had a chance of expressing here “a desire disapproved of by society.”¹³⁸ Through Momma’s bar Burns tries to make intelligible a world that many of his readers would not acknowledge or understand, but he also tries to present a space that many of his homosexual readers were longing for. Momma’s was a secret place where a desirable male-male sexual and affective community became possible.¹³⁹

The Gallery was on the radar of Italian literary critics since its publication in the US. In 1947, the Americanist Emilio Cecchi described the novel as bizarre, and argued, without

¹³⁶ Ibid., 143.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 144-145.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 150.

¹³⁹ Margolick, *Dreadful*, 186.

explaining his judgment further, that it indulged too much in risqué and indecent particulars. At the same time, he thought that an Italian publisher should take up the book and have it translated because Burns showed an unusual sensitivity in understanding Italy.¹⁴⁰ The publishing house Garzanti rose to Cecchi's suggestion and in 1948 – one year before *La Pelle* – released the book in Italian with the title *La Galleria*. The critics praised the book's bravery but, as their American counterparts, completely ignored “Momma.”¹⁴¹

But did Momma actually exist? For decades after the publication this question remained unexamined. According to Margolick, “it seems astonishing that Burns could have invented a place so vivid, richly detailed, and persuasive.” But no one, besides Burns, ever described Momma, before or since. And it is puzzling that Momma was never mentioned in Burns' letters to MacMackin, letters in which he chronicled his life in Naples.¹⁴² Margolick tends to believe that Burns invented Momma as a way to proclaim who he was, defend his identity and his friends, and imagine a space of acceptance and understanding. Maybe Momma was an exaggeration of what might just have been a cruising area inside the Galleria.¹⁴³ And maybe the creation of such an ideal place was some kind of reaction to the ban imposed by the Allies at the beginning of 1945. In one of his letters to MacMackin, Burns explains that the homosexual activity in Naples had “reached such proportions that all bars have been put off limits.”¹⁴⁴ But certainly Momma was for many Italian homosexuals, as for other homosexuals all over the world who had a chance to read Burns' novel, an inspiration, a hope, a way to understand themselves, and to think about themselves as men able to live their own sexualities not as “perverts,” “inverts,” or “molesters,” but as humans able to desire and love. *The Gallery* suggested that there was no script, there was not a right or a wrong

¹⁴⁰ See Emilio Cecchi, “‘Galleria’ di J.H. Burns,” in John Horne Burns, *La Galleria. Un Americano a Napoli* (Milano: Baldini&Castoldi, 1992), 369-371.

¹⁴¹ Margolick, *Dreadful*, 236. Also Paul Fussel in his short introduction to the book, in a 2004 edition, completely ignore Momma and Burns' sexuality. See Fussel, “Introduction,” vi-xi.

¹⁴² Margolick, *Dreadful*, 187-188.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁴⁴ To David Alison MacMackin, Hotel Algonquin, New York, New York. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC (circa January 24-February 20, 1945), HGARC.

masculinity to perform. Even if Momma may not have existed, her bar became a literary space where readers could wander and experience a diverse homosexual space. For many men Momma's bar could be a transformative experience. They could see how they were not broken human beings and they could hope to find a place to be who they were. If Malaparte condemned the effeminate and contagious "Narcissuses," Burns offered to his readers a variety of possibilities and showed how masculinity and homosexuality were not irreconcilable opposites.

The tone of the letters Burns sent from Naples in 1944-1945 to MacMackin is different from the one characterizing the book. In *The Gallery* Burns was free to narrate his stories without fearing military censorship, whereas in his letters he needed to use metaphors. His work as censor certainly helped him find the most effective way to communicate with his friend, but his letters appear far more distancing than the captivating prose of his book. In these letters Burns used the word "dreadfuls" to talk about homosexuals, presented a more feminized homosexuality, compared to the one emerging in his book, and often referred to men having sex with men through religious allusions, maybe ironically hinting at the same-sex inclination of some Catholic priests he had met.¹⁴⁵ Burns, for example, called MacMackin "the Abbess" and in one of his first letters he described one of his casual lovers as "the novice" recounting how they experienced "holy ecstasy" in the youth's "cell."¹⁴⁶ In his letters Burns chronicled the presence of many men, such as Enzo – one of his lovers – who survived in Naples selling "it for 200 lire to *simpatici* (pleasant) dreadfuls,"¹⁴⁷ and suggested that same-sex sex in Italy had not changed much in the last century. Referring, for example, to the

¹⁴⁵ See v-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 2d Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, August 15, 1944, PAMB; v-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, November 28, 1944, PAMB; handwritten V-mail to Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, APO 512 PM NYC, January 15, 1945, PAMB. As the biographer David Margolick explains, it is not clear why Burns used the word "dreadful." Maybe Burns was inspired by Shelley's verse in *Julian and Maddalo*: "deeds too dreadful for a name." See Margolick, *Dreadful*, 58.

¹⁴⁶ V-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 2d Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, August 11, 1944, PAMB.

¹⁴⁷ V-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 2d Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, September 14, 1944, PAMB.

presumed sexual forays of Lord Byron while in Italy, he explained in a campy tone that “[t]he Italian dreadfuls still preserve the traditions of what Bessie Byron did in Italy on her way to Greece.”¹⁴⁸ The “dreadfuls” spent nights together in small circles or cruising the streets.¹⁴⁹ Burns was active on the “dreadful” scene, and in September 1944 he contracted syphilis and had to be hospitalized, as he recounts in one of his letters:

Since the Abbess has been chosen to write our biography, we see no reason why we shouldn't give her the reasons for our sequestration, which have been hushed as effectively as the pregnancy of a nun. It seems that the dreadful life here isn't as free of consequence as it is under the gonfalon of the Statue of Liberty, and that in the course of our Italian brwaugh [sic] some of the sisterhood infected us with a spirochete or two. In due time these produced their fruit on our so far immaculate body and we went screaming to the dispensary to show various medical officers our now maculate skin.

Burns explained to his friend that the treatment for syphilis was drastic. Still, in only eight days, thanks to penicillin, he was feeling well again. The only backlash was his forced chastity: no adventures “for the next ninety days till our blood [went] negative again”. Burns hinted at his hospitalization also in a letter to his family, but he avoided any mention of his disease.¹⁵⁰

The letters he sent to his mother and father were often about his cultural exploration in Naples, but in his correspondence he portrayed also the “less conventional” sexual life of the Allied soldiers: “By 2300 everybody abroad is drunk, and they tear around in a last minute search for someone to sleep with – sex, color, or nationality being irrelevant.”¹⁵¹ Moreover, in his letters to his parents, Burns did not hide completely his male *friendships* even if he was

¹⁴⁸ See V-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 2d Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, August 15, 1944, PAMB.

¹⁴⁹ See V-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, November 28, 1944, PAMB; V-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 1 Lt. John Horne Burns 01 003 087, APO 512 PM NYC, March 23, 1945, PAMB; V-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Hotel Algonquin, New York, New York. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC (circa January 24-February 20, 1945), PAMB; V-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 1 Lt. John Horne Burns 01 003 087, APO 512 PM NYC, May 23, 1945, PAMB.

¹⁵⁰ V-mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 2d Lt John Horne Burns O1003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, September 12, 1944, PAMB. This expression “brwaugh” was used by Burns as an all-purpose exclamation, connoting excitement, revulsion, pleasure, resignation, or surprise. But it was also used to indicate assorted homosexual activities (Margolick, *Dreadful*, 58). For an example of a letter sent to his family about his hospitalization see V-mail to Joseph L Burns Esq, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 2 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, September 10, 1944, PAMB.

¹⁵¹ Handwritten V-mail to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 2d Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, August 26, 1944, PAMB.

never explicit about the nature of these liaisons. Yet in his letters Burns also mentioned women, at times suggesting flirts and infatuations.¹⁵²

In his letters to MacMackin women were no topic. Burns, once he had moved to Florence in 1945, continued to hang out with men even if his new home was less lively than Naples: “There is dreadfulness here but no brwaugh Promiscuity isn’t the thing here because the Florentines are satisfying, soothing, and brilliant.”¹⁵³ The situation in Italy was improving therefore “the whoring with the Allies ... could only be the fruit of economic and moral despair.” In Florence there was “none of the ‘*Wanna blowjob, Joe?*’ of Naples.” People were more subtle and men could find “a rich countess with a villa in Fiesole” to take care of them or, “for those of the opposite taste,” it was “more than easy to maintain a young *carabiniere* or *reduce*.” Also Florence, even if cleaner and more elegant than Naples, was some kind of “*Sodoma e Gomorra*.”¹⁵⁴

The Gallery and Burns’ letters to the US are two completely different genres. *The Gallery* is a publication written for a wide audience, whereas Burns’ letters were a way to communicate, in spite of censorship, with the people he loved and with his friends. The letters

¹⁵² See v-mail to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 2d Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, August 4, 1944, PAMB; v-mail to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 2 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, October 18, 1944, PAMB; v-mail to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 2 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, October 21, 1944, PAMB; letter to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts, typed onto a V-mail form. From 2 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, October 31, 1944, PAMB; letter to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 2 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, November 1, 1944, PAMB; handwritten V-mail to Joseph L Burns Esq, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 2 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, November 6, 1944, PAMB; handwritten letter to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, CPI AFHQ, APO 512 PM NYC, November 20, 1944, PAMB; handwritten V-mail to Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, APO 512 PM NYC, January 8, 1945, PAMB; handwritten letter to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, APO 512 PM NYC, January 31, 1945, PAMB; V-mail to Cathleen Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, PWCD APO 512 PM NYC, March 3, 1945, PAMB; v-mail to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, PWCD APO 512 PM NYC, March 9, 1945, PAMB; v-mail to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, PWCD APO 512 PM NYC, May 24, 1945, PAMB; handwritten v-mail to Mrs Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, PWCD APO 512 PM NYC, July 7, 1945, PAMB; v-mail to Joseph L Burns, 89 Gainsboro Street, Boston (15), Massachusetts. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01003087, PWCD APO 512 PM NYC, July 29, 1945, PAMB.

¹⁵³ Handwritten V-Mail to David Alison MacMackin, Trailsend, Canton, Connecticut. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01 003 087, PWCD APO 512 PM NYC, July 9, 1945, PAMB.

¹⁵⁴ V-Mail to Lt Holger E. Hagen 01 003 400, Hq USFET (Main), Information Control Div, APO 757, U S Army. From 1 Lt John Horne Burns 01 003 087, Hq University Training, APO 49, September 2, 1945, PAMB.

are sassy, playful, campy, and ironic. Burns liked to joke with his friends about homosexuality as effeminacy, he sent ambivalent signals to his family, and he sarcastically called men like him “dreadful.” Burns’ letters are precious glimpses into private moments of same-sex sex life in 1940s Italy that are hard to recover otherwise. They allow us to see, despite the limits imposed by self-censorship, how there were male-male milieus in 1944-1945 Italy made of cruising, parties, prostitution, but also of feelings, emotions, friendships, and relationships. Burns shows how male prostitution was not just violence, hatred, blackmail, and death. He demonstrates how it could also be a pleasant, exciting, and emotional experience. Unlike Malaparte and sensationalist journalists, who pathologized homosexuals, Burns invited the readers of his book to experience positive affects toward “Momma’s men,” but hopefully he also urged them to consider how men-desiring-and-loving-other-men could not be turned into a mono-dimensional category. Burns presented the men hanging out at Momma’s as complex human beings escaping clear-cut categorizations, and highlighted how through silences and secrets homosexuals were able to resist, live, and find each other.

Conclusion

Yellow journalism and the publication of books such as *La Pelle* and *The Gallery* made the Italian homosexuals visible. The crimes committed in the homosexual milieus, described by tabloids and newspapers in rather defamatory tones, symbolized the dangers of sexual deviance. Homosexuals, reducing the distance between masculine and feminine, were menacing “traditional” gender dynamics and gender hierarchies.¹⁵⁵ Homosexuals, as well as young male prostitutes, represented the dangerous “others.” They were “enemies” of the post-Fascist Italians in the making. The descriptions of the “sex deviates” and of their

¹⁵⁵ Bellassai, *L'invenzione della virilità*, 98. The fact that the documents related to male homosexuality were filed by the Italian police under the rubric “Female Prostitution” is certainly indicative of how male-male sexuality was conceptualized by the Italian state.

transgressions became a way to loosely define “normalcy.” The “*invertiti*” were *non-men*, *counter-models*, *queer countertypes*, and *anti-citizens* that “normal” men needed in order to be sure that their virility was safe.¹⁵⁶

Italian media avoided representing homosexuals as “ordinary” individuals. However, reading the diary of Piero Santi, a homosexual man living in Florence in the 1940s, it is possible to perceive exactly such ordinariness. He certainly talks about patronizing hustlers and describes furtive encounters with young men in cinemas, but he also talks about friendship, evenings out, and love: “I won’t ever be able to describe the sweetness I feel when I see Mario arriving, at five, walking through the columns of the Uffizi and then walking with him along the streets in autumn. I think that God does not despise me, if he gives me the possibility of having such friends.”¹⁵⁷ The ordinariness of homosexuality was concealed by media because it risked normalizing what had to remain abnormal. Moreover, many journalists and writers did not talk about the potential normalcy of homosexuality because they were not even able to conceive the possibility that “men like that” could love and have significant relationships like any other “normal” individual.

In my research, with the exception of *The Gallery*, I was not able to find positive representations of homosexuals and homosexuality in the second half of the 1940s. Post-fascist Italy did not seem to be more welcoming than Mussolini’s regime. The anti-homosexuality characterizing the Fascist *ventennio* did not disappear after the end of World War II. However, unlike in previous times when homosexuality was usually concealed through a carefully euphemistic language, in post-1945 Italy homosexuality and homosexuals were openly talked about in derogatory terms. Such negative presence arguably turned “sexual deviance” and “sexual deviants” into new concerns for the Italian general public.

¹⁵⁶ See Dell’Agnese and Ruspini, “Introduction,” xx, and Bracco, “Belli e fragili,” 65-78.

¹⁵⁷ Piero Santi, *La sfida dei giorni, Diario 1943-1946/1957-1968* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1968), 62. For his homosexual experiences see also *Ibid.*, 12-16, 30-33, 42-44, 51, 62-63, 72, 96, 99-103, 115-118, 129-131. For Piero Santi see also Francesco Gnerre, *L’eroe negato. Omosessualità e letteratura nel Novecento italiano* (Milano: Baldini&Castoldi, 2000), 189-212.

The 1940s ended with *La Pelle*'s severe condemnation of homosexuality and with the expulsion of Pasolini from the Communist Party for moral indignity.¹⁵⁸ Indeed after the elections of 1948, which essentially sanctioned the hegemony of the *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy, DC) until the 1990s, the Italian Catholics began their moralization battle, and homosexuals were among the first casualties of this "war." As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, at the end of World War II, Roman homosexuals were celebrating their freedom, but already in the mid-1950s, when *Ragazzi di vita* was set, they were no longer happily strolling along the Tiber. Something had changed.¹⁵⁹

As we will see in the next chapter the policing of sexual and gender non-conformity, for both national and international reasons, intensified in the early 1950s. In 1952 the head of the Italian police issued a newsletter to coordinate the anti-homosexual activities of all Questure and Prefetture. The police stations, which had been following their own strategies to monitor "sexual deviants" in their local areas, were now invited to participate in a national action to contain the alleged homosexual emergency. The more repressive attitude of the Italian state forced homosexuals to be more attentive in their everyday life, but it did not prevent them from establishing connections, nurturing relationships, talking about themselves, and spawning initiatives that would support the emergence of new ways of understanding and conceptualizing their homosexual "selves." The actions carried out by repressive technologies of power do not have to obscure the homosexual counter-resistance. Their parties, their furtive encounters, their stolen kisses, and their fast sex in movie theaters and urinals were some of the strategies they adopted to resist their opponents.¹⁶⁰ At the same time the tabloids, describing such "filthiness," were not only inadvertently enthralling some of their readers, but

¹⁵⁸ "Espulso dal PCI il poeta Pasolini," *l'Unità*, October 29, 1949. See also Sandro Bellassai, *La morale comunista. Pubblico e privato nella rappresentazione del PCI (1947-1956)* (Roma: Carocci Editore, 2000), 206.

¹⁵⁹ Also historians of modern Germany talking about the postwar years underline that the end of the war brought a great incidence of indiscriminate sexual activities for both heterosexual and homosexual individuals. Postwar legal confusion and administrative chaos allowed many German men and women to live a time of exhilarating freedom which was bridled by the re-emergence of economic and political stability in 1948-1949. See Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 66, 69, 72, 88-89; Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 329; Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality in West Germany*, 22-25, 28.

¹⁶⁰ See for example, Romano, *Il mio nome è Lucy*, 45-55.

they were also – perhaps above all – nurturing the discursive existence of the *deviants* and of the *perverted* practices they were trying to condemn. Paraphrasing Erving Goffman, we might say that the obsession with normalcy bred deviations.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon&Schuster Inc., 1986), 129.

Chapter 2

Homosexuals in 1950s Italy Between Repression and Resistance

We used to gather for our sex games at a friend's house, a small out-of-the-way house, the garden enclosed by a rock wall, discreet and – we thought – safe. Unfortunately, on Sunday afternoon July 19, 1953 ... at around 4 pm, a police commissioner from Vicenza and three agents burst into the house ... while around ten people were waiting for friends. Fortunately all of them still had their clothes on while dancing Nothing serious, then, nor compromising The police commissioner, who did not have any documentation authorizing the illegal intrusion, left with his officers quietly. The day before, I had gone to Venice to be present at the traditional “Redeemer's night” that summons there many men from our world. Then, before dawn, on the Lido, I met a young Southern itinerant merchant, a handsome dark, very attractive and sexually exceptional man ... he came with me to a small hotel on the Lido, where he had been other times without troubles, and we made love there until noon. He was happy with me paying for the room and accepted a good breakfast at Noemi's. In the evening, when I came back, I found one of my friends at the station, alarmed because of the afternoon surprise. The following day I talked to the public prosecutor ... with whom I am close, and he assured me that the intrusion was completely illegal, a real violation of domicile, but suggested not to forget what had happened ... in order to avoid future scandals But the following Sunday *Il Gazzettino* ... published in the local news a short article that wanted to be ironic and harmless: there were no names, of course, but people could imagine This raised some curiosity and spread fear and discouragement among many of the group and the host closed his house to other gatherings. But recently we have gotten together, only at night, after dark, and at the gate there is one man on guard who impedes the entrance to unknown people who are not accompanied by one of us.¹

On October 12, 1953, this letter was sent to the homophile activist Bernadino del Boca di Villaregia by an Italian homosexual man living in Bassano del Grappa.² The correspondent had been invited by del Boca to help him collect names of “friends” potentially interested in becoming members of an Italian homophile organization. This letter is an extremely fascinating document referring to several actors in this chapter (homosexuals, hustlers, police, and press), and showing how 1950s sexual policing did not prevent homosexual men from

¹ Letter of G.G. to Del Boca, October 12, 1953, FSP, AFSP, b. 469.

² Bernardino del Boca di Villaregia (e di Tegerone), member of the Italian diplomatic service and author of the homosexual novel, *La lunga notte di Singapore* (1952), in the 1950s was in close contact with the editor of the French section of *Der Kreis* Charles Welti – pseudonym of Eugen Laubacher. In his letters he talked about his personal life, but also about his projects of creating an Italian homophile organization and an Italian homophile magazine. Both projects failed. See letters in SAZ, Ar. 36.38.10, NW, 1.5.20; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.3.; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.4.; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.5.

living a life of sex and intimacy.³ Indeed, as G.G. underscored, in his small town in the Veneto it was possible to procure “excellent acquaintances, above all youths from the surrounding areas, discreet, healthy in mind and body, simple, direct, and good lovers.” G.G.’s letter is also significant because it shows the multidirectional character of power: 1) the technologies of control (police and media) trying to keep under surveillance deviant bodies and deviant sexualities; 2) the homosexuals offering strong resistance to such technologies in order to satisfy their sexual and emotional needs; and 3) the silent support of nonconforming technologies of repression (the complaisant public prosecutor). G.G.’s letter shows how sexual needs and desires, on one side, and repressive measures, on the other, were opposing forces operating in the same system at the same time. This chapter focuses precisely on this complex web of power relations that over the course of the 1950s kept discursively producing and reproducing homosexuality as a vice, a disease, a psycho-physical disorder, a threat to manliness, and also as an identity that some people discovered and decided to embrace. In the following pages I look at the anti-homosexual discourses produced by magazines and newspapers – particularly focused on fears of juvenile sexual “deviance,” at the repressive activities carried out by the police, and at the contextual emergence of discourses in defense of homosexual men.⁴ I will argue that the circulation of polyvalent discourses made homosexuals more visible, more intelligible, more frightening but also more endearing. If some people kept rejecting such a “despicable figure,” some others recognized themselves in it. This chapter emphasizes that power, rather than being a repressive, negative and unidirectional force exercised against a group of individuals, is an ubiquitous complex network of actions and counteractions, repression and resistance. As Foucault maintained in 1979 in an interview, what makes power accepted is “the fact that it does not only weigh on

³ For a few examples of homosexual experiences in 1950s Italy see Andrea Pini, *Quando eravamo froci. Gli omosessuali nell'Italia di una volta* (Rome: Il saggiatore, 2011), 169-170, 258-259, 315.

⁴ Moral panic and requests of action against the homosexual menace in the media were not an Italian feature only. See for example, Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 180-194.

us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.”⁵ Power-knowledge shapes behaviors and resistance, and constitutes ideological apparatuses that, contrasting and withstanding the dominant “ideology,” favor the emergence of new identities and communities.⁶

The 1950s in Italy – dynamic years of political, economic, social, and cultural reconstruction – seemed to be at first glance overwhelmingly conservative from a sexual point of view.⁷ In the Cold War West sexual and political deviance appeared linked, and marriage was promoted as an anti-communist political duty.⁸ Non-normative and non-marital sex were not only interpreted as a threat to morality; they could also “imperil reproductive citizenship and undercut the strength of the nation.”⁹ Italy was no exception: Catholicism, Americanism,

⁵ Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 119.

⁶ For an analysis of power, ideology and ideological state apparatuses according to Louis Althusser see “Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d’État. (Notes pour une recherche),” *La Pensée*, 151 (1970): 67-125.

⁷ Sandro Bellassai, *La legge del desiderio. Il progetto Merlin e l’Italia degli anni Cinquanta* (Roma: Carocci, 2006), 40, 51. See also Vittorio Goresio, “Durante e dopo il boom: sesso, matrimonio, famiglia,” *I problemi di Ulisse* 15, no. 91 (1981): 33-40. For post-war sexual conservatism see, for example, Elanie Tyler May, *Homeward Bound. American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); John D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America,” in *Passion and Power. Sexuality in History*, Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 226-240; Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood. Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley-CA: University of California Press, 1993); Robert G. Moeller, “The ‘Remasculinization’ of Germany in the 1950s: Introduction,” *Signs*, 1 (1998): 101-106; Marcus Collins, *Modern Love. An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, Atlantic Books, 2003); Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution. English Women, Sex, and Contraception, 1800-1975* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004); Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism. Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London. Perils And Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 190-192, 237-239; Julian Jackson, *Living in Arcadia. Homosexuality, Politics and Morality in France from the Liberation to AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 41-53, 113-114; Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth-Century Berlin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe. A Twentieth-Century History*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 96-106; Clayton Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality in West Germany. Between Persecution and Freedom, 1945-1969* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9-11; 25-28; 52-56; 103-105; 211; Jennifer V. Evans, *Life Among the Ruins. Cityscape and Sexuality in Cold War Berlin* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁸ See, for example, Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming out. Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 159, 163; D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace,” 227-240; Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire. The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 257-270; Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood. Gender And the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Neil Miller, *Sex Crime Panic. A Journey to the Paranoid Heart of the 1950s* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2002); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare. The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Douglas M. Charles, *Hoover’s War on Gays. Exposing the FBI’s “Sex Deviates” Program* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015).

⁹ Jennifer Evans, “The Long 1950s as Radical In-Between: The Photography of Herbert Tobias,” in *Queer 1950s. Rethinking Sexuality in Postwar Years*, Heike Bauer and Matt Cook eds. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 13.

and anti-Communism made a “formidable base for the ruling ideology.”¹⁰ However, conservative moralism, advocating for the so-called defense of family, youth, and traditional gender roles, was not a monopoly of the Catholic *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy, DC). The *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party, PCI), the most important Italian party together with the DC after 1945, also presented itself as conservative in terms of gender and sexuality. The Italian Catholics were particularly venomous in their attacks against the Partito Comunista. They accused the PCI of false moralism and presented the “Bolsheviks” as orgiastic rapists, whereas the Italian Communists accused the Christian Democrats, and the Minister of Interior Mario Scelba in particular, of using the police to forcefully evangelize the Italian population. The PCI underlined that the moralization of the Italians was a commendable intention but it did not have to be carried out by *Questori* through threats, fines, and denunciations.¹¹ Furthermore, the Italian Communists aimed their efforts at cultivating a transparent and virtuous image of themselves; they did not want to alienate Catholics or the sensitivities they espoused. They contrasted the moral proletariat with the immoral bourgeoisie and presented the PCI as the real guardian of the traditional family. The Communist man was represented as a hypermasculine breadwinner, whereas the Communist woman was portrayed as a good mother, a good wife, and a conscientious worker. Christian Democrats and Communists, enemies on every level, opposed homosexuality and shared a traditional vision of family values. Women, as wives and mothers, and men, as husbands and fathers, were called upon to stabilize the social order.¹²

¹⁰ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy. Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 182.

¹¹ “Italia Anno Zero,” *Momento Sera*, September 17, 1948.

¹² For the sexual conservatism of DC and PCI see Fabio Giovannini, *Comunisti e diversi. Il PCI e la questione omosessuale* (Bari: Dedalo Libri, 1980), 123-127; Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 173-182; Bruno Wanrooij, “Pro Aris et Focis. Morale Cattolica e Identità Nazionale in Italia 1945-1960,” in *Nemici per la pelle. Sogno americano e mito sovietico nell'Italia contemporanea*, Pier Paolo D’Attorre ed. (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1991): 199-216; Marco Barbanti, “Cultura cattolica, lotta anticomunista e moralità pubblica (1948-60),” *Rivista di Storia Contemporanea* 21, no. 1 (1992): 143-179; Id., “La classe dirigente cattolica e la ‘battaglia per la moralità’ 1948-1960. Appunti sul ‘regime clericale’,” *Italia contemporanea*, 189 (1992): 605-634; Sandro Bellassai, *La morale comunista: pubblico e privato nella rappresentazione del PCI, 1947-1956* (Roma: Carocci, 2000); Paolo Sorcinelli, *Storia e sessualità: casi di vita, regole e trasgressioni tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Milano: Mondadori, 2001), 173-174; Stefania Bernini, “Family Politics: Political Rhetoric and the Transformation of Family Life in the Italian Second Republic,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 13, no. 3 (2008): 306-308, 318-319; Anna Tonelli, *Gli irregolari. Amori comunisti al tempo della Guerra Fredda* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2014). For the

This was the ideal-typical goal of the Italian political forces. As a matter of fact the government, with the support of the Church, was involved in a wide-ranging “*battaglia per la moralità*” (moralization battle) to police the sexual behaviors of both heterosexuals and homosexuals, and contain public indecency.¹³ This battle was a sign of the active resistance of some Italians against the ideal-typical sex/gender structure designed by the government. In the 1950s repressive laws and sexual libertinism existed side by side. Moral purity activists and people who did not conform to sexual bigotry were part of the same system.¹⁴ When

accusation of false moralism of the Christian Democrats against the Italian Communists see Giovannini, *Comunisti e diversi*, 53; Marco Barbanti, “La battaglia per la moralità tra Oriente, Occidente e Italo-centrismo, 1948-1960,” in *Nemici per la pelle*, 161-198; Barbanti, “Cultura cattolica,” 152-171. The relationship between the Italian left and homosexuality has been rather tense for years. After 1945 the cultural production of the Italian left was responsible for a politics of systematic twisted remembrance, aiming at forgetting the Fascist persecution of male and female homosexuals. In the collective Italian memory created by the cultural production of neo-realism, homosexuals ceased to be victims and became criminals. In several post-war movies and books about the war and about the Resistance against the Nazi-Fascists, for example, the valiant partisans were represented as an example of heroic masculinity, opposite to Fascists and Nazis who were not heroic, nor virile, but rather abject, cruel and often homosexual. See Giovannini, *Comunisti e diversi*; Barbanti, “Cultura cattolica,” 151; Luca Prono, “Città aperta o Città Chiusa? The Homosexualization of Fascism in the Perverted Cultural Memory of the Italian Left,” *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 6, no. 4 (2001): 333-351; Elena dell’Agnese, “Tu vuoi fa l’Americano: la costruzione della mascolinità nella geopolitica popolare italiana,” in *Mascolinità all’Italiana: Costruzioni, Narrazioni, Mutamenti*, Elena Dell’Agnese and Elisabetta Ruspini eds. (Torino: UTET, 2007), 14; Anna Tonelli, *Per indegnità morale. Il caso Pasolini nell’Italia del buon costume* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2015). For women as wives and mothers and men as husbands and fathers see Lesley Caldwell, *Italian Family Matters. Women, Politics and Legal Reform* (London: MacMillan, 1991); Francesca Koch, “La madre di famiglia nell’esperienza cattolica,” in *Storia della maternità*, Marina D’Amelia ed. (Roma-Bari: Laterza 1997), 237-248; Penelope Morris, “Introduction,” in *Women in Italy, 1945-1960: An Interdisciplinary Study*, Penelope Morris ed. (London: Palgrave MacMillan 2006), 3-8; Dell’Agnese, “Tu vuoi fa l’Americano,” 28; Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man. Homosexuality in Fascist Italy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 289; Molly Tambor, *The Lost Wave. Women and Democracy in Postwar Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12-18; Tonelli, *Per indegnità morale*, 4-11. A very similar dynamics characterized also West German politics: Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*; Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*; Timm, *Politics of Fertility*.

¹³ Such battle included, for example, the anti-kiss campaign carried out by the Questore of Turin against heterosexual couples showing too much affection in cinemas – a campaign supported by the Minister of Interior. See “Il questore di Torino istituisce pattuglie ‘anti-bacio’ nei cinema,” *l’Unità*, January 8, 1955; Giuseppe Petronio, “Baci al cinema,” *Il Paese Sera*, January 20, 1955; “Occhio Sinistro,” *l’Avanti!*, January 27, 1955; letter of the Minister of Interior to Bruno Spampanato, February 3, 1955, Interrogazione n. 11096; *Il Corriere della Nazione*, April 14, 1955 (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 265). But the Catholics also wanted to regulate behaviors and bathing suits on the beach. In particular the Minister of Interior opposed firmly the use of too skimpy speedos for men. They showed too much and, at the same time, were deemed not manly enough. See phonogram of the Minister of Interior to the Prefects, July 24, 1947; newsletter of the Ministry of Interior to the Prefects, June 29, 1948; letter of the Federazione Generale dell’Industria Italiana to the Ministry of Interior, July 11, 1949; neweletter of the Ministry of Interior to the Questori, July 15, 1949; neweletter of the Ministry of Interior to the Prefects, June 3, 1950; newsletter of the Ministry of Interior to the Prefects, June 11, 1951; letter of the Catholic Action to the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, May 9, 1952; newsletter of the Ministry of Interior to the Prefects, May 21, 1953; newsletter of the Ministry of Interior to the Prefects, June 5, 1955 (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 942). For the battle of state and Church against immorality in 1950s Italy see, for example, Liliusa Azara, *I sensi e il pudore. L’Italia e la rivoluzione dei costumi (1958-1968)* (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2018), 31-67.

¹⁴ For a few examples of the same phenomenon outside of Italy see Robert G. Moeller, “‘The Homosexual Man Is a ‘Man,’ the Homosexual Woman Is a ‘Woman’: Sex, Society, and the Law in Postwar West Germany,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 3 (1994): 395-429; Alan Pettigny, *The Permissive Society. America, 1941-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Robert G. Moeller, “Private Acts, Public Anxieties, and the Fight to Decriminalize Male Homosexuality in West Germany,” *Feminist Studies*, 3 (2010): 528-552; Elizabeth Heineman, *Before Porn was Legal. The Erotica Empire of Beate Uhse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 28-29; Heike Bauer and Matt Cook, “Introduction: Queer 1950s: Rethinking Sexuality in Postwar Years,” in *Queer 1950s*, 8; Alisom Oram, “Love ‘Off the Rails’ or ‘Over the Teacups’? Lesbian desire and Female Sexualities in the 1950s British Popular Press,” in *Queer 1950s*, 42; Evans, “The Long 1950s as Radical In-Between,” 13; Amanda H. Littauer, “‘Someone to Love’: Teen Girls’ Same-Sex Desire in the 1950s United States,” in *Queer 1950s*, 61; Joanne Meyerowitz, “The Liberal 1950s? Reinterpreting Postwar American Sexual Culture,” in

studying this decade, as Jennifer Evans suggests, it is necessary to move beyond simple dichotomies and realize that this was a time of flux “marked seductively by twilight moments amidst baleful persecution.”¹⁵ According to Joanne Meyerowitz too “the stereotype of the conservative postwar era is a one-sided account that erases historical complexity.”¹⁶ There were women and men who tried to escape from predominant gender models.¹⁷ In particular, as James Gilbert argues, the existing hegemonic notions of masculinity “were fluid and contingent and no predictor of what any man might do.”¹⁸ Queer men lived in a complex world where forced discretion, anxiety, and fear did not deny the possibility of finding opportunities for sex, intimacy, reciprocal support, and socio-political action. If we focus too intensely on 1950s policies of control we risk losing sight of all those men who tried, and were able to, cultivate their desires and erotic needs.¹⁹ Italy was simultaneously “the country of sexual propriety, the family and the Catholic morality,” and “the land of ‘Latin lovers’ and sexual freedom.” We are not talking of a split between two versions of Italy. We are talking about a society with deeply ambiguous attitudes towards sexuality.²⁰

The murder of Quintino Livio Caucci in 1952 at the hand of two male youths – a murder I will analyze extensively in the following pages – engendered an unprecedented battle against homosexuals. This repressive action was a consequence of both national and

Gender and the Long Postwar: Reconsiderations of the United States and the Two Germanys, 1945-1989, Karen Hagemann and Sonya Michel, eds. (Baltimore-MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 297-319; Alison Guenther-Pal, “‘Should Women Be Amazons?’: Reallocating Masculinity in German Postwar History and Hosenrolle,” *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, no. 3 (2018): 365-394.

¹⁵ Evans, “The Long 1950s as Radical In-Between,” 26.

¹⁶ Meyerowitz, “The Liberal 1950s?,” 311.

¹⁷ For the complexity of Italian womanhood in the 1950s see Boneschi, *Senso. I costume sessuali degli Italiani dal 1880 a oggi* (Milano: Mondadori, 2000), 195, 204, 217-223; Silvia Cassamagnaghi, *Immagini dall’America. Mass media e modelli femminili nell’Italia del secondo dopoguerra 1945-1960* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2007), 117; Rebecca West, “‘What’ as Ideal and ‘Who’ as Real: Portraits of Wives and Mothers in Italian Postwar Domestic Manuals, Fiction, and Film,” in *Women in Italy, 1945-1960: An Interdisciplinary Study*, Penelope Morris ed. (London: Palgrave MacMillan 2006), 22-24; Lesley Caldwell, “What Do Mothers Want? Takes on Motherhood in *Bellissima*, *Il Grido*, and *Mamma Roma*,” in *Women in Italy, 1945-1960*, 40, 44, 52, 54; Réka Buckley, “Marriage, Motherhood, and the Italian Film Stars of the 1950s,” in *Women in Italy, 1945-1960*, 35, 46.

¹⁸ James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle. Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1-8, 86, 104-105.

¹⁹ See Bauer and Cook, “Introduction: Queer 1950s,” 2, 8; Evans, “The Long 1950s as Radical In-Between,” 14-15; Chris Brickell, “Moral Panic or Critical Mass? The Queer Contradictions of 1950s New Zealand,” in *Queer 1950s*, 109-110; Matt Cook, “Warm Homes in a Cold Climate: Rex Batten and the Queer Domestic,” in *Queer 1950s*, 127; Jackson, *Living in Arcadia*, 114; Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality*, 9-11.

²⁰ Penelope Morris, “‘Let’s Not Talk About Sex’: the Reception of the Kinsey’s Reports in Italy,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 18, no. 1 (2013): 19, 28, 30.

international political dynamics. Some prior circumstances – the early closure of the state-licensed brothels in Modena in 1950, and the assassination of other homosexuals between 1950 and 1951 – are essential premises to understand the readiness of the police in taking action against homosexuals immediately after Caucci’s death. They nourished fears and anxieties about the homosexualization of youths that exploded violently in 1952-1953.²¹ State repression was only one force involved in the Italian sexual power system. The stories I am about to narrate clearly show the existence of other centers of power. Homosexual scandals and murders were epiphenomena of active homosexual milieus. They were signs of the existence of thriving and resisting homosexual subcultures. Moreover, scandals and murders produced discourses about homosexuality that, on one side, favored the strong advance of social controls and, on the other, made possible the formation of “reverse discourses” with homosexuals and their allies demanding for the legitimization of same-sex identities and behaviors.

The Modena Experiment

The debate about the “Merlin Law” lasted a decade. The socialist Senator Lina Merlin proposed the measure on August 6, 1948, and the Italian Parliament passed the law on January 29, 1958.²² This law, aimed at deregulating prostitution and permanently closing the Italian state-licensed brothels, raised fears not only about the spread of venereal diseases, and about the preservation of the social and moral order, but also about the potential homosexualization of Italian men.²³ The brothel was perceived, according to Sandro

²¹ Dennis Altman defines homosexualization as “the adoption of styles and fashions associated with an increasingly visible and assertive gay minority.” See Dennis Altman, *The Homosexualization of America, The Americanization of the Homosexual* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1982), xii. I use this term in a different way, as the process of allegedly turning heterosexual men into homosexuals.

²² Senator Merlin’s proposal remained stuck on hold until March 1952 when it was approved by the Senate in one day (March 5). At that point the law needed the final approval of the Chamber. But the dissolution of the Parliament in 1953 prevented the final and decisive sanction. The process had to begin again during the second legislature (1953-1958) because the election of a new Parliament nullified the previous procedures. Thus, only during her second mandate Senator Merlin was able to finalize her most ambitious project.

²³ For fears about consequences of the closure of the Italian houses of ill repute see “Comunicazione del Prof. Filippo Franchi sulla sessualità maschile nei riguardi del problema delle case di tolleranza,” in *La piaga sociale della prostituzione*, Cesare

Bellassai, as a “*discarica sociale*” (a social dump) necessary to contain the dregs of male sexuality, to protect marriage from dangerous extramarital relationships, and save bachelors from sexual deviance.²⁴ In 1949, when the law seemed to be a done deal, several magazines supported Merlin’s proposal, whereas others suggested caution, asking for a more gradualist approach, and recommended experimental closures in delimited areas. Such a position was shared also by some members of the Italian government. The Ministry of Interior, showing its willingness to favor public decency, but also to surreptitiously oppose the complete closure of the brothels, endorsed in 1949 the relocation of the *case di tolleranza* (houses of ill repute). According to the newsletter released by the Ministry in March 1949, brothels had to move outside of the city centers. Such a decision had major consequences in the city of Modena in particular, and the opponents of the “Merlin Law” exploited this case to raise fears about the potential spread of homosexuality among the male inhabitants of this town in Emilia Romagna.²⁵

In the center of Modena there were five brothels. One of them was closed for irregularities, whereas in the first half of July 1949 the brothel-keepers of the other four were invited to move to the suburbs. However, they thought that, given the presumed forthcoming approval of the “Merlin Law,” it was not wise to undertake the effort of reorganizing their activities in other areas of the city. Spending money on a business that was probably going to be closed soon looked like an unwise decision. A few months later, in September 1949, also the brothel of Mirandola, a town nearby, was closed and, as a result, Modena and its

Coruzzi and Dino Origlia eds. (Roma: Istituto di Medicina Sociale, 1950), 87-97. Prostitution was regulated in Italy since February 1860 and in 1923 the Fascist regime increased the sanitary and police control over brothels and prostitutes. See Bellassai, *La legge del desiderio*, 17-24.

²⁴ Bellassai, *La legge del desiderio*, 138, 142. A panegyric in favor of the brothels was the book published by Indro Montanelli: *Addio, Wanda! Rapporto Kinsey sulla situazione italiana* (Milano: Longanesi, 1956).

²⁵ The newsletter was implementing a neglected Fascist measure (art. 192 of the *Testo Unico di Polizia*, June 18, 1931 no. 773) according to which the police could deny the authorization to a brothel-keeper to open – and keep open – his/her facility, if the authorities believed that the location was against public morality or decency, and could trouble public order. Moreover, a place could not be designated as a brothel if close to barracks, markets, schools, and churches. See session of the Town Council, Treviso, August 28, 1952, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 315.

surroundings had no licensed brothels anymore.²⁶ According to the Prefect, even if he supported the decision of relocating the brothels in the name of decency, their complete closure might have major unwelcome consequences. There were many young bachelors living in Modena, and these youths, as the Prefect explained, after the closure of the legal brothels, had been forced to go to “disreputable and clandestine hangouts.” Such places were “sites of physical and moral infection.” Therefore, the Prefect asked for the urgent intervention of the Ministry: Modena needed brothels.²⁷ The debate about the introduction of the “Merlin Law,” the closure of the brothels, the moral panic about the potential consequences of the closures, the sexual needs and desires of the Italian youths escaping regulations, and the representation of homosexuals “feasting with panthers” were all parts of the complex power relations system operating in 1950s Italy. This case shows the tension between the attempts to repress “dangerous” sexual behaviors, and the reactions against such “technologies of control.”

In January 1951, in an article published by the newspaper *Settimo Giorno*, Pier Luigi Soldini emphasized that Modena was the only place in Italy where the relocation of the brothels had been enforced to the letter.²⁸ He explained that such an “experiment” had produced negative consequences. Venereal diseases seemed to be under control, thanks to antibiotics, but it was undeniable, he added, that after the closure of the brothels the city was experiencing a growth in both illegal prostitution and “sexual inversion.”²⁹ One of the former

²⁶ Pier Luigi Soldini, “Chiuse da due anni le case di Modena,” *Settimo Giorno*, January 17, 1952, 27, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 307.

²⁷ Letter of the Prefect of Modena to the Ministry of Interior, May 10, 1950, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 307. The Prefect sent another letter to the Ministry of Interior asking for a concrete intervention: letter from the Prefect to the Ministry of Interior, July 12, 1950, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 307.

²⁸ Soldini, “Chiuse da due anni le case di Modena.” According to the newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino*, Modena was actually an intentional experiment begun in 1949 (“Le ‘case chiuse’ costrette a sospendere la loro attività,” *Il Resto del Carlino*, April 18, 1955, 2, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 300).

²⁹ The situation was rather variable all over Italy. In Palermo for example the police seemed to be rather strict in implementing the newsletter of March 1949 (letter signed by eleven brothel-keepers of Palermo to the Minister of Interior, April 9, 1949, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 309). But in Novara in 1951-1952 there were still brothels operating in the city center that the authorities were trying to shut down (letter of Cesare Borgini – representative of the Catholic Action of Novara – to Teodoro Bubbio – undersecretary to the Ministry of Interior, November 26, 1951 and letter of the lawyer Gino Cambise to Teodoro Bubbio, June 21, 1952, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 309). In Treviso the Questura allowed to keep one brothel open in the center while waiting for it to be transferred to the suburbs (letter of the Prefect of Treviso to the Minister of Interior, October 13, 1952, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 315). In 1954 the brothel of Treviso was still there (note of the head of the police for On.le Russo, August 7, 1954, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 315). The town council of Treviso asked to close all the brothels in the city center in 1952 (session of the Town Council, Treviso, August 28, 1952, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 315). In the province

brothel-keepers, Alfredo Bianco, directly contacted the Ministry of Interior in March 1951 asking – unsuccessfully – to have his license back and re-open his *casa di tolleranza*. In his letter he explained that the Modenese men’s health was at risk because illegal prostitution was growing uncontrollably. Soldiers, cadets, policemen, and students had to abstain from sex, or had to search for legal prostitutes in Bologna, Parma, and Reggio Emilia. But, most alarmingly, he underlined how several “cases of collective pederasty” called for the intervention of the state and the reopening of his “house.”³⁰

In 1952, when the abolition of the brothels in Italy seemed to be within reach, the opponents of the “Merlin Law” became more and more vociferous, and tried to turn Modena into their key case to sabotage the legislative measure. In June the Prefect of the city sent to the Ministry of Interior the resolution approved by the General Medical Council of Modena. According to this document the closure of the brothels, besides being a sanitary hazard, had caused the proliferation of “unspeakable acts.” Therefore, the Council argued, if the Italian state wanted to protect the youths it was necessary to oppose Lina Merlin’s project.³¹ A couple of months after the approval of this resolution the tabloid *Crimen* published a rather alarming article against the abolition of the *casa di tolleranza*. The journalist Jacopo Rizza, in order to make his regulationist argument even stronger, decided to interview Marthe Richard. According to the tabloid, the woman, who was a former prostitute and had successfully campaigned for the closure of the brothels in France, had changed her mind. In her opinion, the “passionate” Italian population was not ready for such a big change. She thought, at least

of Macerata there was only one brothel. It was located in an alley without homes, but it was in the center, close to the barracks of the firemen, and not far away from the Episcopal seminary. However, the Prefect asked to avoid the closure of the brothel. In Macerata lived about 2,000 soldiers and thus the consequences of the closure, according to the Prefect, could be disastrous in terms of health and morality (note of the Prefecture of Macerata to the Ministry of Interior, April 12, 1949, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 331).

³⁰ Letter of Alfredo Bianco to the Ministry of Interior, March 16, 1951, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 307. Both the Prefect and the Ministry of Interior denied the permission to re-open the brothel in the city center. See letter of the Prefect of Modena to the Ministry of Interior, May 15, 1951 and letter of Ministry of Interior to the Prefect, May 21, 1951 (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 307).

³¹ Letter of the Prefect of Modena to the Ministry of Interior, June 3, 1952, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 307. Three years later also the Doctors’ Council of Bologna asked in an order of the day voted on April 5, 1955, to keep the brothels open in the city center to avoid clandestine prostitution, homosexuality, and venereal diseases (letter of the Doctors’ Council of Bologna sent to the Prefect in April 1955, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 300).

according to *Crimen*, that the closure of the brothels was “a remedy by far worse than the evil.” She warned that sexual crimes would grow, clandestine brothels would mushroom, and homosexuality, “as already happened in Modena, would solicit more victims.”³²

In May and June 1952 the police in Modena also seemed to start paying more attention to the “homosexual danger.” The alert issued by the Medical Council, fed by the press, sensitized the local authorities. In the report about “Order and Public Security” sent to the Ministry of Interior, the Prefect of Modena wrote in May 1952 that homosexuality was spreading, and that such growth could be explained by the complete closure of the brothels ordered in 1949. The Prefect underscored that cases of sexual perversion had raised concerns among the population and in the press, and newspapers had invited parents to monitor their children’s behavior. The action of the police, the Prefect underlined, was careful and timely, and several individuals had been arrested. The report of June highlighted that even if “the phenomenon of homosexuality” was still drawing the attention of the police, it was evidently decreasing.³³

But the fear of burgeoning juvenile homosexuality, because of the closure of the brothels, was not limited to Modena. In April 1952, for example, the head of the military garrison of Novara, Carlo Vittorio Musso, wrote a letter to the Prefect expressing his concern about the definitive closure of two brothels in the vicinity of the military barracks. These two facilities were affordable and served the “needs” of about 2,000 soldiers. Without brothels, the sanitary situation would become explosive in the city, and social and moral order would be at risk. At the moment there were around 300 soldiers visiting the brothels every day and, in spite of this, there were already “illegal prostitutes” and “illegal brothels.” But Musso was particularly worried about local homosexuals. They notoriously searched for youths “prone to

³² Jacopo Rizza, “Avremo un aumento dei delitti sessuali? Atti di violenza, case clandestine, omosessualità: conseguenze della chiusura,” *Crimen*, July 20, 1952, 8

³³ See report of the Prefect of Modena to the Ministry of Interior, May 30, 1952 and report of the Prefect of Modena to the Ministry of Interior, June 30, 1952, ACS, Gab., FP, b. 211.

satisfy their desires for money,” and he was confident that such a “disgusting situation” would have probably become even worse with the closure of the two still existing brothels. The documents produced by doctors, state officials, and members of the Italian army seem to suggest that at the time same-sex sexualities were conceived by them as behaviors dangerously open to everyone. In these reports, homosexuality featured as some kind of disease everybody could contract, especially young people.³⁴

The “experimental closure” of the brothels in Modena, and the forced closure of other brothels in Italy, played an important role in alerting both the press and the police to the potential spread of homosexuality and about its dangerous effects. According to doctors, journalists, and the police, the youths unable to have sex in brothels were turning to “inverts.” For them homosexual encounters were not only a source of pleasure, but also a source of profit. Instead of paying for sex, they were going to be paid for it. But the contacts with the *ambiente torbido* (shady environment), as the homosexual milieus were usually called by the press, were also “infecting” these “normal” men.³⁵ Authorities and media were not concerned about homosexuals, but about ordinary youths. Homosexuals were irremediably lost, but others could still be saved. Fears about the sexual “contamination” of the new generations together with crimes committed in homosexual milieus at the beginning of the 1950s would convince the police that it was time to take a more decisive approach against sexual “perverts.” Whereas the actual proliferation of “unspeakable acts” in Modena remains questionable, the steady proliferation of discourses about them – as these documents show – is undeniable.³⁶

³⁴ Letter of Carlo Vittorio Musso to the Prefect of Novara, April 20, 1952, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 309.

³⁵ Polibio, “Il Pozzo della solitudine,” *Crimen*, July 24, 1951, 9. In a letter sent to the Ministry of Interior by the Prefect of Pesaro, where there were no operative brothels anymore, we read how also there the head of the local garrison was worried about soldiers infected by illegal prostitutes and about “contacts against nature happening between male civilians and soldiers” (letter from the Prefecture of Pesaro to the Ministry of Interior April 26, 1949, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 310). In Macerata the Prefect asked to keep open the only existing brothel even if it was located in the center. He was afraid that many of the young soldiers living in town could have been led astray because of the absence of prostitutes (note of the Prefecture of Macerata to the Ministry of Interior, April 12, 1949, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 331).

³⁶ See “Nota editoriale,” *Crimen*, November 20, 1951, 6 and Candella, “Guerra ad oltranza al terzo sesso,” *Crimen*, November 20, 1951, 6-7.

Sodom on the Tiber

In May, August, and November 1951, while the Italian Parliament was still debating the possible closure of the state-licensed brothels, three men were killed. The murder of Antonio Versino in Turin, at the hand of his male lover, and the murder of Antonio Simeoni in Padua, killed by a hustler, received some press coverage, but the murder of Ermanno Randi caught the attention of a much wider audience.³⁷ The young actor, born in Arezzo in 1920, was killed in Rome on November 1, 1951 by “his most intimate” friend, the Sicilian Giuseppe Maggiori.³⁸ Randi was shot in the apartment where the two had been living together for some months. According to the police, Maggiori had pulled the trigger because he was jealous, and because he thought that the actor wanted to leave him.³⁹

Even if an important magazine, such as *Epoca*, tried to question the existence of a “*rapporto equivoco*” (shady relationship) between Randi and Maggiori, the majority of the press underlined the “abnormality” of this “friendship.”⁴⁰ According to journalists the “pile of letters and pictures” exchanged between the two men was incontrovertible proof of their

³⁷ Versino, a 20 years old student, was killed by Giovanni Marinelli, a 33 year old tailor who did not want to accept the end of their relationship (Gildo Carigli, “Morte dell’efebo,” *Crimen*, May 29, 1951, 8). The newspaper *La Stampa* of Turin published between 1951 and 1954 about thirty articles about this case and the trials against Marinelli. Also *Der Kreis* published an article about this murder, see EC, “Eine italienische Tragödie,” *Der Kreis*, no. 8 (1951): 8-11. Simeoni was a 53 year old married watchmaker by Carlo Mazza, a 22 years old tramp, born in Tripoli and resident in Messina (Aroldo Pretto, “L’uccisione dell’orologiaio,” *Crimen*, August 28, 1951, 10).

³⁸ This was the second time over the course of the year that the relationship between a man and his protégé hit the headlines. Already in May 1951 newspapers and magazines had devoted some attention to the less tragic liaison between the Monarchist parliamentarian Vincenzo Cicerone and his personal secretary, Fausto Sarno, a 26 years old former wrestler. For this story see: “Le avventure dell’on. Cicerone il più elegante deputato d’Italia,” *La Nuova Stampa*, May 3, 1951, 4; “‘Sto matrimonio non s’ha da far’ avrebbe intimato al suo segretario,” *l’Unità*, May 3, 1951, 2; Polibio, “La strabiliante avventura dell’onorevole Cicerone,” *Crimen*, May 15, 1951, 14; “Un ‘affaire’ alla francese intorno all’onorevole Cicerone,” *Stampa Sera*, March 27-28, 1952, 1; Carlo Laurenzi, “Le vicende dell’On. Cicerone da Montecitorio alla cronaca nera,” *La Nuova Stampa*, March 28, 1952, 3. Moreover, see also document of the Questura of Rome to the Minister of Interior, April 23, 1951, charge against Fausto Sarno and Vincenzo Cicerone sent from the Questura of Rome to the Public Prosecutor, April 23, 1951, and letter of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, April 24, 1951 (ACS, MI, Gab., 1953-1956, b. 4).

³⁹ “L’attore Ermanno Randi ucciso a revolverate da un amico travolto da una torbida passione,” *l’Unità*, November 2, 1951. The trial began almost two years later in December 1953. The public prosecutor asked for 24 years of prison for Maggiori. In the end the Assize Court sentenced him eleven years of prison and three in a mental hospital (“Stamane dinanzi ai giudici l’uccisore di Ermanno Randi,” *l’Unità*, December 1, 1953). After the appeal Maggiori’s conviction was increased by 16 months (“Aumentata di sedici mesi la pena all’assassino dell’attore Randi,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, November 19, 1954). For the case see “L’attore Ermanno Randi ucciso a revolverate dal suo migliore amico in una casa di via Apulia,” *Il Tempo*, November 2, 1951, 2; “L’attore Ermanno Randi assassinato con sei colpi di pistola da un commerciante” *Il Messaggero di Roma*, November 2, 1951; “Il giovane attore Ermanno Randi ucciso con 3 revolverate da un commerciante in un appartamento in Via Apulia,” *Il Paese*, November 2, 1951, 2; D.M., “Nella morte il segreto della ribellione,” *Epoca*, November 10, 1951, 74; “Ermanno Randi ha pagato con la vita,” *Crimen*, November 13, 1951, 13-16.

⁴⁰ See “L’assassino aveva visto nell’attore una facile fonte di infame guadagno,” *l’Unità*, November 3, 1951; “Il funerali di Ermanno Randi e dell’uccisa di Piazza Zama,” *Il Paese*, November 4, 1951, 2 and D.M., “Nella morte il segreto della ribellione,” 74.

affair.⁴¹ Moreover, their apartment was described as “furnished with an almost feminine taste,” and here, according to the press, Randi and Maggiori led an “unbelievable life”: they behaved like husband and wife.⁴² While the first worked, the latter took care of the house, went to the supermarket, and cooked “like a good housewife.”⁴³ Such “perverted domesticity” in years of post-war gender redefinition was perceived by the press as a threatening form of male feminization. Further proof of the ambiguous sexuality of these two young men, *La Nuova Stampa* explained, were the books the police found in their apartment. Works by Sigmund Freud and Oscar Wilde on their bookshelves were interpreted as *incontrovertible* evidence of their sexual “abnormality.”⁴⁴ In the end, before killing Randi, Maggiori wrote two letters to explain the reasons behind his criminal act. One letter was for the Questore and the other for Randi’s family. According to *l’Unità* in the latter Maggiori asked for forgiveness and openly talked about his love for the actor.⁴⁵

However, *l’Unità* did not believe Maggiori’s words. The newspaper argued that his “devotion” to Randi was insincere. He exploited Randi’s “abnormality,” and was obsessed by the idea that this story could end leaving him without money.⁴⁶ In a similar vein, *Crimen* stressed that Randi’s murder was “nauseating” not only “because of the environment where it [had] happened,” but also “because of the motives behind it.” Maggiori was just a “kept man” who killed because he did not want to lose his fixed “income.” The press denied that these two men actually shared sincere and loving feelings for each other, described the relationship between Randi and Maggiori as quintessentially exploitative, warned the readers about the ways in which homosexuality could easily lead to crime, and presented “sexual inversion” as a pervasive threat to hegemonic masculinity. Maggiori had a girlfriend and a job before

⁴¹ “L’attore Ermanno Randi ucciso a revolverate da un amico travolto da una torbida passione.”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “L’assassino aveva visto nell’attore una facile fonte di infame guadagno,” *l’Unità*, November 3, 1951; “Solamente ieri mattina l’assassino ha appreso che il Randi era morto,” *Il Paese*, November 3, 1951, 2.

⁴⁴ d.m., “L’omicida piange per la morte della vittima,” *La Nuova Stampa*, November 3, 1951, 3.

⁴⁵ “L’attore Ermanno Randi ucciso a revolverate dal suo migliore amico.”

⁴⁶ “L’assassino aveva visto nell’attore una facile fonte di infame guadagno.”

meeting Randi.⁴⁷ The actor had seduced and corrupted him. According to the press Maggiori, like many other youths, got lost because no one had been able to protect and save him. A few months after Randi's death another homosexual was killed in Rome. This murder, which happened in a rich neighborhood during a hot summer, galvanized the Italian authorities. They felt compelled to act against the "sexual deviants" and reinforced the image of homosexuals as youths' predators.

On August 29, 1952 newspapers reported the death of the 69-year-old Quintino Livio Caucci.⁴⁸ The doctor, described in a private note by the Questore Saverio Polito as "a known passive pederast" was found in his apartment in Rome tied, muffled, and with a deep wound on his head.⁴⁹ The newspaper of the *Azione Cattolica* (Catholic Action, AC), *Il Quotidiano*, avoiding sexual hints, reported the case as a robbery gone awry.⁵⁰ Other newspapers instead talked about it as a sexual crime. *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Il Paese*, *Il Tempo*, and *l'Unità* underlined that the police had already begun rounding up men from the "*ambiente torbido*" in the belief that some of them might know what had happened in the apartment on Via Gorizia 43. Caucci, who had been expelled from the Italian medical association and barred from practicing the medical profession in 1943 for corruption of a minor, lived in this apartment alone and used it as a sex parlor where he could meet up with his "intimate friends" in complete freedom.⁵¹

⁴⁷ "Ermanno Randi ha pagato con la vita," 13-16.

⁴⁸ "Un medico trovato cadavere con un pugnale nella schiena," *La Stampa Sera*, August 29, 1952, 1; "Assassinato con una bastonata alla nuca un vecchio medico nella sua abitazione," *Il Popolo*, August 29, 1952, 2.

⁴⁹ Letter of Saverio Polito to Prefect and to the Head of the Police, August 29, 1952, ACS, MI, Gab., 1950-1952, b. 6. Caucci had started working as an expert in dermatology and venereal diseases in 1908. In 1941 the father of a sixteen-year-old kid pressed charges against him for corruption. In December 1942, after his medical practice in Piazza Vittorio was closed down by the police for public scandal, he was condemned to a five year internal exile to Agropoli, a small town close to Salerno. In 1943 his *confino* was commuted into a two years *ammonizione* (caution). After 1945 Caucci opened a clandestine medical practice in San Lorenzo that was immediately closed by the Questura not only because Caucci was practicing the profession illegally, but also because this place had become a "bawdy house." See "Forse gli assassini sono fra i 'fermati'," *Il Corriere della Sera*, August 30, 1952, 1; Agostino Pepe, "Scoprirono nei giochi dei figli la vocazione al delitto," *Epoca*, September 20, 1952, 68-69; "Gli uccisori del dott. Caucci risponderanno oggi del loro delitto," *Il Corriere della Sera*, February 18, 1954, 4.

⁵⁰ "Fosco delitto in Viale Gorizia. Ucciso da sconosciuti un medico per rapina," *Il Quotidiano*, August 30, 1952, 2. The *Azione Cattolica* was a lay and nonpolitical Italian association, founded in 1905, that encouraged its members to live following Gospel precepts.

⁵¹ See "Il medico Quintino Caucci trovato ucciso nel suo appartamento in Viale Gorizia," *Il Tempo*, August 30, 1952, 2; "Un medico assassinato per rapina dopo essere stato legato e imbavagliato," *Il Messaggero*, August 30, 1952; "Un noto medico

L'Unità, probably trying to cast the national government and the local administration in a bad light (both were in the hands of the Christian Democrats), was particularly vocal about the case. The organ of the Communist party explained that Caucci was well known in Rome given that he had spent the last thirty, forty years of his life frequenting “men who hate women.” The police arrested several young men gravitating in the Roman *ambiente torbido*. Some youths were set free almost immediately, after a short questioning, others were held in custody for 10, 15, or even 30 hours, whereas fifteen were arrested. Only a few of them admitted to having had intercourse with Caucci. The number of arrests was destined to grow rapidly. By September 1 the police questioned seventy men, and arrested forty of them.⁵²

On September 3, 1952 the newspapers announced that the mystery had been solved, and Caucci's murderer had been found. The 19-year-old Salvatore Lazzari had killed the doctor. This youth, whose family was originally from Trapani (Sicily), lived together with his mother in a humble room in the center of Rome. He had lost his father in 1943, in 1944 he had become a *sciuscìa* (a shoeshiner), following the American soldiers to the North, and in 1945 he was incarcerated for robbery. Lazzari left the reformatory in 1948 but was unable to find a job.⁵³ In 1950 he went back to the youth detention center from which he was eventually released two years later because “implicated in an indecent episode of perversion.”⁵⁴ The

trovato ucciso nel suo studio imbavagliato e con le mani e i piedi legati,” *l'Unità*, August 30, 1952, 2; “L'assassino del dott. Caucci non è stato ancora individuato,” *Il Paese*, August 30, 1952, 1 and 3; “Assassinato con una bastonata alla nuca un vecchio medico nella sua abitazione”; c.l., “Noto medico assassinato nel suo alloggio a Roma,” *La Nuova Stampa*, August 30, 1952, 4; “Trovato ucciso in casa un vecchio medico romano,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, August 30, 1952, 5; “Forse gli assassini sono fra i ‘fermati’;” “Il medico Quintino Caucci trovato ucciso nel suo appartamento in Viale Gorizia,” *Il Tempo*, August 30, 1952, 2; “Un noto medico trovato ucciso nel suo studio imbavagliato e con le mani e i piedi legati,” *l'Unità*, August 30, 1952, 2; “L'assassino del medico sarebbe un bieco sfruttatore alla ricerca di ricco bottino nella casa della vittima,” *Il Paese*, August 31, 1952, 2; “L'autopsia sul cadavere di Quintino Caucci ha confermato che il medico morì per asfissia,” *Il Tempo*, August 31, 1952, 2; Pepe, “Scoprirono nei giochi dei figli la vocazione al delitto;” “Gli uccisori del dott. Caucci risponderanno oggi del loro delitto,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, February 18, 1954, 4.

⁵² See “Il dr. Caucci non è stato ucciso, ma è morto soffocato dal bavaglio,” *l'Unità*, August 31, 1952, 2; “Sempre fitto mistero sull'assassinio del dott. Caucci,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, September 1, 1952, 1 and “Quaranta giovani fermata ieri sulla base dei famosi registri dell'ucciso,” *Il Messaggero*, September 1, 1952, 2.

⁵³ “L'assassino del dottor Caucci arrestato ieri è un giovane uscito dal carcere dei minorenni,” *Il Tempo*, September 3, 1952, 2; “Un giovane falegname disoccupato arrestato per l'aggressione che costò la vita di Caucci,” *l'Unità*, September 3, 1952, 2; “Arrestato l'assassino del medico romano,” *La Nuova Stampa*, September 3, 1952, 6; “E' un giovane di 19 anni l'uccisore del medico romano,” *Corriere della Sera*, September 3, 1952, 4; “Arrestato l'assassino del dott. Caucci che è un giovane di diciannove anni,” *Il Messaggero*, September 3, 1952, 1; “Il diciannovenne assassino del dottor Caucci era uscito due anni or sono dal carcere di Porta Portese,” *Il Paese*, September 3, 1952, 2.

⁵⁴ “Stamane in Assise i due giovani involontari assassini di Caucci,” *l'Unità*, February 18, 1954, 2.

Communist newspaper *Il Paese* wrote clearly that the reformatory was the place where Lazzari “began to contract (*contrarre*) those sexual habits” that were “one of the most upsetting and most terrible features” of these juvenile institutions.⁵⁵ In the reformatory he met many delinquent youths and, once outside, he continued hanging out with them. His association with these scoundrels paved Lazzari’s way to the “shady world of abnormal men.”⁵⁶ Being part of this *underworld*, Lazzari learned about Caucci. The latter was one of those men who “loved youths and were willing to pay them.”⁵⁷ Lazzari went to his practice and, after showing him a skin rash on his thigh, had sex with the doctor. When, after this “filthy service,” Lazzari asked for money, Caucci refused to pay. The doctor explained that a free medical examination was enough. Blinded by fury, according to Lazzari’s version, he killed the doctor and ransacked the apartment.⁵⁸

Il Tempo underlined how both characters deserved compassion: the depraved and abnormal Caucci was pitiful because he died miserably after having being maliciously cursed by nature, whereas the young killer deserved commiseration. Lazzari was a product of the war and what he did depended on his sad and troubled childhood.⁵⁹ Caucci was a freak of nature, whereas Lazzari, corrupted – as many others – by abnormal people and bad accomplices, was a victim of socio-historical circumstances.⁶⁰ Such an exculpatory attitude towards the young

⁵⁵ “Il diciannovenne assassino del dottor Caucci era uscito due anni or sono.”

⁵⁶ “L’assassino del dottor Caucci arrestato ieri è un giovane uscito dal carcere.” See also “Arrestato l’assassino del medico romano.”

⁵⁷ “Un giovane falegname disoccupato arrestato.” See also “Il diciannovenne assassino del dottor Caucci era uscito due anni or sono.”

⁵⁸ See “Un giovane falegname disoccupato arrestato” and “L’assassino del dottor Caucci arrestato ieri è un giovane uscito dal carcere.”

⁵⁹ See “Un fosco delitto che non resterà impunito. Un falegname diciannovenne ha ucciso il Dr. Livio Caucci,” *Il Quotidiano*, September 3, 1952, 2. But also the Communist *l’Unità* had a very similar perspective see “Al di là dello steccato,” *l’Unità*, September 6, 1952, 2.

⁶⁰ After WWII homosexual clients were presented as exploitative, whereas the hustlers were victims. This view, which was prevalent within the criminological and medical discourse of homosexuality, argued that male prostitution was the outcome of homosexual seduction (John Scott, Denton Callander, Victor Minichello, “Clients of Male Sex Workers,” in *Male Sex Work and Society*, eds. Victor Minichello and John Scott [New York: Harrington Park Press, 2014], 155). Matt Houlbrook showed in his “Soldier Heroes” that in Great Britain soldiers having sex with queers were seen as innocent victims, whereas queers were predatory corruptors (374-387). But, in the 1950s, he argued, there were also people, such as the sociologist Michael Schofield and the homosexual intellectual Peter Wildeblood, who tried to disrupt the “innocence discourse” surrounding the guardmen (386-387). Interestingly Jennifer V. Evans, talking about the Berlin “Bahnhof boys,” shows that in Germany the attitude towards them was rather hostile: they were predators, not prey. See Jennifer V. Evans “Bahnhof Boys: Policing Male Prostitution in Post-Nazi Berlin,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 4 (2003): 608-609, 625, 636.

man was not shared by all newspapers. *Il Corriere della Sera*, for example, talked about Lazzari as an abnormal person, and grouped him with the “inverts,” and *Il Messaggero* underlined that the youths Caucci paid for sex were the ones soliciting these mercenary relationships.⁶¹

For the press Caucci’s “repugnant and depraved case” revealed a world that many preferred to ignore, and forced the police to take action against unrestrained juvenile delinquency.⁶² Examining Caucci’s apartment the police found, among his documents, a long list with the names of about 300 young men. As a further analysis of the documentation seemed to suggest most of them had had multiple sexual encounters with him in the last two or three years. Deeply deploring Caucci, *l’Unità* argued bombastically that it was possible to imagine that he had “corrupted thousands of people.” But for the journalist the most disturbing aspect of such a story was discovering that among the 300 names there were not only criminals. Many of the youths regularly visiting Caucci’s practice had no criminal records. Most of them were sons of upright people, of honest workers. Some of them were young apprentices, many were unemployed, but many others were office workers and students. *L’Unità*, even if unable to give an answer, pushed its readers to reflect on why such youths ended up prostituting themselves for the few hundred lire that Caucci offered them. Ultimately Caucci’s murder exposed the economic and moral misery in which many young Romans were living. The new generation of the capital – but the newspaper seemed to make a larger argument about the entire nation – lived in complete abandonment, with an unacceptable level of schooling and literacy, victims of licentious magazines and movies.⁶³ The organ of the Communist party deployed this particular case to question the youth policies carried out by the ruling Christian Democrats and cautioned its readers about “the vortex of

⁶¹ See “Esaminate tutte le impronte dei dimessi dal riformatorio” and “Arrestato l’assassino del dott. Caucci che è un giovane.”

⁶² “L’assassino tradito da un foglio strappato,” *La Nuova Stampa*, September 4, 1952, 3.

⁶³ The misery of the Roman youths was also described in the reports sent from the Prefecture of Rome to the Ministry of Interior. See Prefect’s reports sent on March 31, 1950, April 30, 1950, March 1, 1951, April 30, 1951, March 3, 1952, September 1, 1952, ACS, Gab., FP, b. 213.

degeneration” looming over the Italian youths.⁶⁴ Once again the real problem the press emphasized was not the alleged spread of homosexuality per se, but the ways in which homosexuals tainted young Italians and hence the nation’s future.

The police discovered soon that Lazzari had not acted alone. On September 5, 1952 the name of the second killer was published: Fernando Lisandri. He hit Caucci’s head, bashed him violently, tied him down, and gagged him.⁶⁵ Lisandri and Lazzari had met working together in a carpenter’s shop in Trastevere. But, given that they did not earn enough money to satisfy their needs, as Lisandri explained, they had decided to resign and tap one of the men Lisandri had *met* before: Caucci. The young criminal considered the old doctor an ideal subject for blackmailing. He lived alone, he was weak, because of his age, he was wealthy, he would not be able to ask for the intervention of the police, and he particularly liked to spend time with young working-class men.⁶⁶ The newspapers, in spite of this rather explicit account, tried once again not to pay attention to the nature of the relationship between Caucci and Lisandri and tended to justify Lisandri’s behavior as a consequence of his troubled childhood. He was portrayed as some kind of post-war scum, as the end product of a miserable and disorderly family.⁶⁷ According to *Il Tempo* Lisandri and Lazzari were examples of “*gioventù abbandonata*” (deserted youth) who had fallen into the lap of depraved elders.⁶⁸ *Epoca* described them as “corrupted youths” that considered the “exploitation of abnormal men,”

⁶⁴ “Il delitto di Viale Gorizia scaturito da un torbido ambiente di corruzione,” *l’Unità*, September 4, 1952, 2.

⁶⁵ The Assize Court of Rome in 1954 condemned Salvatore Lazzari and Ferdinando Lisandri to 12 years, 5 months and 10 days of detention. To the two men was granted partial mental infirmity. As a consequence, after their detention, Lazzari and Lisandri were supposed to spend at least 3 years in a mental institution (“Dodici anni agli assassini del Caucci,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, February 20, 1954, 1). One year later the Court of Appeal excluded the mental infirmity and increased of one year the previous verdict (“Aggravata la condanna per gli uccisori di Caucci,” *l’Unità*, March 24, 1955, 4).

⁶⁶ See “Il torbido passato degli assassini del dottore,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, September 5, 1952, 1; “Il complice del Lazzari arrestato ieri fu l’esecutore principale dell’orrendo delitto,” *Il Paese*, September 5, 1952, 2 and Pepe, “Scoprirono nei giochi dei figli la vocazione al delitto,” 69.

⁶⁷ Lisandri grew up without his mother and, as Lazzari, spent part of his adolescence in a youth detention center. See “Furono due giovani ad uccidere e a rapinare il dottor Caucci,” *Il Tempo*, September 5, 1952, 2; “Colpo di scena nella indagini sul delitto di Viale Gorizia,” *Il Quotidiano*, September 5, 1952, 2. For the bad effects of war on these youths see “Il torbido passato degli assassini del dottore” and “Arrestato un altro giovane falegname che partecipò all’uccisione di Caucci,” *l’Unità*, September 5, 1952, 2.

⁶⁸ “I nostri figli. Gioventù abbandonata?,” *Il Tempo*, September 16, 1952, 1.

together with smuggling and petty theft, as an extremely easy way to earn money.⁶⁹ The press highlighted how the war had produced devastating effects on the new generations, and underscored that post-Fascist society seemed to be unable to educate or rescue them.⁷⁰

Widely-read magazines and newspapers, writing profusely about Rome as a new Sodom and as a city of “dreadful delights,” were playing into the hands of those they wanted to vilify. The articles written about Randi and Caucci, if read between the lines, presented the capital as a city where homosexuals could experience not only emotional kinship, but also sexual satisfaction. Ultimately, the media were at the same time agents of repression and resistance. They were condemning sexual perversion while publicizing it.⁷¹ They were teaching homosexuals that big cities – despite their dangerousness – could be sexual paradises, they were familiarizing an increasing number of readers with new concepts and new terms, and they were revealing that many Italian young men were walking the streets. Caucci’s murder not only attracted the attention of the media around homosexuals and homosexuality, but it also propelled the Italian police to begin a campaign against sexual perversion aimed at protecting Italian men of all ages from the allegedly pervasive homosexual menace.

Policing the Vice

On September 6, 1952 the Roman newspaper *Il Messaggero*, after having underscored that homosexual behavior was morally deplorable and socially dangerous, announced that the head of the Italian police, Giovanni D’Antoni, was about to issue precise instructions to

⁶⁹ Pepe, “Scoprirono nei giochi dei figli la vocazione al delitto,” 69.

⁷⁰ See “Il delitto di Viale Gorizia scaturito da un torbido ambiente di corruzione,” *l’Unità*, September 4, 1952, 2; “La prima fase dell’istruttoria sul delitto Caucci. Il Lisandri e il Lazzari a confronto a Regina Coeli,” *Il Quotidiano*, September 6, 1952, 2; Elvira Lusini, “Al di là dello steccato,” *l’Unità*, September 6, 1952, 2; “Un nuovo delitto,” *l’Unità*, September 22, 1952, 2. The dynamics of male prostitution as deviation from normative masculinity had been the main focus of an article written by Alberto Giordano, the director of the reformatory of Milan “Cesare Beccaria,” a few months before Caucci’s murder. Alberto Giordano, “Il valore criminogeno della prostituzione maschile nell’età evolutiva,” *La giustizia penale*, 1 (1951): 208-217.

⁷¹ For this see, for example, Justin Bengry, “Profit (f)or the Public Good?,” *Media History*, 20, no. 2 (2014): 146-166. For the role of media building a public discourse about same-sex practices and, thus, publicizing them, see also Harry G. Cocks, *Nameless Offenses. Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris&Co, 2003), 77-114.

contain them.⁷² The following day D'Antoni indeed sent a newsletter to Questori, Commissari and Prefects of Italy. The subject of the communication was clear: “*Omosessualità-repressione*” (Homosexuality-repression). In this document he explained that Caucci's homicide had drawn Italians' attention to “the disgusting homosexual phenomenon.” During the investigation, magistrates and detectives had verified that both victim and killers were “affected with sexual perversion” and that “Caucchi used to host in his apartment, for unmentionable aims, youths of every age and condition, hiding such activity behind his profession as a doctor.” Even if Italian law did not penalize homosexuality, D'Antoni continued, the police had to restrain, with every possible means at their disposal, a behavior that had caused many atrocious crimes in recent years. The police had to control the activities of homosexuals and monitor those areas in every city where the “perverts” met. The police had to carry out “a rigorous and incessant action to repress criminal displays of such deplorable perversion,” but it also had to intervene to repress homosexuality in “cleverly concealed” spaces.⁷³

In the weeks following D'Antoni's newsletter the press started reporting about roundups carried out by the police in Rome. *Il Messaggero* talked about an action fulfilled by a hundred agents on the night of September 16 in the gardens of Villa Borghese and on the Pincian Hill, two areas – as we saw also in the previous chapter – notoriously frequented by female prostitutes, hustlers, and homosexuals. Jeeps were stationed at the entrances of the Villa and squads of plainclothes agents wandered around searching for suspicious individuals. The policemen identified more than 200 suspects and held about 50 of them in custody.⁷⁴ *Il*

⁷² “Dopo il delitto di Viale Gorizia. Severe disposizioni del Capo della Polizia per arginare ogni forma di pervertimento,” *Il Messaggero*, September 6, 1952, 2.

⁷³ Newsletter of Giovanni d'Antoni to Italian Prefects and police commissioners, Rome, September 7, 1952, ACS, MI, Gab., 1950-1952, b. 6. The newspapers reporting the newsletter did not make any reference to the sexual perversion of Lazzari and Lisandri. See, for example, “Severe disposizioni del Capo della Polizia per arginare ogni forma di pervertimento,” *Il Messaggero*, September 12, 1952 and “Il ‘caso’ di cui si parla,” *Il Popolo*, September 12, 1952, both articles in ACS, MI, Gab., 1950-1952, b. 6.

⁷⁴ “Cinquanta persone fermate nel corso di un rastrellamento di polizia,” *Il Messaggero*, September 17, 1952, 2. See also “Un servizio fisso di Polizia a Villa Borghese e al Pincio,” *Il Messaggero*, September 18, 1952, 3; “Retata della Questura a Villa Borghese contro gli equivoci frequentatori notturni,” *Il Paese*, September 18, 1952, 2.

Paese explained that the Romans had greeted the initiative of the Questura with a sense of relief given the appalling crimes happening in the “underworld of the perverts.” For too long in the shadowy alleys and in the solitary corners “shady individuals ... [had] consummated their obscenities, without anyone intervening severely.” “Perverts” had turned Villa Borghese into a kind of obscene shelter where criminals could find hospitality. The Romans thought that it was time to take an initiative to clean the area once and for all of the immoral individuals who loitered there.⁷⁵

In the previous chapter I noted a certain resistance by the police in believing in the reports published by the press. Since the early 1950s the Italian authorities had been fighting against the “third sex” with more determination, but Caucci’s case was a pivotal turning point, as Bernardino Del Boca emphasized in his letters to *Der Kreis*.⁷⁶ Just nine days after D’Antoni’s newsletter, the Ministry sent an official communication to Prefects and Questori all over Italy. Every month the Prefectures had to send a report on the political and economic situation in their provinces, and about public security. From September 1952 on they were asked not only to report about the activities carried out by the local police to prevent and repress displays of “sexual perversion” – that is homosexuality, but also to highlight results obtained in the fight against this phenomenon.⁷⁷ Looking at the reports of the Italian Prefects in 1952 it is possible to notice how most of them did not mention homosexuality.⁷⁸ However, there were also some Prefects who talked about such “vice” in their reports. Although, most

⁷⁵ “Proseguono a Villa Borghese i rastrellamenti della Questura. In difesa della morale e del buon costume,” *Il Paese*, September 25, 1952, 2.

⁷⁶ See, for example, phonogram of the Questura of Rome to the Cabinet of the Ministry of Interior, December 27, 1950 and note of Saverio Polito to the Cabinet of the Minister of Interior, January 8, 1951 ACS, MI, Gab., 1950-1952, b. 6, Roma Atti osceni-Vittoriano. See, for example, Del Boca’s letters to Welty on October 7, 1952 and October 26, 1952, SAZ, Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.3.

⁷⁷ Newsletter of the General Director of Public Safety, September 16, 1952 to the local representative of the Minister of Interior, ACS, DGPS, DAR, 1951-1953, b. 13.

⁷⁸ Prefects’ reports sent in 1952 to the Minister of Interior from the provinces of Alessandria, Ancona, Arezzo, Ascoli Piceno, Asti (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 204), Avellino, Bari, Belluno, Benevento, Bergamo, Bologna, Brindisi, Cagliari (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 205), Caltanissetta, Caserta, Catania, Catanzaro, Chieti, Como, Cosenza (ACS, GAB, FP, b. 206), Cuneo, Enna, Firenze, Foggia (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 207), Frosinone, Genova, Grosseto, Gorizia (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 208), Imperia, Latina, Lecce, Lucca, Macerata, Mantova (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 209), Massa Carrara, Matera, Messina, Milano, Napoli, Nuoro, Padova, Parma, Palermo, Pavia (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 211), Perugia, Pesaro Urbino, Pescara, Piacenza (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 212), Pisa, Pistoia, Potenza, Ragusa, Ravenna (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 212bis), Reggio Calabria, Rieti, Rovigo (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 213), Salerno, Sassari, Savona, Siena, Siracusa (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 213bis), La Spezia, Sondrio, Taranto, Teramo, Terni (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 214), Varese, Vicenza, Viterbo (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 215).

of the time, they just acknowledged that public security was under control, there were no cases of homosexuality, and “appropriate measures of surveillance [had] been arranged in order to prevent and repress displays of sexual perversion.”⁷⁹ Sometimes Prefects hinted at the arrest of some “sexual perverts,” other times they were more explicit.⁸⁰ In a report from Cremona we read, for example, that measures had been adopted “to prevent and repress crimes related to repugnant homosexuality” and that “with patient and discreet inspections” the police had identified about “80 sexual perverts” and pressed charges against three men for blackmailing homosexuals.⁸¹ The Prefect of Forlì explained that, in reference to recent ministerial orders about the repression of homosexuality, measures of prevention and repression against sexual “perverts” had been intensified in the entire province. As a consequence, the police had identified twenty-five “pederasts” and put them under constant monitoring “to avoid scandals and immorality.”⁸² However, we also need to note how the Prefects’ reports seemed to be rather patchy. The Prefect of Rome, for example, did not mention homosexuality in his reports but, thanks to a few communications sent from the Roman Questore to the Ministry of Interior (and thanks to the press), we know that the repression of sexual perversion was operative in parks, around the Coliseum, and in the area of Trinità dei Monti.⁸³

⁷⁹ See the report of the Prefect sent from L’Aquila on September 26, 1952 and on October 27, 1952, ACS, Gab., FP, b. 204. See also report of the Prefect sent from Campobasso on November 27, 1952 (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 206), reports of the Prefect sent from Forlì on November 30, 1952 and on January 1, 1953 (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 207), reports of the Prefect from Modena on December 31, 1952, October 31, 1952, and September 30, 1952 and report of the Prefect from Novara on September 30, 1952 (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 211), report of the Prefect from Treviso on October 29, 1952 and reports of the Prefect from Trapani on October 3, 1952, November 5, 1952, December 5, 1952, January 5, 1953 (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 214), report of the Prefect from Udine on October 4, 1952, reports of the Prefect from Vercelli sent on September 30, 1952, October 27, 1952 and November 27, 1952 (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 215), report sent from the Region Trentino Alto-Adige on November 26, 1952 and on December 26, 1952 (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 222).

⁸⁰ Report of the Prefect of Brescia on October 2, 1952, ACS, Gab., FP, b. 205. See also report of the Prefect of Livorno of November 6, 1952 (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 209), report of the Prefect of Venice of September 29, 1952, report of the Prefect of Verona of September 27, 1952 (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 215), and report of the representative of the Region Trentino Alto-Adige of October 26, 1952 (ACS, Gab., FP, b. 222).

⁸¹ Report of the Prefect of Cremona sent on October 31, 1952, ACS, Gab., FP, b. 207.

⁸² Report of the Prefect of Forlì sent on September 30, 1952, ACS, Gab., FP, b. 207.

⁸³ See report of the Questore of Rome of October 10, 1952 sent to the Ministry of Interior, ACS, MI, Gab., 1953-1956, b. 67; communication of the Questura of Rome to the Ministry of Interior, January 10, 1953, ACS, MI, Gab., 1953-1956, b. 67 and note of the head of police to the Questore April 11, 1953, ACS, DGPS, DAR, 1951-1953, b. 13.

In addition to media and state organs, Catholic associations – closely tied to the Democrazia Cristiana – were part of the repressive apparatus. Catholic Action was against the excessive clamor around homosexuality in the media, but was committed to opposing it through repression, education, and monitoring inside the organization itself.⁸⁴ Already before the anti-homosexual frenzy occasioned by Caucci's murder, the local Secretariats of Morality of this association were talking about the necessity of watching over "pederasts" and taking action against them.⁸⁵ But only on September 24, 1952 did the Moral Secretariat of the Catholic Action issue a newsletter about the collaboration of the association with the local authorities to repress the "homosexual vice." In this note Gino Gavuzzo, national secretary for morality of AC, explained that "inversion" was not rare, and criminal law did not punish it, unless it resulted in obscene behaviors committed in a public place or unless minors were involved. However, Gavuzzo underlined, it was appropriate for members of the Catholic Action to monitor and inform the police in case they noticed signs of "moral disorders." The national secretary also emphasized that it would be useful if the provincial offices could send monthly reports to the Central Secretariat about this "repugnant phenomenon."⁸⁶

For the Christian Democrat Senator Vincenzo Menghi initiatives such as the guidelines dictated by the head of the police D'Antoni or by the Catholic Action were inadequate to repress homosexuality. In his opinion "injunctions, admonitions, police surveillance, temporary detentions, denunciations and custody in correctional facilities – which worsen[ed] rather than correct the evil" were not enough. It was necessary to isolate the "tarati" (abnormal individuals) and, if incurable, detain them in collective labor colonies.⁸⁷

L'Unità explained that Menghi's proposal had been probably inspired by an article, published

⁸⁴ See, for example, report from the Roman Diocese n. 186, September 15, 1952, ISACEM, PG, Serie XII, SM, R, b. 17.

⁸⁵ See notes from the Secretariat Morality, Venice, June 19, 1951 and June 20, 1951, ISACEM, PG, Serie XII, SM, CS, 1951, b. 33. Report from the Roman Diocese n. 174, March 15, 1952, ISACEM, PG, Serie XII, SM, R, b. 17.

⁸⁶ Newletters n. 49 of Gino Gavuzzo, Rome September 24, 1952, General Presidency of the Catholic Action, Secretariat of Morality, Collaborazione alla repressione del vizio omosessuale, ISACEM, PG, Serie XII, SM, R, b. 2. See also, for example, the letter of the diocesan board of Brescia (Moral Secretariat) sent to the General Presidency of the Catholic Action (Moral Secretariat), Brescia, November 14, 1952, ISACEM, PG, Serie XII, SM, Corrispondenza con diocesi e regioni 1936-1970, Lombardia (Brescia), b. 54.

⁸⁷ Menghi's interrogation, October 2, 1952, ACS, MI, Gab., 1950-1952, b. 6.

a few days before by Alberto Giovannini on *Il Tempo*. As the organ of the Communist party underscored, Giovannini had indeed suggested the reinstatement of concentration and forced labor camps for so-called “perverts.” *L’Unità* underlined that such an initiative would have turned the “inverts” into martyrs. Furthermore, the main problem at issue, according to the journalist, was “not pederasty, but youth delinquency.”⁸⁸ A couple of days later, on September 14, 1952, Giovannini returned to the fray arguing that “sexual inversion” was not always congenital and that it could also be acquired. It was a contagious disease, and it was necessary to isolate “infected” men. Compared by Giovannini to lepers, homosexuals had to be institutionalized because they were dangerous instruments of juvenile moral corruption. “Inversion,” according to the journalist, was rampant and the Italian state had to take all possible measures to guarantee its future.⁸⁹ All these documents restated that the “salvation” of the youths was the real concern. Homosexuals were mere carriers of a *disease* that had to be isolated to avoid further *contamination*.

One week after Giovannini’s second intervention, on September 21, 1952, *Crimen* released an investigative report about men killed by *marchette* between the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s.⁹⁰ The article compared “sexual inversion” to cancer and accused homosexuals of poisoning the youths, and turning them into criminals. Salvatore Palazzolo announced proudly that the Italian police had launched a war against the “*terzo sesso*” (third sex), trying to break off the covert business of the “inverts” and their exploiters. Male prostitutes were never called as such in the article. They were “*scellerat[i]*” (scum), men longing for easy profit, delinquents, blackmailers with no scruples, and lost youths. But they were not homosexual. The words *invertito* and *pervertito* were attributed, as synonyms, only to clients. The article underlined how it would be possible to point out on a map of Rome several neighborhoods and public gardens where the “youth market” was taking place.

⁸⁸ “La legge del Menghi,” *L’Unità*, September 12, 1952, 2.

⁸⁹ Alberto Giovannini, “Gli angeli del sesso,” *Il Tempo*, September 14, 1952, 1.

⁹⁰ Salvatore Palazzolo, “Le giungle proibite sono il cancro delle grandi città,” *Crimen*, September 22, 1952, 8-10.

Passaggiata Archeologica, Trinità dei Monti, and Villa Borghese had become jungles that the police needed to clean up. In order to contain the damage produced by the presence of “inverts,” the magazine supported Menghi’s idea of isolating them. The segregation of the “inverts” would end blackmailing and homicides, and would keep them away from youths. Accusing the “*invertiti*” of favoring the criminal behaviors of others and asking for a tightening up of the anti-homosexual measures, *Crimen* was in perfect line with the repressive activities sponsored by the police.⁹¹

Menghi turned his vague proposal into an urgent and formal parliamentary interrogation to the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Justice, and to the high commissioner for hygiene and public health. However, his request for a more severe response to homosexuality was rejected.⁹² On November 19, 1952, during a parliamentary session, the undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Teodoro Bubbio, explained that “sexual perversion was not criminally relevant as such” but that “perverts” could be prosecuted only if their sexual activities resulted in homicide, sexual violence, indecent acts, corruption of minors, etc. The government would not support the idea of opening concentration camps for the re-education of homosexuals.⁹³ The Minister decided to keep fighting homosexuality making use of existing legislation. However, it is relevant to note how the text Bubbio presented in the Parliament was different from the one initially drafted by the head of the Police. Reading D’Antoni’s original answer to Menghi’s interrogation, we see not only that he believed in the necessity of soon drafting a law aimed at regulating the re-education and the isolation of “perverts,” but he was also convinced, using a typical Cold War argument, that such law was necessary to protect the nation from potential external enemies. He wrote in his draft that Italy urgently needed “appropriate legislative measures” that could allow the police “to control the

⁹¹ Palazzolo, “Le giungle proibite,” 9-10.

⁹² Menghi’s interrogation, ACS, MI, Gab., 1950-1952, b. 6.

⁹³ Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior, Teodoro Bubbio, Brief Report, 893-894, Wednesday November 19, 1952, Morning Session, Senate, ACS, MI, Gab., 1950-1952, b. 6.

multifaceted activity of the inverts, who, pushed by their peculiar psychological complexion to hang out ... with elements of every possible condition, nation, and race, lacking any feeling of honor or any sense of fatherland, represent[ed] a serious danger for national security.”⁹⁴

Looking at this document it is evident that anti-homosexual attitudes emerging in Italy in the early 1950s did not depend only on domestic factors. The representation of homosexuals as “a serious danger for national security” resembled the characterization of homosexuals as “security risks” in Cold War America.⁹⁵ Homosexuals seemed to pose a threat not only to the youths but also to the young democracies emerging after the conflict. D’Antoni’s original answer to Menghi’s interrogation echoed an anti-homosexual prejudice that was gaining currency on an international scale and that had in the US a fundamental promoter.⁹⁶ It is not clear if Western allies deeply shared American beliefs about the subversive dangerousness of homosexuals, but they seemed to fear that the presence of sexual “perverts” in their secret agencies could jeopardize their relationship with American intelligence officials. The anti-homosexual policies and procedures of the US State Department ended up offering a model for NATO members.⁹⁷ Moreover, in June 1952 homosexuality, together with other sexual offences, was an item on the agenda at the 21st General Assembly of the *Commission internationale de police criminelle* held in Stockholm. On that occasion members of national police forces, ministerial managers, and academics

⁹⁴ Head of the police to the Cabinet of the Ministry of Interior, October 4, 1952, Menghi’s Interrogation, ACS, MI, Gab., 1950-1952, b. 6.

⁹⁵ The battle against the “queers,” paired with – but distinct from – anti-communist McCarthyism, begun under Truman and intensified under the Eisenhower administration. See Weeks, *Coming out*; D’Emilio, “Homosexual Menace,” 57-73; Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*; Geoffrey S. Smith, “National Security and Personal Isolation: Sex, Gender, and Disease in the Cold-War United States,” *The International History Review* 14, no. 2 (1992): 307-337; Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*; Miller, *Sex Crime Panic*; Johnson, *Lavender Scare*; Charles, *Hoover’s War on Gays*.

⁹⁶ It is worth highlighting that in 1952 the American Psychiatric Association issued its first official catalog of mental disorders (DSM-1) and listed homosexuality prominently among the sociopathic personality disturbances. At this time the terms homosexual, pervert, sexual deviate, pedophile, sex criminal, sex offender and sexual psychopath were overlapped and used interchangeably. See Miller, *Sex Crime Panic*, 108-110; Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 258-259.

⁹⁷ Johnson, *Lavender Scare*, 133-134. For the “Lavender Scare” in allied countries see also Weeks, *Coming out*, 159; Garry Wotherspoon, “‘The Greatest Menace Facing Australia’: Homosexuality and the State in NSW During the Cold War,” *Labour History*, 56 (1989): 15-28; Daniel J. Robinson, David Kimmel, “The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (1994): 319-345; Gary Kinsman, “‘Character Weaknesses’ and ‘Fruit Machines’: Towards an Analysis of the Anti-Homosexual Security Campaign in the Canadian Civil Service,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 35 (1995): 133-161; Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, 185-186; Bengry, “Profit (f)or the Public Good?,” 155-156.

talked about homosexuality, sexual violence, and pedophilia – all categorized under the umbrella concept of “sexual crimes” – and underscored the necessity of preventing such practices in their own states.⁹⁸ The threat against the new generations emerged also at this meeting of the Interpol as the main reason to contain the spread of homosexuality.⁹⁹

(Homo)sexual Education for the Masses

Historians have talked about the relationship between press, state power, and homosexuality in the 1950s. What they posit about other geographical contexts can also be applied to the Italian case. The press, as seen so far, was generally an intolerant antagonist of homosexual men who were identified as a social threat and as a source of moral contamination that needed to be contained and eradicated. The press drew lines between what was “normal” and what was “abnormal,” and shaped notions of the homosexual as a “type.” Crimes and murders contributed to the creation of homosexuality as a public issue, attracted government concerns, and ultimately, magnifying “deviance,” favored anti-homosexual state policies.¹⁰⁰

Homosexual crimes favored the circulation of new types of knowledge about sexuality and allowed “normal” Italians to look at, talk about, judge, and condemn men desiring other men. Moral crusaders, blaming and shaming “*deviant*” sexualities, and provoking public indignation against them, nurtured and publicized “sexual deviance.”

Media generated sexual moral panics, favored the outbreaks of anti-homosexual witch-hunts, and allowed those *witches* to understand that they were not lonely monads but

⁹⁸ See Johnson, *Lavander Scare*, 131-134; Dario Petrosino, *La repressione dell'omosessualità nell'Italia repubblicana e nei paesi del Patto Atlantico. Da uno studio sulla documentazione conservata presso l'Archivio centrale dello Stato*, http://www.storiaefuturo.com/it/numero_10/laboratorio/5_repressione-omosessualita-italia-repubblicana--patto-atlantico~168.html; Id., “Il comune senso del pudore. La repressione dell'omosessualità nell'Italia repubblicana (1947-1981),” *Tribadi, sodomiti, invertite e invertiti, pederasti, femminelle, ermafroditi ... per una storia dell'omosessualità, della bisessualità e delle trasgressioni di genere in Italia*, Umberto Grassi, Vincenzo Lagioia, Gian Paolo Romagnani eds. (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2017), 219-228.

⁹⁹ Special issue “XXI Assemblee Generale de la Commission International de Police Criminelle. Stockholm. 9 au 12 Juin,” *Revue Internationale de Police Criminelle: Organe Officiel de la Commission Internationale De Police Criminelle*, 217-218.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Brickell, “Moral Panic or Critical Mass,” 97-99; Oram, “Love ‘Off the Rails’ or ‘Over the Teacups’?,” 43; Justin Bengry, “Queer Profits: Homosexual Scandal and the Origins of Legal Reform in Britain,” in *Queer 1950s*, 167-169, 178.

part of wider burgeoning communities.¹⁰¹ As John D’Emilio underlined with regard to the US, the political and moral conservatives marshalling the resources of the state and the media against homosexuals unwittingly helped them weld together, and fostered their collective consciousness.¹⁰² The popular press talked about social decay in reference to homosexuality, invoked – successfully – the intervention of the police, and it also stimulated the emergence of forms of resistance.¹⁰³ Regulatory discourses not only catalyzed the production of scientific and humanitarian ones, but they also pushed homosexuals to speak for themselves. And, in the process, the narrative of vicious homosexuals corrupting Italian youths was challenged.

Between 1950 and 1953, while homosexuals were experiencing a rather negative moment in popular media and official repression against them was intensifying, some brave publishers decided to put into print a series of new periodicals aimed at popularizing sexual knowledge: *Scienza e vita sessuale* (Science and Sexual Life, 1950) – renamed in July 1950 *Scienza e sessualità* (Science and Sexuality, 1950-1953), *Problemi sessuali* (Sexual Issues, 1951-1953), and *Sesso e libertà* (Sex and Freedom, 1953).¹⁰⁴ Such magazines had to face endless resistance. *Scienza e sessualità*, *Problemi sessuali*, and *Sesso e libertà*, sold at an affordable price in book shops and newsstands, were written in clear prose, and had among their collaborators legal and medical experts willing to answer readers’ questions about sex and sexual practices. In this way many Italians could understand the complexity of human sexualities in all its “normative” and “non-normative” facets.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ For “moral panic” see Chapter 1, Footnote 89. For the importance of sensationalism in making homosexuality and homosexuals more visible and intelligible see Weeks, *Coming out*, 162-163; Chris Waters, “Disorders of the Mind, Disorders of the Body Social: Peter Wildeblood and the Making of the Modern Homosexual,” in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945–1964*, eds. Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1998), 139-140; Brickell, “Moral Panic or Critical Mass,” 110; Oram, “Love ‘Off the Rails’ or ‘Over the Teacups’?,” 43, 53; Bengry, “Queer Profits,” 169; Morris Kaplan, *Sodom on the Thames: Sex, Love, and Scandal in Wilde Times* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 263.

¹⁰² D’Emilio, “Homosexual Menace,” 237.

¹⁰³ Bengry, “Queer Profits,” 179.

¹⁰⁴ The periodical *Scienza e vita sessuale* changed name, as requested by the Società Edizioni Mondiali Scientifiche of Rome, because according to this publisher the title *Scienza e vita sessuale* was too similar to one of their publications: *Scienza e vita*. See *Scienza e vita sessuale* 1, no. 4 (1950): 2.

¹⁰⁵ “Consultorio sessuale medico per i lettori,” *Scienza e vita sessuale* 1, no. 1 (1950): 95-96; “Consultorio sessuale medico per lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 1, no. 10 (1950): 94-96; “Commiato” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 11-12 (1953): 3.

Scienza e sessualità and *Problemi sessuali* were more medically oriented, whereas *Sesso e libertà* was focused on the social and human dimension of sexuality.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, while *Scienza e sessualità* and *Problemi sessuali* also published rather conservative statements, *Sesso e libertà* was more progressive.¹⁰⁷ So progressive that it was forced to stop its publication after only one year.¹⁰⁸ Reading the programmatic article published by the editorial board of *Sesso e libertà* it is possible to understand how it clashed with 1950s “official moralism.” The periodical promised to fight for: 1) sexual equality and female sexual emancipation, 2) protection and socio-medical assistance of sexually “abnormal” individuals, 3) reform of the matrimonial institution, 4) divorce, 5) universal sexual education, 6) emancipation from sexual taboos and prejudices, and 7) full respect for every sexual act. In particular the editorial board underlined that *Sesso e libertà* believed that everyone had a right to sexual freedom, and to choose how to use their bodies for sexual purposes. No one had “to be harassed, persecuted or condemned for having practiced sexual acts or activities of any kind, as long as they did not entail violence, constraint or fraud” and as long as they did not harm others.¹⁰⁹ According to *Sesso e libertà* it was time to put an end to the “dictatorship of sex” imposed by the majority on sexual minorities.¹¹⁰ In 1953, the last year of publication of *Scienza e sessualità*, *Problemi sessuali*, and *Sesso e libertà*, the magazine *Ulisse* sent to press a monographic volume entitled *L’omosessualità e la società moderna* (Homosexuality and Modern Society) in which different authors, with different scientific backgrounds and

¹⁰⁶ *Scienza e sessualità* and *Sesso e Libertà* were meant to work together for the sexual emancipation of the Italians. Since April 1953 an agreement between these two periodicals established that *Scienza e sessualità* would focus on the medical and psychic spheres, whereas *Sesso e Libertà* would deal with sexuality from a human and social perspective (“Una rivista consorella,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 4 [1953]: 294). When in 1953 *Scienza e sessualità* ceased its publications its most important collaborators were supposed to continue working for *Sesso e Libertà* (“Commiato” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 11-12 (1953): 3). However, in the same year also *Sesso e Libertà* interrupted its activity.

¹⁰⁷ *Problemi sessuali*, for example, argued against the Merlin Law. See “Piangerà in cocodrillo,” *Problemi sessuali* 2, no. 4 (1952): 11-18; “La legge Merlin vista da un dermatologo,” *Problemi sessuali* 2, no. 5 (1952): 9-11; Gianni Alfero, “Legislazione sanitaria e prostituzionale,” *Problemi sessuali* 2, no. 5 (1952): 41-48.

¹⁰⁸ Petrosino, “Crisi della virilità,” 323-326. See for example an order of sequestration issued by the Public Prosecutor of Milan issued in May 1953 against both *Scienza e sessualità* and *Sesso e libertà*, Letter of the Presidenza del Consiglio to the Cabinet of the Ministry of Interior, May 30, 1953, ACS, MI, Gab., 1953/1956, b. 400.

¹⁰⁹ “Perché questa nuova rivista?” *Sesso e libertà* 1, no. 1 (1953): 3-4.

¹¹⁰ T.N. and A.S., “Vi parlano due invertiti,” *Sesso e libertà* 1, no. 2-3 (1953): 75-78.

different perspectives, expressed their ideas about same-sex sexuality.¹¹¹ In early 1950s Italy these three brave periodicals and *Ulisse*'s monographic volume were important attempts to popularize new ways of understanding and conceptualizing same-sex sexualities. These publications moved away from the accusatory arguments against homosexuals made by the Italian police and by the Italian popular press.¹¹²

Reading these publications it becomes evident that understanding why some people had same-sex desires was a burning question for many Italians.¹¹³ The experts writing for *Scienza e sessualità* and *Problemi sessuali* talked about homosexuality as a disease, and denied it should be considered a vice.¹¹⁴ They explained that it was a consequence of endocrine dysfunctions and psychological traumas that could be more or less successfully cured through hormonal therapy, psychological therapy, or a combination of the two.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ The monographic issue of *Ulisse* included the following essays: Stefano Somogyi, "Il fenomeno della omosessualità secondo le indagini statistiche," 631-639; Gilbert Dreyfus, "L'omosessualità vista da un medico," 640-645; Tullio Bazzi, "L'Omossessualità e la Psicoterapia," 646-656; Gian Franco Tedeschi, "L'omosessualità e la psicanalisi," 657-665; Emilio Servadio, "Recenti vedute psicoanalitiche sulla genesi dell'omosessualità," 666-670; Salvatore Messina, "L'omosessualità nel diritto penale," 671-676; Giuseppe Sotgiu, "L'omosessualità non è reato," 677-679; Pietro Agostino D'Avack, "L'omosessualità nel diritto canonico," 680-697; Carlo Diano, "L'Eros Greco," 698-708; Enrico Fulchignoni, "L'omosessualità nelle donne," 709-717; Luigi Volpicelli, "La scuola e l'omosessualità," 718-730; Eurialo De Michelis, "L'omosessualità vista da un moralista," 731-734. See "L'omosessualità e la società moderna," *Ulisse* 8, (1953).

¹¹² Another scientific work published in the early 1950s was Ettore Mariotti's *La Neofilia* (1952) a book about love among male adolescents. Mariotti, untenured professor of dermatology and venereal diseases at the University of Naples, was able to print 1,100 copies of his work. The monograph was not significant in terms of distribution but it was another example of how in the early 1950s there was a desire to talk about and understand same-sex sexuality. *La Neofilia* was accused of obscenity and sequestered. On January 20, 1953 the Criminal Court of Rome acquitted Mariotti because, even if the book contained "obscene and repugnant passages," and even if the author's thesis was "repugnant," the work had to be considered scientific and thus not indictable (ISACEM, PG, SM, b. 11). The public prosecutor appealed and this time the Court (October 13, 1953) did not recognize the scientific value of the work and deemed it obscene (ISACEM, PG, SM, b. 11). The *Cassazione* rejected Mariotti's final appeal (May 18, 1954) and confirmed the sentence against him. The judges denied its scientific relevance (ISACEM, PG, SM, b. 12).

¹¹³ In 1949 Antonio Gandin specified several potential causes such as "atavism," "bisexuality," "autoerotism," physiological and psychological anomalies, environmental pressures (boarding schools, prisons, barracks), and vice. Antonio Gandin, *L'amore omosessuale, maschile e femminile. Male, cause, rimedi* (Milano: Fratelli Bocca, 1949), 111-189.

¹¹⁴ As Clayton J. Whisnant underlines the idea of homosexuality as illness has become more and more widely accepted in Germany, UK and US displacing gender deviation as the dominant representation of same-sex desire. Whisnant, *Male Homosexuality*, 36-50. Already in 1949 Antonio Gandin in his book about the "homosexual love" had underlined that homosexuality was not a vice but a disease (Gandin, *L'amore omosessuale*, 23).

¹¹⁵ To have a sense of the array of hypotheses and interpretations presented in *Scienza e sessualità* see: "Consultorio Sessuale Medico per i lettori," *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 5 (1951): 88-89; "Vi parla di Dr. Argos. Il problema dell'omosessualità," *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 7 (1951): 78-80; "Ai vostri quesiti il direttore risponde," *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 8 (1951): inside back cover; "Consultorio Medico-Sessuale per i lettori. Consultorio del Dottor Argos," *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 9 (1951): 88; "Consultorio Medico-Sessuale per i lettori. Consultorio del Dottor C. Serra," *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 9 (1951): 90-91; "Risponde il direttore," *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 1 (1952): 96; "Consultorio Medico," *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 12 (1952): 1142-1143; "Consultorio medico," *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 4 (1953): 382; "Consultorio Medico-sessuale per i lettori," *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 5 (1953): 482-484; "Rispondiamo ai lettori," *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 6 (1953): 492; "Consultorio Medico-sessuale per i lettori," *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 8 (1953): 766-767; "Consultorio Medico-sessuale per i lettori," *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 10 (1953): 86. See also some articles talking about potential cures: Gino Olivari, "Infantilismo psichico e omosessualità maschile," *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 8 (1951): 11-13; Gino Olivari, "Rieducazione degli omosessuali," *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 12 (1951): 30-35; Vincenzo Galvani, "Omossessualità e naturismo," *Scienza e*

However, even if most publications talked about homosexuality as a “third sex,” *Scienza e sessualità* also published excerpts from Kinsey’s report that timidly questioned the clear-cut distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality.¹¹⁶ In *Ulisse*’s monographic volume Gilbert Dreyfus, professor of Medicine at the University of Paris, and Tullio Bazzi, Professor of Neuropsychiatry at the University of Rome, underlined that it was necessary to talk about homosexualities, and not homosexuality, because such “anomalies” were caused by many different factors (external or internal), and could take many different forms.¹¹⁷

Particularly important in *Scienza e sessualità* were the correspondence columns because they allowed a dialogue between readers and experts.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, given that the periodical did not publish the letters received but only the answers, it is not possible to fully reconstruct the stories of people searching for help. In their answers the experts – the director of the periodical Augusto Pepe and two doctors Dr. Argos and Dr. Serra – were often dismissive and questioned feelings, emotions, and experiences of their readers.¹¹⁹ Pepe even invited homosexuals, “unfortunately” condemned to live “in such a special condition,” to remain “in the shadow, without displaying their way of being.” Their ostentatious behaviors

sessualità 4, no. 1 (1953): 35-37. See also some articles published in *Problemi sessuali*: Elio Berti, “L’omosessualità,” *Problemi sessuali* 2, no. 4 (1952): 57; “Legge Merlin vista da un dermatologo,” *Problemi sessuali* 2, no. 5 (1952): 11; “Come si riconoscono i pederasti,” *Problemi sessuali* 2, no. 7 (1952): 20-30; Consultorio,” *Problemi sessuali* 2, no. 9 (1952): 90-91.

¹¹⁶ “L’omosessualità in America,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 3 (1951): 8. See also “Dal Rapporto Kinsey. Sviluppo e attività sessuali precoci,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 7 (1951): 57-73.

¹¹⁷ Dreyfus talked about two main subcategories: “artificial homosexualities” caused by external circumstances (boarding schools, prisons, detention camps, and military service), and *real* “physio-pathological homosexualities” caused by psychological traumas, hormonal anomalies, or a combination of the two. Dreyfus argued that all these homosexualities could be generally treated and cured. Dreyfus, “L’omosessualità vista da un medico,” 640-645. According to Bazzi it was not possible to say for sure if homosexuality was congenital or acquired. But it was possible to notice the existence of a multiplicity of homosexualities: some homosexuals were hypersexualized, others avoided intimacy and sex, and yet others had sexual desires not clearly classifiable in terms of homosexuality or heterosexuality. Bazzi, “L’omosessualità e la psicoterapia,” 646-649. For an analysis of multiple forms of same-sex sexualities see also Gandin, *L’amore omosessuale*, 26-65. Also according to Giorgio Punzo, who published in 1954 a piece about the necessity of overcoming traditional sexological frameworks, homosexuality should be seen in all its multiple facets: the homosexuals could not be united under one single category. See Giorgio Punzo, “Critica e superamento del concetto di ‘omosessualità,’” *Quaderni di libera analisi*, 1 (1954): 14-85.

¹¹⁸ It is relevant to notice how some homosexuals were already writing letters to homophile organizations abroad in order to receive help and support. See letters in SAZ, Ar. 36.38.3, NW, 1.3.1.2.; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.3.3.; Ar. 36.38.3, NW, 1.3.2.5.; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.3.7.; Ar. 36.38.8, NW, 1.4.3.8.; Ar. 36.38.8, NW, 1.4.3.9.; Ar. 36.38.8.

¹¹⁹ “Consultorio Medico-Sessuale per i lettori. Consultorio del Dottor Argos,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no.1 (1952): 89; “Consultorio del Dottor Argos,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 5 (1952): 471.

could irritate “the sensitivity of the normal” and cause “unpleasant reactions.”¹²⁰ Dr. Argos could be kind at times, writing that the “sorrowful letters” he received from youths and adults describing “painful and dramatic stories” did not deserve “coldly technical answers, but human comfort.”¹²¹ However, he was also able to be rather vicious with his correspondents. Answering a letter sent in April 1952, for example, he wrote: “There is no doubt that you suffer from homosexuality. And, I have to admit, from a kind of homosexuality it is very hard to recover from. It is fascinating that you are happy only at Carnival when you are free to dress like a woman. Maybe it would be advisable to move to Scotland so that you can wear skirts.”¹²²

One of the most prolific collaborators of *Scienza e sessualità* and *Problemi sessuali* was the engineer Gino Olivari. He had become an advocate of the human rights of homosexuals in 1950 after having read the story of two young men who had committed suicide in a small hotel in Rome because of their “unspeakable love.”¹²³ Their death made him realize that it was essential to look at homosexuality from a humanitarian perspective.¹²⁴ We cannot deny that in some of his writings Olivari described homosexuals as damaged and as intrinsically defective individuals who could bequeath their flaws to their offspring.¹²⁵ However, he also used compassion to talk about them, and invited everyone to listen to their words and their sufferings.¹²⁶ Olivari hoped that at some point these men and women would recover from their “abnormal sexuality,” but he also hoped that everyone would understand the interior drama and the agony of many homosexuals who were alone, unable to understand

¹²⁰ “Ai vostri quesiti il direttore risponde,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 1 (1951): inside front cover and inside back cover. For the necessity of avoiding “intentionally flashy behaviors” see also Guido Montanari, “L’omosessualità maschile e femminile,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 9 (1952): 777-782 and Piero e Daniela, “Il problema dell’omosessualità,” *Sesso e libertà* 1, no. 7 (1953): 77-79.

¹²¹ “Vi parla di Dr. Argos. Il problema dell’omosessualità,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 7 (1951): 78.

¹²² “Consultorio del Dottor Argos,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 4 (1952): 376.

¹²³ For this case see “Ferisce a morte l’amico con una revolverata e si toglie quindi la vita sparandosi al petto,” *Il Messaggero*, June 27, 1950, 2.

¹²⁴ Gino Olivari, “Incomprensione. Il problema dell’omosessualità,” *Problemi sessuali* 3, no. 2 (1953): 6.

¹²⁵ See Gino Olivari, “Il problema dell’omosessualità,” *Problemi sessuali* 2, no. 8 (1952): 9 and O.G. “L’omosessualità: vizio o malattia?” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 3 (1953): 249.

¹²⁶ Olivari, “Incomprensione,” 15-16. Olivari can remind us of the argument made about Richard von Kraft-Ebing by Harry Oosterhuis in *Stepchildren of Nature: Kraft-Ebing, Psychiatry and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

themselves, and live their “abnormal libido.”¹²⁷ Homosexuals were not responsible for their condition and, as every human being, they had a right to satisfy their natural sexual desires. It was inhumane to chase and denigrate them for living according to their natural disposition.¹²⁸ Homosexuals, Olivari recognized, felt and loved “in a way different from the norm” but they were also able to be “moral, reserved, generous and humane, as much as the so-called normal individuals.” Of course there were “depraved and immoral homosexuals” but it was necessary to avoid inconsiderate generalizations blaming an entire category of people for mistakes made by a few.¹²⁹ Olivari thought that the goal of periodicals such as *Scienza e sessualità*, *Problemi sessuali*, and *Sesso e libertà* was to educate public opinion, make it realize that every human being deserved respect, and create a dialogue between “normal” and “abnormal” people.¹³⁰

Scienza e sessualità, despite the publication of some rather unsympathetic and insensitive articles about same-sex sexuality, not only introduced – at the end of 1952 – a section where it was possible for men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, to search for pen pals, but it also allowed its readers to gain knowledge about the organization of important initiatives in favor of homosexuality, such as the conferences of the International Committee for Sexual Equality (ICSE), the first worldwide homosexual association of the postwar era, established by the homosexual Dutch Center for Culture and Recreation.¹³¹ Furthermore,

¹²⁷ See Gino Olivari, “Infantilismo psichico e omosessualità maschile,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 8 (1951): 11-13; Id., “Rieducazione degli omosessuali,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 12 (1951): 30-35

¹²⁸ Olivari, “Il problema dell’omosessualità,” 8-9. See also Olivari, “Incomprensione,” 8-9.

¹²⁹ For this point see also Piero e Daniela, “Il problema dell’omosessualità,” 77-79.

¹³⁰ O.G. “L’omosessualità: vizio o malattia,” 248-250. See also Olivari, “Incomprensione,” 11. For the importance of creating a dialogue between homosexuals and heterosexuals see also Piero e Daniela, “Il problema dell’omosessualità,” 65-68.

¹³¹ For unsympathetic articles see Antonio Gandini, “Sviluppo storico dell’omosessualità maschile,” *Scienza e sessualità* 1, no. 9 (1950): 64-77; Marco Velati, “L’omosessualità sullo schermo,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 1 (1951): 14-16; J.A. Hadfield, “Perversioni e aberrazioni sessuali,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 1 (1952): 66-69; Guido Montanari, “Piccola Enciclopedia Sessuale” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 9 (1952): 825-828. For sections devoted to men and women searching for pen pals see “Corrispondenza tra lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 11 (1952): 1046-1047; “Corrispondenza tra lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 12 (1952): 1086-1087; “Corrispondenza tra lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 1 (1953): 92-93; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 2 (1953): second back cover and 192; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 3 (1953): 283-285; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 3 (1953): 283-285; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 4 (1953): 384-385; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 5 (1953): 485-486; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 6 (1953): 579-580; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 7 (1953): 677-679; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 8 (1953): 774-775; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 9 (1953): 865-866; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 10 (1953): 89-91; “Corrispondenza fra i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 11-12 (1953): 58-59. Since 1950 homosexual Italian men had been publishing personal ads on *Das Kleine*

Scienza e sessualità not only published articles that looked at homosexuals as human beings deserving of support and compassion, but it also gave voice to homosexuals themselves. The periodical, which usually did not publish the letters received verbatim, decided on two occasions that it was important for their readers to be aware of the personal dramas that homosexuals were forced to experience by listening directly to their voices.¹³²

In January 1953 the periodical published under the title *La tragedia del terzo sesso* (The Third Sex's Tragedy) the letter of a homosexual talking about his life without love, without friends, without a job, without a family, and without hopes. The author, strictly anonymous, explained that by reading *Scienza e sessualità* he had discovered that there were people willing to listen to him. He underscored that society, even if "jealous and fearful of its normality," could not deny the "abnormal individuals" – who were part of it – the right to talk about themselves, about their traumatizing childhood, and about their distressed adulthood. The anguish and sorrow accumulated "over years of silent and deep suffering" were pushing him "with the terrible force of desperation, to come out of the depressing shadow" he was living in, and show his face. He had a right to exist and he did not want to be stripped of this right by "idiotic moral prejudices." In this long letter he highlighted how, despite being an "invert" and an "abnormal individual," he was "forced to live the life of the normal" suffocating inclinations, impulses, and desires. Since childhood he had been forced to hide his feelings, while trying to clarify doubts and asking himself questions he was not able to

Blatt of the Swiss magazine *Der Kreis* in search for friends, lovers, and travel companions. Readers of *Scienza e sessualità* could also learn about the International Committee for Sexual Equality. The latter was founded to serve as an umbrella organization linking homophile groups across national borders and working to win basic civil rights. It created a transnational network and offered a homophile identity that crossed national borders. The Committee did not aim at mass membership, but at bringing together leaders and most active members of national homophile groups. For the history of ICSE see Leila J. Rupp, "The Persistence of Transnational Organizing: The Case of the Homophile Movement," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 4 (2011): 1014-1039. For articles about the ICSE conferences of Amsterdam and Frankfurt am Main see: "La Conferenza di Amsterdam per l'uguaglianza sessuale," *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 1 (1952): 5-7; "Lettera di Jean Cocteau alla Conferenza," *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 1 (1952): 8-9; "Secondo Congresso Internazionale per l'Eguaglianza Sessuale. A Francoforte sul Meno dal 29 agosto al 2 settembre 1952" *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 9 (1952): 773-776; "Relazione sul secondo Congresso Internazionale per l'uguaglianza sessuale," *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 11 (1952): 967-970.

¹³² See, for example, Olivari, "Infantilismo psichico," 11-13; Dr. Harry J. Holland, "Terzo Sesso," *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 1 (1952): 54-57; Robert G. Ross, "Radio New York sugli omosessuali..." *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 3 (1952): 244-246; B. Di Tegerone, "Cronaca nera e problemi sessuali. Omosessualità e ipocrisia," *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 12 (1952): 1125-1129.

answer. The few friends he still had pushed him away as “infected” and even finding a job became a struggle. The author of the letter explained that he left his home town hoping to find a “quiet shelter,” and be surrounded by people who did not know about his secret. But soon, he recounted, rumors and gossips from his old town started circulating in the new one, and “little by little faces became less and less friendly.” At that point he decided to move to Rome hoping that the anonymity of the big city would give him a chance to exist. However, even there the references of his previous employers branded him as a “smart and honest” worker, but unfortunately sexually “abnormal.” Unemployed, he hoped for his family’s comfort, but he was rejected. Argos and *Scienza e sessualità* were his last chance. He was searching for solidarity, for help, and for a job. He could not tolerate another rejection, any other refusal. He asked those reading the periodical to send him “a compassionate and friendly word” before it was too late.¹³³

This anonymous letter was not the first one *Scienza e sessualità* published. In February 1952 the periodical had already given space to the words of one of his homosexual readers. On that occasion the letter, originally sent to the tabloid *Crimen* and never published by that magazine, was meant to show how yellow journalism, arguing for the repression and punishment of homosexuals, was actually harming people. The author of the letter explained that, after having read the article “*Guerra a oltranza al ‘terzo sesso’*” (All out war on the ‘third sex’) published by the sensationalist magazine, he had felt the need to talk because of the insults included in the article, and because the “all out war” *Crimen* had promoted was also a war against him. He argued that in talking about “all out war” the magazine targeted a group of blameless people, which was inhumane and barbaric. The real fight had to be carried out against all “those men who had joined us for vice or money.” The members of the “third

¹³³ “La tragedia del terzo sesso,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 1 (1953): 76-80. The periodical wrote at the bottom of the letter “Whoever can and want to help this man, offering a job, please write to the periodical.” For an article about the homosexual in the family see Antonio X, Luciana Z, “Il problema dell’omosessualità. Rapporti con i genitori,” *Sesso e libertà* 1, no. 4-5 (1953): 57-60.

sex” were not, as *Crimen* argued, “a gang of criminals.” They were rather, most of the time, victims of blackmailers, torturers, and murderers.¹³⁴

This letter perfectly mirrored the positions of *Scienza e sessualità* that, in addition to opposing any form of criminalization of homosexuality, considered male prostitution as the real danger. Unlike the popular press that was trying to present the young hustlers as youths corrupted by evil “pederasts” exploiting their poverty, *Scienza e sessualità* described the male prostitutes as dangerous delinquents.¹³⁵ Reversing the perspective of most mainstream media, this publication looked at homosexuals as human beings deserving a decent life, not as youth corruptors. Their role as victimizers had to be problematized or called into question. Blaming them for juvenile delinquency and for the moral collapse of the nation seemed to be a mere oversimplification of a much more complicated phenomenon. The male hustlers were not only “brats” who sold themselves in train stations, public toilets, and cinemas, but also students, employees, retailers, and workers who, far away from their families and living alone in big cities, searched for male “protectors” to exploit.¹³⁶ These youths extorted as much money as possible from their victims, and did not hesitate to resort to threats, public accusations, and scandals. Most of the times their “protectors” were not “corruptors,” as the youths maintained, but poor preys in the hands of despicable manipulators.¹³⁷ Olivari also argued that rather than persecuting homosexuals, the police had to get off the streets those reprehensible individuals who, protecting themselves behind the anti-homosexual prejudice and accusing homosexuals of depravity and immorality, were constantly harassing,

¹³⁴ “Lettera di un omosessuale,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 2 (1952): 169-171.

¹³⁵ “Ai vostri quesiti il direttore risponde,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 1 (1951): inside front cover and inside back cover; “Consulenza legale,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 4 (1952): 369; Guido Montanari, “L’omosessualità maschile e femminile,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 9 (1952): 781; “Consulenza legale,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 11 (1952): 1048; Vincenzo Galvani, “Omossessualità e naturismo,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 1 (1953): 35. Among the articles appeared in the monographic issue of *Ulisse* one was in favor of the criminalization of homosexuality (Salvatore Messina, “L’omosessualità nel diritto penale,” 671-676), while another underlined the necessity of keeping homosexuality legal (Giuseppe Sotgiu, “L’omosessualità non è reato,” 677-679). For male prostitutes as delinquents see “Consulenza legale,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 6 (1951): 95, A.G., “Consulenza Legale,” *Scienza e sessualità* 2, no. 12 (1951): 74-75.

¹³⁶ See for the migration flows of Italian single men in the 1950s from South to North Emanuela Scarpellini, *L’Italia dei consumi. Dalla Belle Epoque al nuovo millennio* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2008), 133-141.

¹³⁷ Antonio Gandin, “I prostituti,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 11-12 (1953): 52-55.

exploiting, and blackmailing them.¹³⁸ Another article published in December 1952 by *Problemi sessuali* and entitled *Il dramma del Terzo Sesso* (The Third Sex Drama) highlighted the necessity of protecting homosexuals from young delinquents. According to the author of this piece the Italian press and the Italian police, after Caucci's murder, were blaming homosexuals for that crime and other felonies, but media and police should have targeted not the homosexuals themselves, but the young blackmailers who were usually the real culprits.¹³⁹

Scienza e sessualità published two powerful articles in January and in December 1952 highlighting how the Italian press and the Italian police, fighting against homosexuals, were carrying out a war against the wrong enemy. The first article, signed by Harry J. Holland, was another critical note against *Crimen's* "Guerra a oltranza al 'terzo sesso'." He wrote in January 1952 that the campaign against the "third sex" conducted by the Italian police and by sensationalist tabloids was pernicious. The Italian state, instead of using police to fight homosexuals, isolating them from "normal" society and pushing them towards male prostitutes, blackmailers, and criminals, had to follow the example of other European nations – such as Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark – where homosexuals received moral, medical and legal support, and where they had their own clubs where they could "know each other, understand each other, and help each other."¹⁴⁰ In Italy there were too many unhappy homosexuals who had "to stop thinking about themselves as abnormal and about the others as normal." There was "no norm in sexuality," Holland underscored. Justice could not be based on taboos and it was necessary "to promote a new morality and new laws."

¹³⁸ Olivari, "Incomprensione," 10-11. For the homosexuals as victims of blackmailers and juvenile delinquents see also T.N. and A.S., "Vi parlano due invertiti," 75-78.

¹³⁹ Sirio, "Il dramma del Terzo Sesso," *Problemi sessuali* 2, no. 12 (1952): 21-24. A letter sent to *Sesso e libertà* reported in September 1953 that the Italian police was illegally filing the homosexuals instead of profiling, and taking action against, their young exploiters: "Il problema dell'omosessualità," *Sesso e libertà* 1, no. 9 (1953): 67-69. According to the legal expert of *Scienza e sessualità* the "homosexual files" did not exist. The police was keeping track of cases of homosexuality related to crimes, but there was not a systematic action run by the Questure to collect personal files of every Italian homosexual. See "Consulenza legale," *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 4 (1952): 369. However, in a report sent from the Prefect of Arezzo to the Minister of Interior on February 9, 1955 I read that two individuals "devoted to homosexual practices" were "photographed, fingerprinted, recorded in the special register" and put under special surveillance. Thus, this document seems to confirm the existence of the "homosexuals' files" (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 259).

¹⁴⁰ For the media fabricating the image of the bad homosexual see also Piero e Daniela, "Il problema dell'omosessualità," 77-79. For the necessity of clubs and spaces for homosexuals see also T.N. and A.S., "Vi parlano due invertiti," 75-78.

Ethics could not be based on “psalms” but “on knowledge and on the courage of using knowledge.” Instead of obscurantist police campaigns and media wars against homosexuals Italians needed to be educated about sex and sexuality.¹⁴¹

The second article published by *Scienza e sessualità* in December 1952 did not depart much from Holland’s argument. Author of the piece was Bernardino del Boca di Villaregia, member of the “homophile international,” representative of Italy at the ICSE conferences of Amsterdam and Frankfurt, and director of *Sesso e libertà* since January 1953.¹⁴² His article took a critical stance against sensationalist journalists who, misinterpreting facts, tended to condemn homosexuals as a group, instead of blaming individual homosexual felons. Del Boca thought that many taboos and preconceptions would disappear by showing the public what homosexuals looked like, going beyond the representations offered by sensationalist tabloids. Homosexuality would stop being seen as an evil causing victims, unhappiness, and disasters. The hypocritical puritans were actually, according to Del Boca, themselves responsible for the evil they decried. A young homosexual able to be open about himself to others, knowing that he could be understood and helped, would be able “to find a place in the world and reach a psychological balance that [would] make him useful to society.” A hidden homosexual instead “would become, unfortunately, a danger for the community, because in the twilight world where he [was] forced to live, he [would] only meet vice, misery, and evil.” Del Boca

¹⁴¹ Holland, “Terzo Sesso,” 54-57. Also heterosexuals were victims, according to the periodical, of abuses perpetrated by the Italian police. See, for example, “Rispondiamo ai lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 8 (1953): 683-684.

¹⁴² Del Boca came in contact with Luigi Pepe Diaz, architect of *Scienza e vita sessuale* and *Scienza e sessualità* in 1951. Diaz, according to Del Boca, had contacted him because he decided to pay more attention to homosexuality in his periodical. *Sesso e libertà* was a product of the collaboration between Del Boca and Diaz. After the shutdown of *Sesso e Libertà*, Del Boca unsuccessfully tried to found a new Italian publication called *Tages* (interview of Bernardino del Boca di Villaregia by Enzo Cucco, July 16, 1984, FSP, AFSP, b. 463 and “Come eravamo. Intervista a Bernardino del Boca a cura di Giovanni dall’Orto,” *Babilonia*, November 1987, 14-16). Del Boca was the Italian representative at the ICSE conferences, tried to advertise the activities of the Committee and create an official Italian section (see Report of the Second International Congress for Sexual Equality-ICSE, 1952, FSP, AFSP, b. 40). In the Archives of the Fondazione Penna I found an Italian translation of the number 5 and 6 of the *ICSE-Kurier* of 1952, the newsletter of the Committee, but I do not know how and if it was regularly distributed, and where. The translator was G.G. Del Boca’s friend from Bassano Del Grappa – and author of the letter opening this chapter (FSP, AFSP, b. 465). In 1953 Del Boca reached out to his personal friends in Italy in order to create an Italian homophile organization under the auspices of the International Committee (Letter of G.G. to Del Boca October 12, 1953, FSP, AFSP, b.469). But he was rather pessimistic about this project. He thought that the Italians did not want to be organized and were individualist and egoist (letter to Welti January 5, 1954, SAZ, Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.5, Del Boca). In 1957 he tried again unsuccessfully to create an Italian section of *Der Kreis* (note for Welti, no date, SAZ, Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.5, Del Boca).

believed that only through the foundation of a “Society for Sexual Equality in Italy” and only by following the examples of homophile organizations in other European nations could the so-called “homosexual issue” be confronted and solved.¹⁴³

Scienza e sessualità, *Problemi sessuali*, and *Sesso e libertà* taught many Italians about sex, “normative sexuality,” and “sexual deviance.” Though published for a limited period of time, they turned out to be important instruments of knowledge and resistance against conservative ethical and sexual views. These periodicals, despite their limitations and their, at times, judgmental articles, allowed homosexual men and women to understand that they were not alone and that there were people capable of sympathizing with them. Such press, unlike sensationalist publications, looked at homosexuality directly. It was not just a “plague” threatening youths, but a phenomenon that needed to be understood. Moreover, homosexuals were not mere “lepers” looking for young prey, but first and foremost human beings. These publications counterbalanced the repressive action of the state and tabloids. At the same time despite everything same-sex behaviors, as shown by contemporary witnesses and contemporary fiction, seemed to be flourishing.

The Boy-Lover and The Scientist

Rome in the 1950s, as Stephen Gundle underlines, “is remembered for the glamour of the *dolce vita*.” Numerous film stars, foreign business people, playboys, artists, writers and journalists lived there. However, the city was not only glamorous. Rome was a magnet. It drew youths from every Italian region. It often was the place where their dreams and hopes crushed. Rome was the place where many working-class families lived in the *borgate* lacking proper services, transport, and at times even water. Rome was the place where displaced

¹⁴³ B. Di Tegerone, “Cronaca nera e problemi sessuali. Omosessualità e ipocrisia,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 12 (1952): 1125-1129.

families and individuals often lived in refugee-camp conditions.¹⁴⁴ Rome was glamorous, but also miserable. The Caucci case (1952) and the notorious affair of Wilma Montesi (1953) turned Rome, in the eyes of the Italian authorities, into a modern Babylon and pushed the Roman police to tighten their control over the *sex underworld* of the capital, where glamour and misery were often inextricably intertwined.¹⁴⁵

On April 26, 1954 the Questore of Rome, Arturo Musco, issued a newsletter with a series of rules aimed at preserving public order in the Italian capital. He wrote that the media had drawn attention to “degenerate” and “abnormal” people who constituted a serious danger for the morality of the citizenry. These people were vagrants, drug addicts, prostitutes, procurers, homosexuals, and “other ignoble parasites.” Protecting public morals in Rome was particularly important because of the diplomatic delegations present in the capital, and because of the sacred nature of the city. As a consequence, police action against immorality had to be energetic but discrete: too much publicity could have compromised the good name of the capital and negatively affected tourism. The police had to be particularly strict in their campaigns against female prostitutes and homosexuals. The latter had been dangerously increasing in number, showing lewd behaviors at urinals and in public places. Areas and bars where “disgusting and intolerable inverts” gathered had to be cleaned up. The police were invited to be particularly severe not only with pimps, but also with cinema and bar owners

¹⁴⁴ See Franco Ramella, “Le migrazioni interne. Itinerari geografici e percorsi sociali,” *Storia d’Italia*, 24, *Migrazioni*, Paola Corti and Matteo Sanfilippo ed. (Torino: Einaudi, 2009): 435-444; Stephen Gundle, *Death and the Dolce Vita. The Dark Side of Rome in the 1950s* (London: Canongate, 2011), 7, 36-37.

¹⁴⁵ Tennessee Williams in his book *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*, published in 1950, presents a post-WWII Rome in which transactional sex emerges as a very important part of the urban economy. Mrs. Stone is an old American actress who pays for the company of young male Romans and who, in the end, falls in love with one of them, Paolo. This Italian gigolo not only has a female pimp, but also that he has sexual relationships with both men and women. When the book was turned into a movie in the early 1960s the Italian government denied its permission to shoot the movie in Rome because it considered the subject of the film defamatory for Italy and the Italians. In the end the movie, starring Vivien Leigh and Warren Beatty, was shoot in London (Franco Calderoni, “Hanno fabbricato i Romani per la signora Stone,” *Il Tempo*, May 13, 1961). For an analysis of the Wilma Montesi’s case see Gundle, *Death and the Dolce Vita*. Montesi was an Italian woman whose corpse was discovered on Rome’s littoral on April 9, 1953. Her murder was followed by prolonged investigations involving allegations of drug and sex orgies in Roman high society. Even the son the Italian vice-prime Minister, Piero Piccioni, was initially involved in the case. He was later on absolved of all charges. The murder remained unsolved.

who turned out to be too indulgent with female prostitutes and homosexuals.¹⁴⁶ The heightened concern of the police over the “inverts” was a sign that homosexuality was thriving. Reading the memoir of Michael Davidson about 1954 Rome and the notes collected by Alfred Kinsey in 1955 during his European research trip it is indeed possible to gain a good sense of how animated same-sex life was in Italy at the time. However, we also need to keep in mind that the readiness of Italian men and youths to offer themselves and indulge in same-sex acts could also depend, in these specific cases, on the recognizability of Davidson and Kinsey as foreigners. The memory of the Allied soldiers’ willingness to pay for sex was still vivid in many people’s minds, and probably that memory persuaded some Italian men to make their move.

Davidson, an English foreign correspondent, was in Rome when Musco’s classified newsletter was released. In his memoirs as a boy-lover he talked about how Rome had changed between the end of the 1940s and 1954. He recounted how his favorite *stabilimento balneare* (beach resort) near Ponte Sant’Angelo, the *Stabilimento Barese*, completely changed its character over the years. According to Davidson, “in 1948 Signor Barese’s establishment was, during the summer heat, the most attractive peghouse in Rome.” Davidson explained that the place was cheap. One cabin cost 100 lire and “one paid an extra 100 lire every time a visitor entered it.” Boys and youths at the *Stabilimento* “were willing, and many of them were anxious, to make a financial profit out of their afternoon’s pleasure.”¹⁴⁷ Davidson was away from Rome for six years and came back at the beginning of 1954. When the summer season began he went to Signor Barese’s *Stabilimento*, but he found out that “his manner had changed completely.” One aspect particularly bothered Davidson: “no visitor to one’s cabin was allowed.” A customer arriving “with a boy companion,” who wanted to hire a cabin for them both, would be told to take two cabins and “a watch would be kept to make sure that

¹⁴⁶ Newsletter of the Police Commissioner of Rome sent to the Head of the Italian Police, the Prefect of Rome, and the Commanders of the Carabinieri of Rome, April 26, 1954, ISACEM, PG, Serie XII, SM, CS, 1953-1954, b. 34.

¹⁴⁷ Michael Davidson, *Some Boys* (New York: Oliver Layton Press, 1971), 109-110.

neither entered the other's.”¹⁴⁸ The boys, Davidson explained, still came there “deliciously inviting, to bathe and loll in the sun and – they hoped – to be picked up: preferably by well-to-do foreign tourists. It was the ‘facilities’ which had been withdrawn. ‘I don’t allow *that* kind of conduct on *my* premises,’ [author's emphasis] Signor Barese would proclaim self-righteously; and the boys, if there were no better place to go, led their clients for a ‘stroll’, *passaggiata*, through the thickets of scrub and brushwood that spread like a canopy over the river-bank.”¹⁴⁹ By 1954 Davidson wrote sarcastically that “nobody could have been more diligent than Signor Barese in the preservation of adolescent virtue.”¹⁵⁰

Despite this moral tightening, Rome was still full of many young men who were not “purposely hustlers” but who were nonetheless “ready to swap their sexual secrets for cash.” According to Davidson, there was “sexual blandishment round every corner” but no *friendship* “lasted longer than the moment when the last extra hundred lire had been wheedled or blustered forth.” Rome, in his opinion, “has always been a city of whores” and foreigners thought that there anything was acceptable.¹⁵¹ Beside Pincio and Villa Borghese young *marchette* and old customers crowded in “cheap and shabby cinemas.” Men “moved from one seat to another – from one boy to the next, like bees exhausting bloom after bloom – or the boys clattered about, seeking yet another likely client to sit beside.”¹⁵² Davidson’s favorite cinemas were in Campo de’ Fiori and Largo Argentina. The theater close to the Largo, in particular, once the lights were out “seemed to become the landscape of some bizarre, half-lit dream”: “The boy beside one might casually take out his penis and knead it into erection, with an air of its being the most ordinary thing to do in a public cinema; or he might wave it ostentatiously beneath one’s nose, as if the thing were a challenge. Or, more restrained, the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 111.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 111.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 112.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 115-119.

¹⁵² Ibid., 119. For homosexual encounters in cinemas see Pini, *Quando eravamo froci*, 94-95, 151, 153, 157, 174, 186, 191, 192, 248, 255, 257, 266, 268, 271, 276, 302, 315, 319, 325, 342, 354, 355, 359, 361.

boy might merely open up its trousers and sit quietly waiting.”¹⁵³ Davidson explained further that he was “appalled, and yet engrossed, by the proximity of so many cocks-for-sale; and by the pervasive diffusion of corruption-by-purchase.” According to Davidson most of the youths in the cinemas were “ordinary lower-class boys” and “to them, what they did in the cinema was as ordinary a way of picking up a little pocket-money.”¹⁵⁴ Davidson glossed, in the end, that “what they had between their legs was a form of cash.”¹⁵⁵ He objectified the Italian youths and presented them as greedy, immoral, and licentious sexual partners.¹⁵⁶

In the fall of 1955 Alfred Kinsey visited Europe.¹⁵⁷ His goal was to collect information about Europeans’ sexual behaviors. On that occasion he recorded his observations in a journal.¹⁵⁸ As his biographer Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy wrote, Kinsey described Italy in detail, with particular energy and vividness. Italy was for the American sexologist a “sexual Eden.”¹⁵⁹ Kinsey described it as a country where women were not allowed to have intercourse before marriage and men were ready to have sex with everyone and everywhere.¹⁶⁰ According to Kinsey, there was a strong contrast between female and male prostitution. Walking in Rome he “saw very little [female] prostitution,” given the presence of state-run brothels, whereas he saw “a good deal of male prostituting.” He explained that every man he talked to “married as well as unmarried and pre-adolescent as well as adolescent” had homosexual activity. But, at the same time, it was rare “to find an exclusively homosexual male.” A man “looking for sex would have accepted it from either females or males,” paid if he had it with a

¹⁵³ Davidson, *Some Boys*, 121.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵⁶ He described similar forms of sexual activity in Ischia, Naples, and Catania in the late 1950s-early 1960s. See: *Ibid.*, 77-86, 155-170, 197-203.

¹⁵⁷ For Kinsey’s trip see also Lloyd Robin, *For Money or Love: Boy Prostitution in America* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1976), 67; Wardell B. Pomeroy, *Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 421-430; Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *Alfred C. Kinsey. Sex the Measure of All Things* (London: Chatto&Windus, 1998), 420-430.

¹⁵⁸ 10 pages of the journal were devoted to Scandinavia, 15 to England, 3 to France, 2 to Spain, 1 to Portugal, and 20 to Italy. Kinsey collected information about Italy also thanks to an anonymous informant. See “Dr. Kinsey and Mr. ‘X’,” *About Time. Exploring the Gay Past*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: Penguin, 1991), 204-207.

¹⁵⁹ Gathorne-Hardy, *Alfred C. Kinsey*, 420, 423.

¹⁶⁰ Alfred Kinsey, Notes on European Trip 10-12/1955: Scandinavia, 10/9/1955 Conference, 1 and Italy 12-16-55, 1, Kinsey Institute.

man, paying if he had a girl. This happened often in sequence and “since the girl would cost less than he had been paid by the male, he would still make a profit.”¹⁶¹

Kinsey considered the Coliseum as one of the most important centers for sexual activity in Rome. Dark passageways, innumerable niches, and corners made it an ideal place for sex. Many different kinds of people were cruising there: some female prostitutes, homosexuals, and those looking for any possible sexual contact.¹⁶² Talking about his experience he wrote:

I went into one of the blind alleys in the Coliseum and found two soldiers masturbating each other. This is not necessarily homosexual but were unable to get other contact and does not fall into same category as anal intercourse. At one point in the Coliseum there is a deep, main entrance to dungeons and there is an iron fence to prevent people from toppling into it. As we came along we found a male on one side exhibiting his erect penis to a male on the other side. We disturbed this and one went away but the other immediately followed him. I saw a priest whom I watched on and off for two hours who was certainly cruising the Coliseum for sexual contact.¹⁶³

Another part of Rome where sexual activity seemed to be rampant were the Spanish Steps. At that time it was an important place for men seeking men, even if it was traditionally a cruising place for heterosexual contacts too. According to Kinsey, the male youths around the Steps seemed to be older than the ones cruising in the Coliseum area. They appeared to be between 16 and 20 years of age, while at the Coliseum they were around 13 and 14.¹⁶⁴ The American sexologist, confirming Davidson’s experience, highlighted the centrality of cinemas for all those searching for male-male sex. He recounted how a notorious movie house near the Roman Fora provided a place for older men wanting to make contacts. Being there on a Saturday evening, Kinsey found the house packed, and noticed a constant stream of people going in and out of the restroom.¹⁶⁵ In the end, he corroborated Davidson’s account that the area along the Tiber was extremely *busy*. Here, he explained, several houseboats operated as

¹⁶¹ Alfred Kinsey, Notes on European Trip 10-12/1955, Italy 12-16-55, 4, Kinsey Institute.

¹⁶² Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

restaurants during dining hours, but then, later in the evening, they were centers for male prostitution.¹⁶⁶

After Rome Kinsey continued his trip to Naples. Here, as he explained, it was possible to observe people hunting for sex at any hour of the day and night. The *Galleria Umberto I* – the place where Burns’ book was set – was a “prime business center” for this kind of activity.¹⁶⁷ Here there were both male and female prostitutes, as he recorded in his notes:

Saw a girl completely nude to the waist, had a very gauzy shawl which kept slipping off all the time. Saw a boy of perhaps 20, slender, young, who was just as open in his approach as I have ever seen and I saw him there morning, noon, and night. Saw him with GI’s, sailors, men in their 30’s, etc. He was doing a big business. Smaller kids would start out by offering to take you to girls, if that didn’t work, they would offer boys, older or younger brothers, then finally himself. You get this from hundreds of kids.¹⁶⁸

In Naples, as in Rome, public toilets were another important center of sexual activity.¹⁶⁹ Here Kinsey saw “men from 13 to 50 exhibiting and indicating they were ready for sexual contact.” Together with Wardell Pomeroy – Kinsey’s travel companion and co-author of both *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* – he once “watched a boy who had an erection in one toilet” and who proceeded to follow them for several blocks after they had left until they finally explained that they were not interested in further contact. But on another occasion their refusal did not discourage an “older male” to come up to them two or three times. However, the sexologist explained, these men “culturally could not offer this free” because “it would lower their status” and he thought that such behavior depended on the “Greek and Phoenician backgrounds” of this part of Italy.¹⁷⁰ Kinsey thought that people in Naples had “very high sex outlet, higher than any other culture” he had ever seen.¹⁷¹ However, according to Wardell Pomeroy, during their trip they were also aware “that part of

¹⁶⁶ Alfred Kinsey, Notes on European Trip 10-12/1955: Scandinavia, 10/9/1955 Conference, 1 and Italy 12-16-55, 9, Kinsey Institute.

¹⁶⁷ Alfred Kinsey, Notes on European Trip 10-12/1955: Italy 12-16-55, 12, Kinsey Institute.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

¹⁶⁹ For homosexual encounters in urinals see Pini, *Quando eravamo froci*, 95-97, 157, 165, 166, 212, 237, 255, 257.

¹⁷⁰ Alfred Kinsey, Notes on European Trip 10-12/1955: Italy 12-16-55, 16, Kinsey Institute.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

the abundant sexuality directed toward [them] and any other obvious American was motivated by the desperate need for money.”¹⁷² Concluding his notes about Naples Kinsey wrote: “Many hotels are set up to provide homosexual relations. Handpicked elevator boys and other hotel men. Boys bring up letters and in Rome would be satisfied with a tip but in Naples he would sit down and make it perfectly apparent he would be glad to stay longer for other purposes. [I] [u]nderstand [that] small towns south of Naples would be even more Greek in their attitudes.”¹⁷³

The last part of Kinsey’s trip was in Sicily. In his notes he underscored how youths were willing to have sex for money. In Palermo he was approached by several men, and visiting a couple of little remote fishing villages he had the impression that same-sex sexuality was all but taboo. Together with Pomeroy he went then to Taormina, a city “discovered years ago by other Europeans as an ideal spot for obtaining homosexual relations.” But “nobody in town worrie[d] about the ancient reputation for homosexuality.” Sicilians were far more reserved than the exuberant Neapolitans, but they were still rather open to same-sex contacts. In Taormina it was still possible to meet the – now old – boys photographed by von Gloeden and talk to them about their contact with the Baron. The last Italian city Kinsey visited was Catania described as “free in its acceptance of everything sexual.” In all these places, the researcher underlined, he did not see any “purveyors of erotica” and concluded “when sex is so free you do not have this sort of things.”¹⁷⁴

Both Davidson and Kinsey seemed to align with *Scienza e sessualità, Problemi sessuali*, and *Sesso e libertà* in depicting the male youth of Italy not as victimized prey but as rather shrewd and sexually active individuals. These documents are exceptional sources for historians today, but they were not accessible to contemporary readers, and the situations they described were maybe unfamiliar to many Italians. As Penelope Morris underscored, for

¹⁷² Pomeroy, *Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research*, 426.

¹⁷³ Alfred Kinsey, Notes on European Trip 10-12/1955, Italy 12-17-55, 17, Kinsey Institute.

¹⁷⁴ Alfred Kinsey, Notes on European Trip 10-12/1955, Italy-Sicily 12-17-55, 18-20, Kinsey Institute.

Kinsey “Italy was a country of sexual freedom and lack of inhibition.” However, his views went “well beyond anything that was, or indeed could have been, expressed in the Italian press. If such a relaxed attitude existed, it was only amongst some Italians and not expressed publicly.”¹⁷⁵ On the other hand Italian fiction, published in the first half of the 1950s, by openly talking about homosexuality, turned it into a mainstream topic and revealed details often unknown about homosexual milieus.

Glances on Twilight Moments

In 1961 the lesbian pulp fiction writer Ann Bannon (pen name of Ann Weldy), persuasively argued that the “gay novel” could “show genuine situations and genuine people doing believable things.” She explained in particular that “the novelists are in a position to make the homosexual real; make his friends, social contacts, his mode of life, his fields of work, his morals, his morale real and understandable to the reading public.”¹⁷⁶ Fiction is a glance on “twilight moments,” as Anna Clark would say,¹⁷⁷ that often could not be captured by newspaper articles and documents collected by institutional archives. Focusing on a novel and two short stories published in 1954 and 1955, when the repressive activity of the Italian police was supposedly at operating speed, we can see how male prostitution, heterosexuality, and homosexuality were fascinatingly entangled. These three works – *Del Cinema Splendor* (*About the Cinema Splendor*, 1954), *Ragazzi di vita* (*Boys of Life*, idiomatically hustlers, 1955) and *Il ragazzo di Trastevere* (*Trastevere Boy*, 1955) – made visible to the general public invisible aspects of everyday life in secretive homosexual milieus. These three homosexual authors, Piero Santi, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Giuseppe Patroni Griffi, used fiction to reflect on the worlds they used to live in.

¹⁷⁵ Morris, “‘Let’s Not Talk About Italian Sex,’” 28.

¹⁷⁶ Ann Bannon, “Secrets of the Gay Novel,” *One*, 9, 1961, p. 6.

¹⁷⁷ Anna Clark, “Twilight Moments,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 1-2 (2005): 139-160.

In 1954 Santi published the book *Ombre Rosse (Red Shadows)* in which he presented five stories related to five different Florentine cinemas. The last chapter, *Del Cinema Splendor*, is focused on the “homoerotic vice.”¹⁷⁸ Santi’s account is extremely fascinating not only because it describes homosexual cruising dynamics but also, and above all, because it talks about feelings and emotions from the point of view of the homosexual protagonist, Francesco. We read about his loneliness, about his sense of uniqueness and isolation, we read about his “revelation” when at sixteen years of age, while sitting in the cinema *Splendor*, another man touched him for the first time.¹⁷⁹ Until then Francesco had thought to be the only one, “thrown among men and women who loved each other.” But that evening, in that cinema, thanks to a stranger Francesco had discovered that there were “other men like him.”¹⁸⁰ Such a discovery, Santi underlines, did not make him feel better, but left him irremediably scared. And, Santi continues, after the revelation Francesco did not engage in sexual acts. He kept going to the same cinema, the cinema where he *found* himself, and he always left an empty seat beside him hoping that a man would sit there at some point.

Francesco is particularly fond of young, masculine, and apparently heterosexual workers. He loves looking at their “warlike and bold profiles,” and at their “rebel locks.” He savors their smell made of gasoline, dirt, and leather.¹⁸¹ At times some man or some youths, more anxious than he is, sit beside him, but that is not what he wants: “Locks of every possible color, jackets and a smell of virility, that is what ... he desires.”¹⁸² And one night he takes the initiative and sits down beside a young man. He decides to do something he never did before, because the youth responded to his gaze and, above all, because Francesco that night has more money than usual: he can pay him.¹⁸³ The *Cinema Splendor* is a cruising space and the young working-class men sitting there are available if homosexuals are ready to pay.

¹⁷⁸ Piero Santi, *Ombre Rosse* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1954), 136.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 144-147.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 160.

The scene described by Santi in the rest of the chapter is cruel and violent. Lionello, the young man approached by Francesco, is a pimp living off his girlfriend. He knows perfectly well what to do to entice homosexuals and then blackmail them. Lionello provokes Francesco, and when Francesco touches him back the sham begins. Calling him a “coward” and promising to make him “pay again and again” Lionello steals Francesco’s wallet and his watch.¹⁸⁴ The young pimp enjoys every moment of that torture until Francesco stands up and runs to the restroom.¹⁸⁵ Here, alone, Francesco starts fantasizing about a life he cannot have, “the sweet and easy life of an infinite number of people, of those who do not have unpleasant secrets, who can talk openly and sincerely”: he wants the life of the “normal men.”¹⁸⁶ Once out of the cinema he tries to walk back home. But his thoughts are focused on the “other,” on Lionello, and on the world of the “normal.” Santi’s account ends with Francesco dying run over by a car and feeling, in the last seconds of his life, peaceful. He dies imagining how wonderful his life would be if he could be part of the world of the “others.”¹⁸⁷ In this work Santi stages the loneliness among homosexuals, their difficulties in coming to terms with themselves, but also, and above all, the cruelty of the world of the “others”: a world unable to understand people like Francesco, a world always ready to point an accusing finger at homosexuals. Santi’s account is an attempt to “humanize” the homosexual and, once again, make people understand the cruelty of all those who violently threaten and exploit them.

One year later Pasolini published *Ragazzi di vita*. The book, one of the finalists for the *Premio Strega* – the most prestigious Italian literary prize – in 1955, was accused of obscenity because of its scandalous scenes suggesting male-male sex, and sequestered. In 1956 Pasolini and the publisher were acquitted.¹⁸⁸ The novel is about Riccetto and other young street

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 165-180.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 181.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 183.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 185-190.

¹⁸⁸ Letter of the Presidenza del Consiglio to the Cabinet of the Ministry of Interior, August 1, 1955, ACS, MI, Gab., 1953/1956, b. 400. On July 4, 1956 the Tribunal of Milan acquitted Pasolini and Garzanti – his publisher – and released the

urchins who try to survive in 1950s Rome through scam, robbery, and prostitution. Reading the book we realize how male-male sex for these youths is a means not only to buy food, cigarettes, and bus tickets from the working-class poor suburbs where they live to the city center, but also a way to enjoy heterosexual sex with prostitutes. As it emerges clearly from reading the book, male-male sexual interactions are for these youths a habit. They know where to go and what to do in order to shell out some money. These youths, while having sexual contacts with men, do not show any form of positive affect towards them, quite the opposite. In one scene, Pasolini, who was personally attracted to the *ragazzi di vita* he described, presents Riccetto, together with his friends Alduccio and Begalone, while interacting with a homosexual man who desires to have sex with all of them and particularly with Riccetto. This nameless homosexual, who Pasolini depersonalizes and dehumanizes calling him just the *froschio* (the fag), emerges from the book as an effeminate and passive figure, led by nothing else but sexual desire. The *froschio*, aware of the risks he runs in going to a more private place together with these three youths, appears to be scared of them, but also intrigued and aroused by the idea of spending some time with these *maschi* (males). No one treats him respectfully: not Pasolini in his description nor the youths in their behavior. The young delinquents do not show him any courtesy, quite the opposite. Riccetto, in particular, aware of his physical attractiveness and feeling, as Pasolini underscores, some kind of superiority towards the homosexual, is particularly rude and tells him “Kill yourself, you are ugly!”¹⁸⁹ once he notices the voluptuous gaze of the *froschio* looking at him. Moreover these youths, who look forward to having sex with this homosexual to get his money, tease him by saying “two [men] are not enough for you, are they?”¹⁹⁰ These *marchette* are presented by

book from seizure because the judge denied the pornographic content of the novel, Archivio di Stato di Milano, Sentenza 1808/1956.

¹⁸⁹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Ragazzi di vita* (Milano: Garzanti, 1963), 228.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

Pasolini – and they feel themselves to be – superior to this human being called by the author “little girl” and “soubrette.”¹⁹¹

Ricchetto and his friends, while having sex with men, are represented by the author as hypermasculine heterosexuals. In a famous scene, the author shows for example how the first thought of Ricchetto, after having “earned” some money, is to have sex with a female prostitute and offer her to his friends too, almost in an attempt to prove each other’s masculinity and sexual prowess.¹⁹² This dynamic appears several times throughout the book. Paradigmatic also is the scene in which Alduccio and Begalone, after having unsuccessfully put the moves on two female tourists, decide to go and have sex in a female brothel. They do not have enough money, and so they venture on the streets of Rome to earn some more approaching older men in urinals.¹⁹³ In *Ragazzi di vita* male-male sex is a mere source of income. It is not supposed to be pleasant in itself, but can possibly assure sexually satisfying heterosexual intercourse.

Patroni Griffi released in 1955 – in the same year as *Ragazzi di vita* – a collection of short stories entitled, as the main novella I am interested in, *Il ragazzo di Trastevere*. Even if we can define Otello, the protagonist of this short piece of writing, a Roman *ragazzo di vita*, his story is different from the one narrated by Pasolini. Patroni Griffi describes Otello’s life from his experience as a soldier in World War II to his relocation in Milan as a dancer in a variety show in the mid-1950s. The author depicts Otello as a fiancé, as a husband, as a father, but also as a male prostitute selling his body to anonymous male clients on Via Veneto, and as a man unable to define his (in any case pecuniary) relationships with two special male *friends*. We do not know what Otello thinks and feels because Patroni Griffi’s third-person narration does not give space to his inner self but it is fascinating to follow him in his sexual and sentimental adventures. Patroni Griffi describes Otello as a passionate lover

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 229.

¹⁹² Ibid., 38-48.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 224-225.

with men and women, but at the same time he never completely and clearly discloses Otello's sexual orientation.

Otello's relationships with two men, the American GI Dan and the Italian Fernando Guardalupo, even if based on the exchange of money, seem to be more sincere and more affectionate than the relationship Otello has with his wife Dora. It seems that he decided to be a *marchetta* in order to survive in post-war Rome, help his widowed mother, and have enough money for his wife and his daughter. It seems that prostitution is a means for him to take care of his family and his marriage. It seems to be a tool to let him live his heterosexual and domestic existence. However, Patroni Griffi describes the pecuniary exchange between Otello and Dan as a relationship. He writes that "in a few weeks Dan bought Otello and Otello let Dan devour him."¹⁹⁴ Otello talking to Dan about his wedding with Dora and asking for money says: "Dan I love you, you know it, there is something special between us" and he adds: "this [the wedding] does not change anything between us, I am marrying her, but I am not going to be the husband she wants."¹⁹⁵ And Dan, joking about this situation, says: "I like having a married husband. A bigamist." But then Otello, after having received the money he needs for his wedding, tells the American: "Dan, you are really a good friend!"¹⁹⁶ In one dialogue we can see how disorienting and queer the relationship between these two men is. After the wedding the young Roman tries to carry out two relationships, one with his wife and one with his American lover-friend-client. In Patroni Griffi's words: "Fortunately, the guy had broad shoulders that allowed him to fulfill his matrimonial duties and, at the same time, to satisfy the needs of the captain. Otello wanted to please the captain completely, because he felt that he could always count on him."¹⁹⁷ The same-sex relationship as described by Patroni Griffi

¹⁹⁴ Giuseppe Patroni Griffi, *Il ragazzo di Trastevere* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1955), 131.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

seems to be not only pleasant, but also and above all profitable. It allows Otello to be a heterosexual husband.

Reading *Il ragazzo di Trastevere* it is important to notice how Otello does not despise the men he sleeps with. He is not violent – at least with Dan and Guardalupo. He is not disrespectful. He is a *ragazzo di vita*, but he is far away from the thugs described by Pasolini and Santi. Otello is a *marchetta* but reading the story we realize how Otello thinks that female prostitutes are dirty, and he looks at them with scorn. It seems that he does not conceptualize himself as one of them.¹⁹⁸ Even if Pasolini's Riccetto and Patroni Griffi's Otello sell their bodies in order to live their heterosexual lives, they seem to conceptualize male-male sex in a completely different way. Otello, left by Guardalupo, breaks up with his wife and moves to Milan. Here he finds a new female lover, Myriam, but the very last lines of the story forewarn the appearance of a new male *friend* too.¹⁹⁹ This short story is rich of ambiguities and shades that let us understand the queer twilight in which Otello lives, loves, and works.

The works written by Santi, Pasolini, and Patroni Griffi offer a perspective on the dynamics existing between homosexuals and hustlers different from the one usually presented by sensationalist tabloids and the police. Focusing on the *marchette* represented in these works we see how they lived in “twilight moments,” performing sexual acts they were not supposed to engage in, but they did. They committed acts, and maybe felt desires, that they justified as temporary, and then they had a chance to return to their everyday lives evading a stigmatized and deviant identity. Lionello and the other working-class men sitting in the cinema, Riccetto and his partners in crime, as well as the loner Otello lived in a liminal queer zone in which heterosexuality and homosexuality confusingly intertwined.²⁰⁰ These works showed how the male-male sex market worked in 1950s Florence and Rome, offered a sexual

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 142.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 171.

²⁰⁰ For heterosexuality, homosexuality, and male sex workers see, for example, Cirus Rinaldi, “‘Conformarsi deviando.’ Una riflessione storico sociale sul *sex work* maschile,” *La prostituzione nell’Italia contemporanea. Tra storia, politiche e diritti*, Annalisa Cegna, Natascia Mattucci, Alessio Ponzio eds. (Macerata: Eum, 2019), 87-104.

map to homosexual men looking for sex, suggested the existence of different kind of homosexualities and homosexuals (and of different kind of hustlers), and exposed how blurred the border was between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Moreover, homosexuals gratuitously mistreated and insulted in Santi's and Pasolini's works likely produced in the 1950s readers different affective reactions: hate, disgust, disrespect, but also sympathy, pity, and compassion. These works operated as powerful tools of discursive proliferation about same-sex practices and desires among a potentially vast audience.

The Sword of Damocles

Looking at magazines, fiction, scientific publications, and reports of the Italian Prefects it is evident that homosexuality in the mid-1950s was not in *remission*.²⁰¹ The Roman Questore Arturo Musco on April 20, 1955, almost one year after his newsletter concerning the preservation of public order, sent another memorandum to offices and police stations of Rome expressing his concern about the performance of the local authorities. One pressing issue was still the presence of far too many female and male prostitutes on the streets. He underlined that such phenomenon could not be eliminated by the police only. But, at least, it could be contained so that it would not cause scandals and offend public morality. It was necessary that

²⁰¹ Reading the Prefects' reports sent to the Ministry of Interior between 1955 and 1956 about surveillance and repression of homosexuality we can register the existence of very different attitudes towards the issue. Some Prefectures did not mention homosexuality at all or wrote that they had nothing to declare about it: Ancona, Agrigento, Ascoli Piceno, Avellino, Bari, Benevento, Bergamo, Cagliari (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 259), Campobasso, Catanzaro, Chieti, Cosenza, Cremona, Enna, (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 260), Foggia, Grosseto, Imperia, Latina, Lecce, Macerata (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 261), Matera, Nuoro, Padova, Palermo, Perugia (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 262), Pisa, Pistoia, Potenza, Ragusa, Reggio Calabria, Rieti, Salerno (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 263), Siena, Siracusa, Sondrio, Taranto, Teramo, Trieste (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 264), Varese, Vicenza, Viterbo (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 265). Some mentioned it sporadically: Brindisi, Caltanissetta (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 259), Cuneo, Ferrara, Firenze (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 260), Forlì, Frosinone, Gorizia, L'Aquila, Livorno, Lucca (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 261), Messina, Naples, Parma, Pavia (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 262), Rovigo (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 263), Savona, Trapani (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 264), Udine (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 265). Some others underlined their efforts to fight sexual perversion: Alessandria, Aosta, Arezzo, Asti, Belluno, Bologna, Brescia (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 259), Catania, Como (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 260), Genoa, La Spezia, Mantova, Massa Carrara (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 261), Milan, Modena, Novara, Pesaro-Urbino, Pescara (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 262), Piacenza, Ravenna, Reggio Emilia, Rome, Sassari (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 263), Terni, Turin, Trento, Treviso (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 264), Venice, Vercelli, Verona (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 265). The Prefect of Caserta wrote in these reports between 1955 and 1958 always the same sentence: "About homosexuality, we identified 12 individuals infected with pederasty that are constantly monitored" (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 260). For examples of scientific publications see Teuclo Dati, *Endicronologia Sessuale. Dal sesso all'intersesso* (Roma: Il Pensiero Scientifico Editore, 1955), 436-471; Tullio Bazzi, "Omosessualità," *Enciclopedia Medica Italiana* (Firenze: Sansoni Edizioni Scientifiche, 1955), 162-168.

female prostitutes and homosexuals, as well as their pimps, did not turn some areas of the city into their own “headquarters.” Moreover, the police had to keep monitoring cinemas and public places where the “inverts” knew they could find “youths, men, and soldiers, with whom they [could] unleash their senses.” Musco also emphasized that beside preventive measures of custody, the police could still repatriate men who did not legally reside in Rome. He explained that this was the only means offered by the Italian laws “to remove from the capital undesirable individuals.”²⁰²

But homosexuality was not a Roman “problem” only. Between 1953 and 1956 the police tried to contain homosexual activities or had to deal with crimes happening in local homosexual milieus in other places as well. In 1953 a homosexual scandal broke out in Venice. The magazine *Minosse Settimanale di Cronaca* accused the British citizen David Thomas Edge of organizing homosexual orgies in his mansion.²⁰³ In July 1953 the Questura of Salerno was informed that on the Amalfi coast many English and American men were “devoted to practicing pederasty with underage local youths” who were then generously paid.²⁰⁴ The Italian authorities between 1954 and 1955 carried out a repressive action in Capri after having received anonymous letters talking about the existence on the island of male brothels for rich homosexual foreigners.²⁰⁵ In March 1956 the Questura of Modena sent a letter to the Ministry of Interior complaining about the presence of too many homosexual men in town.²⁰⁶ In May 1956 the police discovered an illegal male brothel in Florence where

²⁰² Newsletter of Questore Arturo Musco sent to offices and police stations of Rome, April 20, 1955, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 346.

²⁰³ See Claudio Dell’Orso, *Venezia sconta, 7 secoli di piaceri, intrighi e scandali erotici* (Venezia: StudioLT2, 2012), 94-107. But already in 1952 the Italian police in Venice had put under special surveillance a group of American and British citizens for their notorious homosexual activities. See note for the head of the police, July 28, 1952 from the Questura of Venice, Letter of the vice Questore of Venice to the Ministry of Interior, August 26, 1952; letter of the head of the General Affairs division of the Division Classified Affairs, November 12, 1952, “Jeffress Arthur, son of Arthur, American”, ACS, DGPS, DAR, 1951-1953, b. 13.

²⁰⁴ Anonymous note from Naples July 20, 1953, ACS, DGPS, DAR, 1951-1953, b. 13.

²⁰⁵ See anonymous note, November 23, 1954; Communication of the Commissario Nino de Vito to the Questore of Rome, December 15, 1954; letter of the Commissario Mario Fortunato to the Questore of Naples, January 14, 1955; letter of the Prefect of Naples to Giovanni Carcaterra, head of the police, March 20, 1955; letter of the Prefect of Naples to Giovanni Carcaterra, head of the police, April 13, 1955 (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 353).

²⁰⁶ Letter of the Questura of Modena to the Ministry of Interior, March 29, 1956, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 353.

young Florentine homosexuals met foreign tourists.²⁰⁷ And finally, in October 1956 Noè Vincenzoni was killed in Marina di Pisa by a soldier, Francesco Crea, because the victim wanted to pay the hustler less money than they had previously agreed upon.²⁰⁸

In 1956 the *Azione Cattolica*, that had been carrying out its moralizing campaign for years, suggested that it was time to introduce a law against homosexuality. In April 1956 Gino Gavuzzo argued that homosexuality had dramatically spread after the end of the war and that it was necessary, at that point, to penalize it as other countries were already doing. The reason why homosexuality had not been criminalized in the past by the Fascist regime, namely the alleged low number of homosexuals in the country, according to Gavuzzo was clearly contradicted by the increased number of same-sex scandals and crimes. It was necessary a “rigorous penal repression of such vice.”²⁰⁹ Therefore he sent to Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, undersecretary at the Ministry of Justice, some recommendations about the revision of the Penal Code in this sense.²¹⁰ However, the commission set up by the Ministry of Justice concluded its work at the end of October suggesting some changes in the criminal code that did not include the criminalization of homosexuality.²¹¹

Even if homosexuality was not criminalized, the Italian police had at their disposal a few instruments of repression that the democratic Parliament ratified definitively at the end of 1956. The police were already putting homosexuals under special surveillance and they were forcing them to go back to their municipality of residence before the introduction of this law.

²⁰⁷ See “Una ‘casa-squillo’ per giovani soli scoperta a Firenze,” *Momento sera*, May 11, 1956; note of the Ministry of Interior to the Prefect of Florence, May 17, 1956; answer of the Prefecture of Florence to the Ministry of Interior, May 30, 1956 (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 351).

²⁰⁸ See “Un uomo sgozzato lungo la Pisa-Lucca,” *La Nuova Stampa*, October 8, 1956, 7; “Pensionato assassinato a Pisa in una via deserta della periferia,” *La Nazione*, October 8, 1956, 2; “Il pensionato fu ucciso nella lite con un ricattatore,” *La Nuova Stampa*, October 9, 1956, 4; “Fermato a Livorno un giovane sospettato del delitto di Pisa,” *La Nazione*, October 12, 1956, 5; V.L. Berghini, “Un cadavere tra gli sterpi,” *Crimen*, October 20, 1956, 6-7; “Un artigliere confessa di aver ucciso il pensionato,” *La Nuova Stampa*, October 26, 1956, 6; “La Corte d’Assise di Pisa giudicherà l’artigliere assassino,” *La Nazione*, October 27, 1956, 5.

²⁰⁹ Gino Gavuzzo’s letter to Antonio Nasi, secretary of the Catholic Legal Experts’ Association, April 21, 1956, ISACEM, PG, Serie XII, SM, CS, 1956-1957, 1-30 aprile 1956, b. 36.

²¹⁰ Gino Gavuzzo’s letter to Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, October 8, 1956; Gino Gavuzzo’s letter to Angelo dell’Acqua, October 9, 1956; Oscar Luigi Scalfaro’s letter to Gino Gavuzzo, October 27, 1956 (ISACEM, PG, Serie XII, SM, CS, 1956-1957, b. 36).

²¹¹ Sergio Seminara, *Il delitto tentato* (Milano: Giuffrè, 2012), 626.

However, they did so following possibly unconstitutional Fascist measures.²¹² With the introduction of the Law 1,423 of December 27, 1956 – Preventive measures against people deemed dangerous for security and public morality – the Italian democratic Parliament sanctioned, adding subtle modifications, Fascist police methods.²¹³ According to this law the Questori could warn vagabonds, presumed illegal traffickers, criminals, and drug dealers, prostitutes, pimps, alleged minors’ corruptors, and “all those people regularly carrying out activities considered against public morality” (art. 1). The warning meant that these people, allegedly committing a crime without the presence of concrete evidence, were invited to change their behavior. If they did not, they would incur the following measures: repatriation and forced stay in their municipality of residence up to three years (art. 2), and – in case of people considered particularly dangerous – special surveillance or forced sojourn in a remote place chosen by the police (*confino*) (art. 3). This law replicated, to an extent, the Fascist Law on Public Security of 1931 (Royal Decree n. 773). The only difference was that the measures foreseen by article 3 (special surveillance and *confino*) would need now the approval of a judge to be legally enforced (art. 4). This law was going to affect all those people who were not imputable for a crime, such as homosexuals, but were considered socially dangerous because of their life style. As Lombardi Ruggero of the Christian Democratic Party explained in his speech in the Parliament in December 1956, this law was necessary to act pre-emptively against “inverts,” drug dealers, and pimps.²¹⁴

In 1957 the Ministry of Interior produced a statistical document about the number of illegal female prostitutes tracked down by the police between 1945 and 1956. In this document were also included the numbers of homosexuals held in custody, warned, reported,

²¹² See for example Prefects’ reports from Bologna, Brescia (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 259), La Spezia (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 261), Milan (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 262), Turin (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 264). See also letters of the Prefect of Naples to Giovanni Carcaterra, head of the police, March 20, 1955 and April 13, 1955, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 353.

²¹³ The new law had become necessary after the Constitutional Court declared illegal repatriation and *confino* as regulated by the Fascist Law on Public Security. According to the Court it was necessary to justify these measures, whereas under the Fascist regime people could be repatriated or confined without an official reason. See sentence number 2 of the Constitutional Court, June 23, 1956.

²¹⁴ Ruggero Lombardi, Atti Parlamentari, Legislatura II, Discussioni, Seduta Pomeridiana December 20, 1956, 29906.

and arrested between 1952 and 1956. This document, beside showing rather intense police activity between 1952 and 1954, confirmed once again how homosexuality was considered a phenomenon closely related to prostitution.²¹⁵ Male homosexuals, hustlers, and female prostitutes were categorized by the Italian police as members of the same perverted posse. As we have seen in these first two chapters, male hustlers and homosexuals, in particular, were perceived as two sides of the same coin. Some sources blamed homosexuals for having corrupted the youths, while others accused young hustlers of being perpetrators more than victims. The Italian state, approving Law 1,423, opted, like its Fascist predecessor, for an ambiguous strategy. The measure approved by the Italian Parliament at the end of 1956 was a legitimized “sword of Damocles” hanging over the head of many Italian citizens who could be warned and deported because their sexuality was deemed dangerous for Italian society and, above all, for the new generations.

In the mid-1950s the sexual system of power was constituted by the intersection of opposing forces: the Italian state kept prosecuting homosexuality without calling it by its name, conservative political forces and popular tabloids continued presenting it as a form of lèse-majesté against Italian normative masculinity, and homosexuals were carving out their own spaces not only in big cities, but also in small towns – as the letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter shows. Digging in the archives of *Der Kreis* we can see how over the course of the 1950s Italians tried – in vain – to found their own homophile association and publish their own magazines, published personal ads in *Das Kleine Blatt* of the Swiss homophile organization searching for lovers, friends and travel companions, participated in parties organized in Zurich on New Year’s Eve and for Carnival, gathered in “friendly”

²¹⁵

Year	Temporarily detained	Forewarned of possible legal actions	Reported	Arrested
1952	630	144	38	85
1953	670	200	132	66
1954	901	106	114	43
1955	400	56	57	43
1956	394	39	59	19

ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 337.

resorts on Lake Garda, wrote letters to *Der Kreis*, became members of international homophile organizations, and participated in international homophile events. State repression could not harness their desire of being in contact with their counterparts in Italy and abroad. Repression could not hinder the resisting power of homosexual subcultures that were fighting for their own existence.²¹⁶

Compared to homosexuals presented by 1940s media, 1950s queer men seemed to be more “masculine.” Randi, and the protagonists of Santi’s and Patroni Griffi’s stories, for example, were not outright effeminate. Sensationalist tabloids, particularly predisposed to present feminized images of homosexuals in the 1940s, seemed to have moved toward more gender normative representations. In the 1950s a distinction between gender inversion and homosexuality seemed to emerge. Moreover, many boyfriends, fathers, and husbands confessed in their letters to *Scienza e sessualità* to have harbored homosexual desires, and have experienced homosexual sex.²¹⁷ As Piero Santi wrote in *Ombre Rosse*, there were so many different forms of homosexuality that one term could never encompass such a “sexual habit.”²¹⁸

Over the course of the 1950s masculinity and sexual normalcy did not seem to be necessarily coupled anymore. If, as we saw in the previous chapter, Madame Royale was easily seen as an “invert,” Ermanno Randi’s rugged male physicality crashed previous “detection criteria.” Some homosexuals could still be effeminate, but effeminacy no longer seemed to be a *conditio sine qua non* of homosexuality. Homosexuality was more readable in

²¹⁶ See SAZ, NW, 1.1.5; Ar 36.38.3, NW, 1.3.1.2; Ar 36.38.3, NW, 1.3.2.5; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.3; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.4; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.5; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.3.3; Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.3.7; Ar. 36.38.8, NW, 1.4.3.8; Ar. 36.38.8, NW, 1.4.3.9; Ar. 36.38.8, NW, 1.4.3.10; Ar 36.38.1; Ar. 36.38.8, NW, 1.4.3.12.

²¹⁷ See “Risponde il direttore,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 1 (1952): 1-2; “Consultorio Medico-sessuale per i lettori. Consultorio del Dottor Argos,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 8 (1952): 763-764; “Consultorio del Dottor Argos,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 9 (1952): 859; “Consultorio del Dottor Argos,” *Scienza e sessualità* 3, no. 10 (1952): 954 “Consultorio Medico-Sessuale per i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 3 (1953): 280, 283; “Consultorio Medico-sessuale per i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 9 (1953): 862). See also Guido Montanari, “Piccola Enciclopedia Sessuale,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 5 (1953): 478. Dr. Argos explained also that cross-dressing was not necessarily a “symptom” of homosexuality: “Consultorio Medico-sessuale per i lettori,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 7 (1953): 676.” For this point see also Dr. E. Podolski, “La mentalità dei dediti al travestitismo,” *Scienza e sessualità* 4, no. 8 (1953): 708-712.

²¹⁸ Santi, *Ombre rosse*, 143.

the media, but it was also sensed as more invisible. Not being easily detectable, homosexuals were perceived by their opponents as increasingly deceitful and dangerous. The “homosexual” seemed to have acquired a specific role, but at the same time it was becoming clear how diverse “homosexuals” were. Mechanisms of policing and control turned the homosexual into a subject of concern, pity, and animosity. Such mechanisms did not silence non-normative forms of sexual expressions, and did not prevent the circulation of discourses in defense of homosexuals. Quite the opposite: they stimulated the uncontrollable proliferation of numerous and diverse discourses concerning sex and sexualities. Such discourses, at times repressive at times permissive, showing the existence of different forms of masculinities, favored processes of self-identification and offered new opportunities for mutual solidarity.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ For this interpretation about the GDR, but same argument can be made about Italy, see Jennifer V. Evans, “Decriminalization, Seduction, and ‘Unnatural Desire’ in East Germany,” *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 573.

Chapter 3

Falling Tiles: the Homosexual Domino Show in Early 1960s Italy

In 1962 a band from Milan, the *Peos*, released a 45 rpm record about two scandals. The A-side featured a song, *Mazzarino*, telling the story of a group of monks who in the late 1950s had committed a series of crimes in a small town in Sicily.¹ The B-side instead featured a song entitled *Balletti Verdi* (Green Ballets):

Du du du du du da / I don't know how you can live without women / du du du du du do / I cannot live without women / but there are some men who / can live without women because / they enjoy themselves more when they dance wearing a tutu / Green Painted Ballets / some men take part in them [the Green Painted Ballets] convinced / that being with a woman is a sin / and that women lead them astray / Green Painted Ballets / those who do not attend these ballets are losers / because among the numerous guests / there are many well-regarded names / who distract themselves in pleasures / instead of going to the seaside / and they spend time together with some poor sods / who make very sad things / Green Painted Ballets / gatherings of refined men / classy refined robust men / who only by chance look like hunks / But if such cases spread / if one day all this becomes a trend / the beautiful girls will be losers in the end / Because their suitors / will want only misters / and if tailors do not want to starve / will have to tailor slips / Green Painted Ballets / gatherings of refined men / classy refined robust men / who only by chance look like hunks / who only by chance look like hunks.²

Using a metaphorical language and a caricatural tone, the *Peos* took a clear stance against the Italian boys who were giving in to homosexuals' advances. The young men participating in the parties described in this song were represented as pleasing their male suitors, while leaving empty-handed many Italian "beautiful girls." The members of the band proudly distanced themselves from "deviance" ("I don't know how you can live without women") and, at the same time, highlighted their "normalcy" ("I cannot live without women"). The *Peos* portrayed homosexuality as a growing phenomenon that was threatening the masculinity of many young "normal" Italians who, despite their virile appearance (they looked like

¹ Renzo Gatto, *I monaci di Mazzarino. Una storia senza innocenti* (Caltanissetta: Lussografica, 2016).

² The song is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRm8GmhhR70>.

hunks), were – figuratively speaking – dancing in private parties “wearing a tutu.”

Furthermore, the *Peos* seemed to suggest the necessity of criminalizing homosexuality. They paired indeed the participants to the “Green Painted Ballets” with the terrible story of a group of lawless Sicilian friars who had raped, killed, blackmailed, and committed robberies. Title and lyrics of this ludicrous song were inspired by a sexual scandal occurred two years before.

In October 1960 newspapers and magazines started talking about a judicial inquiry involving homosexual men organizing parties in mansions around Brescia, Lombardy. Such parties, according to the newspapers, turned into orgies where male minors, invited on purpose to entertain older men, were forced into prostitution. Within a month, a local scandal became national, with presumed ramifications in Switzerland. The leftist newspaper, *Paese Sera*, talked about what was happening in Brescia as “the most extended organization of prostitution for homosexuals ever discovered in Italy.”³ According to the Italian press the scandal of Brescia revealed that homosexuality was an “endemic infection” diffused in all social strata, and that in Italy existed an “inter-class community of vice” that was pooling together the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the proletarian and the capitalist, the intellectual and the illiterate. The magazines *Le Ore* and *Cronaca* underscored, in particular, that the *Balletti Verdi* were demonstrating that Italian youth was in extreme danger. At the beginning newspapers and magazines singled out both ordinary people and celebrities, but slowly the initial uproar faded, the scandal lost its appeal and, in 1964, the case was closed with a mild verdict. The Italian press named this scandal *Balletti Verdi*. The word “ballet” was a metaphor for “sexual scandal.” The adjective “green” was used to underline not only the “unripe” age of the youths involved, but also the homosexual nature of the scandal itself.

³ Salvatore Conoscenti, “Industriali e minorenni implicati nei ‘balletti verdi’,” *Paese Sera*, October 5-6, 1960, 1. The same idea was expressed by others magazines: Giorgio Mistretta, “La Leonessa Capovolta,” *Lo Specchio*, October 16, 1960, 5-7; “Mike non c’entra,” *Le Ore*, October 25, 1960, 70.

Green was supposed to be the homosexual color par excellence, given that Oscar Wilde often wore a green carnation pinned on the lapel of his jacket.⁴

In 1984 Gayle Rubin published her foundational essay “Thinking Sex.” In this piece she underlines that “sex is always political,” that there are “historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and more overly politicized,” and that in these particular moments of sexual reconfiguration the conservatives stir up erotic hysteria appealing for the protection of minors from harmful sexual behaviors. In her essay this scholar talks, among other things, about the so-called “domino theory of sexual peril.” As she explains, there is an alleged line “between sexual order and chaos.” If non-normative sexual behaviors and practices are permitted to cross it, “the barrier against scary sex [crumbles] and something unspeakable [skitters] across.” The fall of one *domino tile* can produce a chain reaction menacing the existing gender and sexual order, and potentially threatening the dominant political system. The fall of one *tile* can engender a political struggle over sex in which “the primary producers of sexual ideology – the churches, the family, the shrinks, and the media” begin to oppress “the groups whose experience they name, distort, and endanger.”⁵

The closure of the *case chiuse* (bawdy houses) was arguably the first *tile* to fall in the 1960s Italian *homosexual domino show* that had in the *Balletti Verdi* its most scandalous expression.

⁴ See Paolo Cattaneo, “I peccatori verdi,” *Cronaca*, October 15, 1960, 3-5; C.A., “Un traffico di ragazzi fra l’Italia e la Svizzera messo in relazione con lo scandalo di Brescia,” *l’Unità*, October 16, 1960, 8; “Mike non c’entra,” 72. Famous people were identified as implicated in the scandal. They were later completely exonerated. Among them we can mention Mike Bongiorno (Clemente Azzini, “Imminenti alcuni clamorosi arresti per i ‘balletti verdi’ di Brescia?,” *l’Unità*, October 6, 1960, 5; “Mistero fitto su Mike Bongiorno forse teste per i ‘balletti verdi’,” *l’Avanti!*, October 13, 1960, 2; “Mike Bongiorno è colpevole?” *Cronaca*, October 22, 1960, 12-15; “Mike Bongiorno interrogato dal giudice,” *Paese Sera*, December 3-4, 1960, 2), Gino Bramieri, Franca Rame, and Dario Fò (“Né verde, né balletti,” *l’Avanti!*, October 20, 1960, 5; “Interrogatori a Milano per i ‘balletti verdi’,” *l’Unità*, December 4, 1960, 9). Paul Steffen and Bud Thompson, a choreographer and a dancer, respectively, were unjustly accused of having organized orgies in Milan (Enzo Braschi, “Anche i nomi di Carlini e Steffen nello scandalo dei ‘balletti verdi’,” *Il Secolo d’Italia*, October 14, 1960, 5; “Paul Steffen e Bud Thompson nuovamente interrogati ieri mattina,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, December 10, 1960, 4). In 1962 they were fired, together with other members of Steffen’s corps de ballet, from the State Television. Officially they were fired because they participated in a strike. But there is also the possibility that Steffen’s and Thompson’s terminations were a consequence of their involvement in the *Balletti Verdi* trial. See Antonio Gualini, “I banditi della TV,” *Le Ore*, February 2, 1962, 38. For a possible explanation of the name *Balletti verdi* see Stefano Bolognini, *Balletti Verdi. Uno scandalo omosessuale* (Brescia: Liberedizioni, 2000), 32. For Wilde’s green carnation see also Ari Adut, “A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde,” *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 1 (2005): 227. For green as a color for homosexual men see also George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 51-53.

⁵ Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” *Social Perspectives in Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider eds. (New York: Routledge, 1998): 100-102, 104, 108, 117, 126.

The final approval of the Merlin Law in 1958, as I will show in the first section of this chapter, stimulated fears about the spread of sexual diseases, immorality, and homosexuality. Of course, as my previous chapters have showed, other *tiles* had been falling before the closure of the bawdy houses. Nevertheless evidence suggests that the Merlin Law was understood and perceived as an exceptional move, as a political measure dangerously affecting – and potentially perverting – the sexual behaviors of Italian men. The Merlin Law was experienced by Italian conservatives as a fearsome moment of sexual reconfiguration that could subvert the existing sexual and gender system. The closure of the brothels “deprived” male youths of their sexual “rite of passage,” and divested many Italian men of their easy access to female bodies. The *case di tolleranza* (houses of ill-repute) were a substantial feature of the sexual privileges granted to Italian men. Their abolition caused a reorganization of the Italian “sexual citizenship” and provoked fears about potential sexual transgressions. In a society already rather hostile to *non-normative* sexualities, popular tabloids and the conservative press easily presented the Merlin Law as a source of juvenile sexual corruption. And the homosexual scandals following the closure of the *case* exacerbated such fears of juvenile perdition.⁶

According to James Lull and Stephen Hinerman a media scandal “occurs when private acts that disgrace or offend the idealized, dominant morality of a social community are made public and narrativized by the media, producing a range of effects.”⁷ Scandals are “successful” only if they arise public attention, disapproval, and discussion, and only if they lead to significant profits for the media industry. Without public responses there is no scandal. The moral failures of individuals or institutions reported by media offer a platform for

⁶ For fears related to the implementation of the Merlin Law see, for example, Liliosa Azara, *I sensi e il pudore. L'Italia e la rivoluzione dei costumi (1958-68)* (Roma: Donzelli editore, 2018), 99-136.

⁷ James Lull and Stephen Hinerman, *Media Scandals. Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 3. See also John Thompson, *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2000); Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Johannes Ehrat, *Power of Scandal. Semiotic and Pragmatic in Mass Media* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Anne Helen Petersen, *Scandals of Classic Hollywood: Sex, Deviance, and Drama from the Golden Age of American Cinema* (New York: Plume, 2012).

reinforcing or changing values that communities consider relevant. Media scandals can be cathartic moments of identity-building for a community. They allow audiences to discuss the violation of social norms, and the necessity of protecting behavioral patterns and role models. Scandals are often “intertextual,” that is they inform and feed each other. The narrative of a scandal is open to multiple twists and turns that can cause a “snowball effect.”⁸

Richard Cleminson, Pura Fernández, and Francisco Vázquez García, discussing homosexual scandals in late nineteenth-century Spain, argued that certain sexual practices “can be imbued with a measure of social panic or given a scandalous flavor because of their nature or their mode of expression,” however “public attention, shock, and disgust can only be iterated if they coincide with broader patterns relating to amoral or immoral behavior, which in turn, tends to represent in any given national consciousness some broader or deeper truth or threat that lurks partially visible, partially invisible, but worming its way into the fabric of society.” Therefore, they argued, we need to connect sexual scandals with much broader concerns and anxieties related to economic development, social changes, and redefinition of gender roles. Like Rubin, they highlight how sex and gender issues are political issues related to social, economic, and cultural power structures. The *Balletti Verdi* was no exception. The scandal indeed erupted when Italy was experiencing major socio-economic changes.⁹

The Italian economic miracle was a moment of rupture. Methods of production and consumption, ways of thinking and dreaming, living, and planning changed. Established

⁸ See Mirjam Gollmitzer, “Theorizing adversarial guests: The resistance to (and restoration of) media routines,” *Communications* 40, no. 1 (2015): 27; Igor Prusa, “Mediating scandal in Contemporary Japan,” *French Journal for Media Research*, 7 (2017), <http://frenchjournalformediaresearch.com/index.php?id=1145>.

⁹ Richard Cleminson, Pura Fernández, and Francisco Vázquez García, “The Social Significance of Homosexual Scandals in Spain in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 23, no. 3 (2014): 361-362. For sex scandals see also William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal. The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Anna Clark, *Scandal. The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Scott Spector, “Where Personal Fate Turns to Public Affair: Homosexual Scandal And Social Order in Vienna, 1900-1910,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 38 (2007): 15-24; Id., “The Wrath of the ‘Countess Merviola’: Tabloid Exposé and the Emergence of the Homosexual Subject in Vienna in 1907,” *Sexuality in Austria. Contemporary Austrian Studies*, Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, and Dagmar Herzog eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Pb., 2007), 31-48; Id., *Violent Sensations: Sex, Crime, and Utopia in Vienna and Berlin, 1860-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 116-165.

structures, conservative institutions, and traditional cultures tried to resist, but they often collided with socio-economic novelties resulting in disorientation and alienation. The “new Italians,” as described by Giorgio Bocca in the article *La fabbrica dei nuovi italiani* published in 1963 by *Il Giorno*, were redefined not only by geographic relocations, but also by new consuming habits and by the diffusion of new media that modified their self-perception, and their perception of the society around them. In these years began, as Pier Paolo Pasolini explained, the “anthropological transformation” of the Italians triggered in his opinion by a process of secularization that did not offer appropriate alternative moral values. Italians moved from the countryside to the city, from fields to industrial plants, from parish churches to local party branches without being culturally ready to face such big changes. The American model of the “consumer society,” taking hold in Italy between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, and the modernization of the Catholic Church through the election of Pope John XXIII, affected the core values of a country that was still shaped by a strong rural and traditional culture.¹⁰

In this “new Italy” social imbalances were extreme. Families were moving from South to North and the old moral schemes were transforming. Italy’s change was inevitable, but “degenerations” needed to be avoided. Young people were in a state of physical and moral migration. They were trying to define themselves by drawing a clear line of distinction between their generation and the generation of their parents. But at the same time they did not have well-defined reference models to follow. The youths of the “economic miracle” grew up in a society that was trying to redefine Italianness midst fast industrialization and economic modernization. They were moving from one family model to a new and unknown one. The youths were living in a more anonymous society that idolized consumerism and amusement.

¹⁰ Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano. Culture, identità e trasformazioni fra anni Cinquanta e Sessanta* (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 1996), vii-x. See also Francesco Malgeri, *La stagione del centrismo. Politica e società nell’Italia del secondo dopoguerra (1945-1960)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2002), 293-329; Francesco Alberoni, *Pubblicità, televisione e società nell’Italia del miracolo economico* (Roma: Armando, 2011) and Guido Crainz, *Storia della Repubblica. L’Italia dalla liberazione ad oggi* (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2016), 80-99.

They were surrounded by multiple temptations – cinemas, discos, night-clubs, cars, and motorbikes – that they could not afford. And often the youths searched for the easiest way to scrape together a few lire to enjoy the consumerist pleasures offered by the Italian economic miracle. This change was causing an unprecedented moral turmoil, and the homosexual scandals of the early 1960s hypostasized social, economic, and cultural anxieties of a nation that was living through an epochal transformation. The scandals I will talk about in this chapter embodied fears about the adequacy of the new Italian generations to take the helm of the nation.¹¹

At the end of my second chapter I highlighted how, in the late 1950s, homosexuals were more present in the media, and at the same time were understood as less detectable in everyday interactions. Homosexuality and effeminacy were not necessarily paired and, for this reason among others, homosexuals were perceived as dangerously deceitful. Fears of homosexualization and feminization, represented by the figure of the male prostitute indulging in homosexual activities despite his alleged heterosexuality, coupled with fears of socio-economic juvenile disorientation.¹² Daunting images of youths at risk, unable to become productive citizens and fathers because of their sexual debauchery, were not a novelty in the 1960s. But the scandals erupted at the beginning of the decade made the figure of the “homosexual corruptor” spoiling the “innocent boy” more worrisome than before. In this chapter I will argue that the *homosexual domino show* triggered by the Italian media 1) was a consequence of fears surrounding the new Italian generations, 2) nurtured moral and social

¹¹ Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, xi-xiii, 71-85. The GDP increased from 17,000 billion in 1954 to 30,000 in 1964. In the same years the per capita income passed from 350.000 lire to 571.000. People working in the agricultural sector decreased from 8 to 5 million, people working in the Italian factories moved from 32% to 40% and in the service sector they moved from 28% to 35%. In 1954 250,000 people immigrated abroad, between 1961 and 1962 the Italian immigrants were 380,000. Between 1955 and 1970 24,800,000 moved inside Italy. For immigration from South to North see also Franco Alasia and Danilo Montalo, *Milano, Corea. Inchiesta sugli immigrati* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1960); Livio Zanetti, “Gli italiani si spostano,” *L’Espresso*, December 3, 1961, 10-11; Goffredo Fofi, *L’immigrazione meridionale a Torino* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1964); Francesco Alberoni-Guido Baglioni, *L’integrazione dell’immigrato nella società industriale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1965); Emanuela Scarpellini, *L’Italia dei consumi. Dalla Bella Epoque al nuovo millennio* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2008), 131-140; Luca Gorgolini, *L’Italia in movimento. Storia sociale degli anni Cinquanta* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2013), 34-46, 304-307; Anna Badino, Franco Ramella, “La grande migrazione interna: due generazioni dal boom alla crisi,” in *Storia del lavoro in Italia. Il Novecento. 1945-2000. La ricostruzione, il miracolo economico, la globalizzazione*, Stefano Musso ed. (Roma: Le navi, 2015), 292-331.

¹² For “homosexualization” see Chapter 2, footnote 21.

hostility against homosexuality, 3) favored the growth of sexual literacy – making medico-legal jargon more familiar, and 4) guaranteed to Italian homosexuals an exceptional space in popular tabloids. As Ari Adut argues, a scandal is “the disruptive publicity of transgression” producing “externalities” that can indeed incite “socially creative powers.” Publicity and transgression caused by a scandal, or a series of scandals, can play an essential role in “social reproduction, conflict, and change.”¹³ The series of scandals and events I will scrutinize in this chapter aroused anxieties surrounding the proliferation of homosexual acts and male-male prostitution, gave the impression that sexual “perversions” were spreading like a contagious disease, and pushed conservative politicians to demand that homosexuality be criminalized. Scandals allowed the assertion of core societal values, cautioned about potential contaminations, and branded once again as “deviant” certain individuals and behaviors. At the same time the *homosexual domino show*, publicizing “deviations,” promoted “perverse” imitations.¹⁴

“Italian Fathers Do Not Sleep Anymore”

At the end of the 1950s police, Church, and media were claiming to monitor the sexual behaviors of the Italians. The press in particular talked about an alleged upsurge of homosexual crimes. The Italian *homosexual domino* was in a precarious equilibrium even before the closure of the brothels. However, I contend, the coming into effect of the Law 75 of 1958 unleashed fears that gave a decisive shake to already trembling *tiles*. The Merlin Law was the beginning of that sequence of events and scandals that reached its peak with the

¹³ For this see Adut, “A Theory of Scandal,” 213, 217, 222, 238, 241-244.

¹⁴ Gabriella Parca, a sociologist, published in 1965 a book about Italian men based on 1,018 interviews. She underlined that no one knew the exact numbers of homosexuals in Italy, and that the perceived increase of homosexuality in the 1960s depended probably on the possibility of talking about it more openly in the media. Gabriella Parca, *I sultani. Mentalità e comportamento del maschio italiano* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1965), 248-249.

Balletti Verdi. Enemies of the Law 75 proclaimed that such measure would have devastating effects on the Italian youth's sexuality.¹⁵

The Merlin Law, which aimed at abolishing state-licensed brothels and penalizing the exploitation of sex workers, was definitively passed after ten years of debates on January 29, 1958, and came into force nine months later – on September 20. The long debate about this law was built around the necessity of satisfying the sexual needs of the Italian men, and around the potential spread of venereal diseases caused by the closure of the brothels. Many medical experts justified the existence of “bawdy houses” arguing that they were an important

¹⁵See reports about the repressive activities against homosexuality sent by the Prefects to the Ministry of Interior between 1957 and 1959 (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, bb. 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265), the reports sent by the Italian Prefects to the Ministry about illegal prostitution in 1957 (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, bb. 346, 349, 350, 352), and the reports sent by the Head of the Police to the Minister of Interior between 1958 and 1960 (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 285.2). See also the letter of the Prefect of Florence sent on May 6, 1957 to the Ministry of Interior about the police action against the spread of homosexuality in Florence (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 260), and the report sent on December 19, 1959 by the Prefecture of Ferrara to the Ministry of Interior about the alleged arrest of 15 homosexuals loitering in a park at night (ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 334). Policeman Carmelo Camilleri discusses methods used to observe and repress homosexuals in the 1950s. See Carmelo Camilleri, *Polizia in azione: incursione nel mondo che ho combattuto* (Roma: Editoriale ordine pubblico, 1958), 37-40. For documents about the Church monitoring the sexual behaviors of the Italians see note of Gazzino Gazzino (Secretariat of Morality of the Catholic Action) January 7, 1957; letter of Gino Gavuzzo to Gazzino Gazzini, January 9, 1957; note of Gazzino Gazzini to the Questura of Rome, March 14, 1957; letter of Gino Gavuzzo to Angelo La Zara (Secretariat of morality in Rome), October 9, 1959; letter of Angelo La Zara to the Central Secretariat of Morality of the Presidency of AC, October 19, 1959, newsletter of Angelo La Zara to the Presidency of AC, October 25, 1959 (ISACEM, SM, b. 91). For documents about media monitoring homosexual behaviors see Piero Caprile, “I fiori del male. Il processo del ‘terzo sesso’,” *Crimen*, April 6, 1957, 13-14; Pietro Rogat, “Rosso dalla gelosia l’orbo è diventato cieco,” *Crimen*, May 4, 1957, 6-7; Pennaverde, “Bandiere Fiorentina,” *Crimen*, May 4, 1957; M.T., “Noi la minoranza,” *Il Borghese*, September 13, 1957, 411-412; Salvator Nicolosi, “I teddy boys del terzo sesso,” *Crimen*, February 22, 1958, 20-21; Angelo de Robertis, “Casa di bambole,” *Crimen*, August 9, 1958, 14-15; Gildo Carigli, “La fogna dei sentimenti,” *Crimen*, August 16, 1958, 12-13; “Fusti’ per uomini. ‘Fusti’ per donne,” *Crimen*, March 7, 1959, 18; Lamberto Carpani, “L’ho ucciso io il maggiordomo,” *Crimen*, December 12, 1959, 11. Also the Criminalpol seemed to be particularly interested in keeping homosexuality under control. In June 1957, during the General Assembly organized in Lisbon, the representative of the Belgian police asked to devote the following session of the Assembly (London 1958) to “study the question of homosexuality and the laws applying to this subject in different countries.” In November 1957, the Secretary-General of the International Criminal Police Organization sent an official communication to the Heads of the National Central Bureaus asking to answer very specific questions about the legal definition of homosexuality in every state, the existence of laws punishing homosexuality, and the ways in which male prostitution was controlled. Moreover the Secretary asked to explain what were the crimes generally associated with homosexuality in every country, and if national governments were thinking about changing the present laws. By May 1, 1958 40 states replied. The report drafted by the Secretary-General showed how countries defined and punished homosexuality in very different ways. 20 countries treated homosexuality and heterosexuality identically from the legal point of view – and Italy was numbered among them, even if the Italian Ministry of Interior was evidently treating homosexuals and heterosexuals in rather different ways. 15 countries partially prohibited homosexual acts among men. 3 others, while treating homosexuality and heterosexuality in the same way, extended the age limit for minors to protect them against homosexual practices and, in the end, 4 countries completely prohibited homosexuality. Moreover, according to this report, Italy was one of the countries where the present legal regulation of same-sex sexuality was deemed satisfactory by the state. See the Secretary-General of the International Criminal Police Organization (M. Sicot) to the Heads of the National Central Bureaus, newsletter Hosex-4731, Paris, November 7, 1957, Criminal legislation on homosexuality, AGR, Bruxelles, CGPJ, 135-Homosexualite; International Criminal Police Organization, “XXVII Session of the General Assembly –London 15-20 September 1958,” Report presented by the Secretary-General, Homosexuality. Criminal legislations concerning it and its repercussions on criminality, AGR, Bruxelles, CGPJ 135-Homosexualite. See also Special issue “XXVI General Assembly of the International Commission of the Criminal Police. Lisbon from June 17 to June 22,” *International Review of the Criminal Police: Official Organ of the International Commission of the Criminal Police*, 238; “Homosexuality and Crime,” *International Criminal Police Review*, 123 (1958): 321-324; “Homosexuality and its influence on crime,” *International Criminal Police Review*, 124 (1959): 14.

“safety valve” for the physiological demands of young men, and underlined that they were always preferable to the alternatives: masturbation and “sodomy.”¹⁶ Doctors were not the only ones fearing the growing spread of homosexuality. In February 1958, for example, an Italian citizen wrote a letter to the Minister of Interior arguing that the Merlin Law would be detrimental for families, would favor the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and would cause the increase of rapes, sexual violence, and sexual crimes. Moreover, in his opinion, Senator Merlin, in addition to prescribing the opening of re-education centers for former prostitutes, “should have thought about the creation of similar centers to cure the thick legions of homosexuals, masturbators, and abnormal men ... who would appear after the closure of the brothels.”¹⁷

In December 1958, three months after the *case* were definitively closed, the Ministry of Interior decided to collect information in order to understand the moral consequences deriving from the enforcement of the Merlin Law, investigate the risks associated to this measure, and study appropriate remedies to make the law more operational. In the newsletter sent to the Prefects the Ministry asked to present specific statistics about the number of female prostitutes and pimps in every province, about the increase or decrease of venereal diseases and sexual crimes, but also about the intensification, or not, of the “homosexual phenomenon.” Furthermore, after the introduction of the law, the reports sent every month by the Heads of Police to the Ministry of Interior had to include a new section about the number of homosexuals held in custody, warned, reported, and arrested all over the nation.¹⁸

In 1958 and 1959 criticism of the Merlin Law became more and more vocal in the press. Several tabloids presented the supposed increase of venereal diseases, the presence of too many prostitutes on the streets, the appearance of new illegal brothels, and even the

¹⁶ See Sandro Bellassai, *La legge del desiderio. Il progetto Merlin e l'Italia degli anni Cinquanta* (Roma: Carocci, 2006), 90, 141; Molly Tambor, *The Lost Wave: Women and Democracy in Postwar Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 125; Azara, *I sensi e il pudore*, 3-29.

¹⁷ Letter sent on February 11, 1958 to the Ministry of Interior by U.F., ACS, MI, Gab., 1957-1960, b. 41.

¹⁸ See newsletter of the Ministry of Interior to the Prefects (December 27, 1958), ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 619 and reports of the Head the Police sent to the Minister of Interior between 1958 and 1960, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 285.2.

alleged growth of juvenile delinquency – known as the “*teddy boys*” phenomenon – as consequences of the measure.¹⁹ *Il Secolo d’Italia*, the newspaper of the neo-Fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Italian Social Movement, MSI) underlined that the law had caused an escalation in “crimes against morality, sexual criminality, and homosexuality.”²⁰ But the far Right was not alone in arguing that after the implementation of the Merlin Law there had been a growth in the number of Italian “inverts.”²¹ Also the Ministry of Interior confirmed that the number of Italian homosexuals was increasing.²²

In May 1959 the conservative tabloid *Lo Specchio* published an article about the city of Modena where, as we know, the brothels had been closed since 1950. Assessing the situation of Modena after nine years without the *case di tolleranza*, the journalist underlined

¹⁹ Piero Palumbo, “L’offensiva Merlin non arriva in salotto,” *Lo Specchio*, April 13, 1958, 13-15; Leonida Fazi, “Facciamo il processo alla legge Merlin,” *Meridiano d’Italia*, June 24, 1958; Angelo Scala, “Chi si salverà dalla legge Merlin,” *Lo Specchio*, July 13, 1958, 14-16; “Il sesso in agguato,” *Crimen*, August 23, 1958, 4-7; Leonida Fazi, “Dopo Porta Pia,” *Meridiano d’Italia*, September 30, 1958; Angelo Scala, “Le schiave in libertà,” *Lo Specchio*, April 12, 1959, 13-17; Romano Guerzoni, “La cavia in agonia,” *Lo Specchio*, May 17, 1959, 18-19; Giovanni Lupo, “Una legge alla prova,” *Il Popolo*, June 26, 1959; O.G., “Il bilancio Merlin. La capitale immorale,” *Lo Specchio*, July 5, 1959, 26; G.R., “Il bilancio Merlin. L’appartamentino sulla Laguna,” *Lo Specchio*, July 5, 1959, 27; Violetto Polignone, “Dopo la Merlin il caos,” *Meridiano d’Italia*, July 21, 1959; Angelo Scala, “Il vaccino anti-Merlin,” *Lo Specchio*, August 16, 1959, 6-8; “Le ‘clienti’,” *Lo Specchio*, November 8, 1959, 11-14; “Le veneri diurne,” *Lo Specchio*, November 29, 1959, 16-18. But it was possible to find also articles taking a more positive stance towards the law: Lina Merlin, “Ha vinto la battaglia contro le persiane chiuse,” *Oggi*, February 27, 1958, 18; Gigi Ghirotti, “Comincia l’era Merlin,” *L’Europeo*, September 21, 1958, 18-21; Antonio Gambino, “Persiane aperte,” *L’Espresso*, September 21, 1958, 11; Gigi Ghirotti, “Le profughe della legge Merlin,” *L’Europeo*, September 28, 1958, 38-42; Angela Gotelli, “La legge Merlin e la salute pubblica,” *Oggi*, October 9, 1958, 3; Antonio Gambino, “Imputata Lina Merlin,” *L’Espresso*, June 7, 1959, 3. For the presumed connection between Merlin Law and teddy boys see: “Teddy-boys e Merlin,” *Lo Specchio*, July 12, 1959, 3; “Ancora i teddy-boys,” *Lo Specchio*, September 20, 1959, 31. In 1959 the Italian media devoted much space to the phenomenon of the *teddy boys*. They were presented as thugs, layabouts, and thieves, mostly immigrants from the South, who were experiencing adjustment difficulties in the North, and were committing crimes against persons, property, and society. The Italian phenomenon was not unique. Similar phenomena were also registered, for example, in the USA, France (*blouson noir*), Germany (*Halbstarcken*), Netherlands (*provos*), and Japan (*taiyozoku*). See Simonetta Piccone Stella, *La prima generazione. Ragazze e ragazzi nel miracolo economico italiano* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1993), 146-162, 220-225, 232-234; Cecilia Cristofori, “La costruzione sociale della prima generazione di giovani in Italia. Il contributo della ricerca empirica” in *Le rappresentazioni sociali dei giovani in Italia*, Franco Crespi ed. (Roma: Carocci Editore, 2002), 80; Riccardo Cruzolin, “Le rappresentazioni sociali dei giovani in Italia negli anni Sessanta. Una ricerca empirica su quotidiani nazionali,” in *Le rappresentazioni sociali dei giovani in Italia*, 114; Luca Gorgolini, “Un mondo di giovani. Culture e consumi dopo il 1950,” in *Identikit del Novecento. Conflitti, trasformazioni sociali, stili di vita*, Paolo Sorcinelli ed. (Roma: Donzelli editore, 2004), 283-297. For a few examples of coeval articles about the Italian “teddy boys” see Sandro Morriconi, “Il mestiere di bullo,” *Crimen*, January 17, 1959, 18-21; Luciano Oppo, “Teddy Boys in vista,” *Lo Specchio*, June 7, 1959, 4-7; Oreste Gregorio, “Anche Milano ha paura. Inchiesta sui teddy-boys in Italia,” *Lo Specchio*, June 14, 1959, 4-8; Giorgio Mistretta, “La teppa ha i soldi in tasca,” *Lo Specchio*, July 5, 1959, 14-15; Corrado Stajano, “Non spaventano Milano le bravate dei teddy boys,” *Il Tempo*, July 21, 1959, 10-13; Renato Nicolai, “Teddy Boys di serie A e di serie B,” *Vie Nuove*, August 22, 1959, 37-39; “Il seme della violenza. Vostro figlio è un teddy boy?,” *Lo Specchio*, September 6, 1959, 12-17.

²⁰ “Il fallimento della Legge Merlin nelle cifre del Ministero degli interni,” *Il Secolo d’Italia*, May 24, 1959.

²¹ Giuseppe Gonella’s speech, Parliamentary Acts, House of Deputies, III Legislature, Discussions, May, 26, 1959, 7627-7628.

²² In May 1959, during a debate about the expenditures of the Ministry of Interior, the Minister announced that the number of homosexuals had increased in 7 provinces. In July the Ministry of Interior confirmed that between March 19 and December 31, 1958 homosexuality had grown and that there was an increasing trend in other 8 provinces. Communication sent from the Ministry of Interior to the Cabinet of the Minister (July 14, 1959), ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 972.

that in this “test city” “street walkers,” prices for sex, venereal diseases, and homosexuals had undeniably increased. Modena was presented as an example of what the entire nation would look like soon. As for homosexuality in particular, the magazine explained that it did not have precise figures and statistics, but looking at the local newspapers it was certain that this city, where only ten years before cases of homosexuality would have been considered exceptional, had become “the scene of disconcerting and frequent [homosexual] episodes.”²³

Even if it was not possible to prove a causal relation between the introduction of the Merlin Law and the supposed increase of homosexuals in Italy, this myth was promoted by conservative magazines and newspapers. Maurizio Bellotti, in an article published by the French homophile magazine *Arcadie*, tried to be ironic about the alleged homosexualization of the Italian men caused by the closure of the brothels: “The Italian fathers do not sleep anymore. The newspapers show their pain and sorrow by talking about the fate of so many men that will be denied the possibility of a healthy sexual initiation in the welcoming whorehouses. And fathers tremble for the virility of their offspring because in their souls there is the suspicion – oh terrible suspicion! – that, without women, their sons will turn into homosexuals.”²⁴

On July 2, 1959 the right-wing magazine *Il Borghese* illustrated the effects supposedly produced by the Merlin Law by using two images. They both aimed at making a simplistic argument about the homosexualization of Italian men. In the first picture (Figure 3.1.), whose caption reads “In the [Venetian] Lagoon after the Merlin Law. The youths enjoy each other’s company,” we see two young men apparently being affectionate to one another. In the second one (Figure 3.2.) bearing the caption “Rome, working class neighborhood. Merlin’s product,”

²³ Romano Guerzoni, “La cavia in agonia,” *Lo Specchio*, May 17, 1959, 19.

²⁴ Maurizio Bellotti, “Nouvelles d’Italie,” *Arcadie*, November 1959, 641. For the alleged casual link between Merlin Law and homosexuality presented by conservative magazines see “Lettere al Direttore,” *Lo Specchio*, May 31, 1959, 3; “Lettere al Direttore,” *Lo Specchio*, August 9, 1959, 31; Gianni Mantovani, “I regali della zia Merlin,” *Meridiano d’Italia*, October 23, 1960, 19-23; “Libertà di parola,” *Cronaca*, May 27, 1961, 23. Also the homophile Bernardino del Boca talked in a letter to Eugen Laubacher about the anti-homosexual media campaign following the closure of the brothels (Letter of Del Boca to Welt of November 16, 1959, SAZ, Ar. 36.38.7, NW, 1.4.2.5.).

the magazine presented an effeminate man and blamed the closure of the brothels for the appearance of such individuals.²⁵



Figure 3.1. “In the Lagoon after the Merlin Law
The youths enjoy each other’s company.”

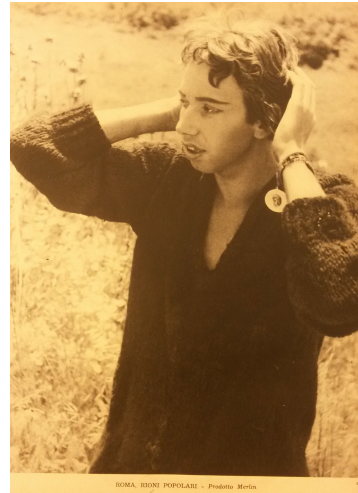


Figure 3.2. “Rome, working class neighborhood.
Merlin’s product.”

These two images were in line with the intensive anti-homosexual campaign *Il Borghese* carried out in 1959. In every issue, the magazine published sarcastic pictures to poke fun at its enemies, and homosexuals were among them. The writer Pier Paolo Pasolini and Giò Stajano – grandson of the former Secretary of the Fascist Party Achille Starace, and campy protagonist of the Roman *Dolce Vita* – were among the favorite targets of *Il Borghese*. In two pictures published respectively in October and November 1959, for example, Pasolini was presented as “the bard of the Italy ‘like that’” (Figure 3.3.), whereas Stajano was displayed as a “devotee of the *secco medio*,” of the “sex lying halfway” between the masculine and the feminine one (Figure 3.4.).²⁶

²⁵ “L’Italia dopo la Merlin,” *Il Borghese*, July 2, 1959, 14-29.

²⁶ Franco Trandafilo, “La Crociata dei garofani verdi,” *Il Borghese*, May 21, 1959, 859; M.T., “L’Italia ‘così’ e l’Italia ‘cosà’,” *Il Borghese*, September 17, 1959, 448. For Pasolini’s picture see *Il Borghese*, November 12, 1959. For Giò Stajano’s picture see *Il Borghese*, October 1, 1959.



Figure 3.3. Pier Paolo Pasolini as the “bard.”



Figure 3.4. Giò Stajano, devotee of the *secco medio*.

Il Borghese used gender inversion as a framework to present “transvestites” and “female impersonators” as the most representative “homosexuals.” In March 1959, for example, the magazine published a picture of the famous French transsexual Coccinelle presenting “him” as “an actor ... specialized in feminine roles” (Figure 3.5.), and in May 1959 it published a picture of the Italian Giorgia O’Brien in drag presenting her as a “(male) dancer ... specialized in feminine parts” (Figure 3.6.).²⁷



Figure 3.5. Coccinelle.



Figure 3.6. Giorgia O’Brien.

These pictures, according to *Il Borghese*, were shown to the readers so that they could understand what homosexuals looked like. The magazine was particularly good at muddying the waters mixing homosexuality, transvestitism, female impersonation, and “gender non-

²⁷ For Coccinelle’s picture see *Il Borghese*, March 12, 1959. For Giorgia O’Brien see *Il Borghese*, May 21, 1959. Giorgia O’Brien was the stage name of the Sicilian actor and singer Giorgio Montana.

conformity.” The “vogue of ‘sex change’” in particular was presented by *Il Borghese* as a new aspect characterizing the emerging vanguard of the Italian homosexual “movement.”²⁸

The anti-homosexual stance of *Il Borghese* emerged in all its strength at the end of 1959 when Piero Buscaroli published in two separate installments a long article entitled *La crociata del terzo sesso* (*The third sex crusade*). According to this piece homosexuals were coming out all over Europe, and were trying to achieve equality with “tyrannical ‘heterosexuals’.” Also in Italy, where the “movement” had been rather absent, things were changing. The poet Sandro Penna, the writer Pasolini, and the “*giovane efebo*” (young ephebe) Stajano were, according to Buscaroli, members of the new “homo-vanguard” that was trying to thread its way into the “normal” society.²⁹ *Il Borghese* was afraid that the “*corrente deviazionista*” (deviationist trend) had decided to propagandize its own ideas and conquer new proselytes among the new generations.³⁰ The conservative magazine was particularly worried about *Arcadie*, and it did not miss a chance to bash it. In previous years the magazine of the French homophile organization had published articles about Italy, but in April 1959 Maurizio Bellotti published a piece entitled “*L’Italie a quelque chose à dire*” (*Italy has something to say*) that inaugurated a section on Italy – *Nouvelles d’Italie* – that would be featured in *Arcadie* for the next twenty-three years.³¹ But the French periodical also

²⁸ Piero Buscaroli, “La crociata del terzo sesso,” *Il Borghese*, December 3, 1959, 887.

²⁹ Buscaroli, “La crociata del terzo sesso,” 886-887 and Piero Buscaroli, “La crociata del terzo sesso. Le bestie nere,” *Il Borghese*, December 10, 1959, 932-933. Same argument about the spreading of homosexuality all over Europe was also made by Malaparte in his last book. See Curzio Malaparte, *Mamma Marcia* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1959), 258-279, 283. Young homosexuals were often called ephebes by the Italian press. In ancient Greece the ἑφηβος was a male adolescent often characterized by a rather feminine beauty.

³⁰ “Il sesso di ognuno,” *Il Borghese*, December 24, 1959, 1017.

³¹ Bellotti used the space offered by the French homophile magazine to show aspects of the homosexual life in Italy that many ignored. Moreover, being *Arcadie* written in French – a language fairly known in Italy at the time – and being easily available in the country, Bellotti’s section offered to his fellow countrymen a lot of information about the emerging Italian homosexual culture (Francesco Vallini, Virginio Mazzelli, “Come eravamo. L’Italia prima del movimento gay,” *La Fenice di Babilonia. Periodico di cultural omosessuale*, 2 (1997): 135, 142). In his section he dealt extensively with the very anti-homosexual attitude showed by *Lo Specchio* and *Il Borghese* (Maurizio Bellotti “L’Italie a quelque chose à dire,” *Arcadie*, 64 (1959): 222-223 ; Maurizio Bellotti “Nouvelles d’Italie,” *Arcadie*, 64 (1959): 224-228; Maurizio Bellotti “Nouvelles d’Italie,” *Arcadie*, 66 (1959): 366-371). For articles about Italian homosexuality published in *Arcadie* before 1959 see Fabrizio della Torre, “L’homophilie en Italie. Aspects et reflexions,” *Arcadie*, 1 (1954): 18-21; “Ulisse,” *Arcadie*, 4 (1954): 48-49; Ettore Mariotti, “Dante et le vice florentin,” *Arcadie*, 19-20 (1955): 5-9; Porthos Melzi, “Lettres Italiennes: ‘Garçon du Trastevere,’” *Arcadie*, 22 (1955): 57-58; Ettore Mariotti, “Néophile,” *Arcadie*, 25 (1956): 24-31; Ettore Mariotti, “Néophile,” *Arcadie*, 26 (1956): 12-19; Franco Cerutti, “Nous s’avon pas trois têtes,” *Arcadie*, 30 (1956): 24-31; Fabrizio della Torre, “Lettre a M. Carlo Laurenzi,” *Arcadie*, 34 (1956): 51-53; Ettore Mariotti, “Néophile et fluide,” *Arcadie*, 37 (1957): 18-21; Gian Carlo Beria, “Lettre a la Direction de ‘Il Mondo’ de Rome,” *Arcadie*, 55-56 (1958): 58-60; Franco

had another Italian collaborator, Franco Cerutti, who decided to write an open letter to *Il Borghese* in order to rebut the claims made by Buscaroli in his *La crociata del terzo sesso*. The verbal crossfire between Cerutti and Buscaroli published by *Il Borghese* is an important source showing how, on the one hand, an Italian homophile was trying to illustrate the innocuous ordinariness of homosexuality, and how, on the other, an inflexible opponent was presenting homosexuality as the epitome of moral and physical corruption. Cerutti's letter is particularly significant because it was a well-argued statement about the right to exist of homosexuals published by a magazine with a large audience, that certainly included many "men like that" who could find Cerutti's words comforting and encouraging.³²

In his intervention Cerutti explained that homosexuality was not wrong in itself, but that its acceptance or rejection depended on cultural context. And cultures were not fixed. Moreover, he argued that there was nothing unnatural in homosexuality, because it existed in nature, and he underscored that belittling same-sex sex because of its infertility was hypocritical: many heterosexuals considered sex as a form of pleasure rather than as a way to reproduce the species. Cerutti explained that he could not say how many homosexuals were living in Italy at the time, but, using a distinction we have already encountered in the first chapter, he was sure that it was possible to find occasional (*occasionali*) and innate (*costituzionali*) homosexuals across all social strata. Moreover, espousing the argument made by many critics of the Merlin Law, he underscored that after the closure of the brothels "occasional homosexuals [had] multiplied." Cerutti highlighted how the sexual orientation of a person was a secondary feature, and that the only thing that actually mattered was the capacity of this person to be an active member of the social body. Heterosexuality and homosexuality were "two opposite sides of the same crystal." And homosexuals, like their

Cerutti, "Les Petites Vacances de Alberto Arbasino," *Arcadie*, 57 (1958): 58-59; D.B., "Les Ragazzi de Pier Paolo Pasolini," *Arcadie*, 58 (1958): 46-47; Jacques Remo, "Omossessualità di Gino Olivari," *Arcadie*, 59 (1958): 46.

³² The right-wing press, publishing aggressive articles against the homosexuals, offered important pieces of information about the homosexual world to all those interested in it. Bellotti remembered ironically that he had learned about the existence of *Arcadie* thanks to *Il Borghese* (see Vallini and Mazzelli, "Come eravamo," 136 and Andrea Pini, *Quando eravamo froci. Gli omosessuali nell'Italia di una volta* [Roma: Il Saggiatore, 2011], 155-156).

heterosexual counterparts, were able to love. Homosexuality was not only about sex. Homosexuals, like heterosexuals, were able to experience a variety of emotions from mere physical attraction to spiritual sublimation. Cerutti concluded his letter hoping that “progress” could terminate the persecution that homosexuals were still experiencing in Italy.³³

Buscaroli’s answer was perfectly consistent with his previous articles and with the anti-homosexual editorial line of *Il Borghese*. He rejected the idea that homosexuals should be accepted by Italian society. He rather thought that they had to be pitied and treated with appropriate therapies, and he denied the possibility that homosexuals could actually experience affection and “pure love.” He accused Cerutti of having written a “homophile manifesto” that aimed at normalizing and legitimizing as a “human condition” what was actually a vice, a hereditary perversion, a disease, or a neurosis. If homosexuals were actually sick, they deserved pity. Yet Italian society had the right – indeed the obligation – to defend itself, its youths, and its sons from contagion.³⁴

The world of culture and the entertainment industry, according to *Il Borghese*, were particularly infectious homosexual spaces. In the late 1950s, and especially around 1959, homosexuals had acquired an unexpected space in literature and cinema. In 1959 Giò Stajano published his two books, *Roma Capovolta (Upturned Rome)* and *Meglio l’uovo oggi (Better an egg today)*, that outspokenly described homosexual life in Rome. *Roma Capovolta*, according to an article published by *Il Giorno*, was the first overt “manifesto of the men ‘like that’.” It was “a gallery of this bizarre milieu, an inventory of gatherings, a catalogue of sexual intercourses.”³⁵ The book earned such notoriety that the journalists created the

³³ “Il sesso di ognuno,” 1017-1019.

³⁴ Ibid., 1019-1020.

³⁵ Gian Gaspare Napolitano, “E’ uscito il manifesto di quelli ‘così’” *Il Giorno*, October 1, 1959. *Roma Capovolta* and *Meglio l’uovo oggi* were confiscated for violation of articles 528 (obscene publications) and 529 (offense to common decency) of the penal code. The judge on February 20, 1960 condemned both Giò Stajano and the publisher Giovanni Quattrucci, and ordered the definitive requisition of both books. ISACEM, SM, b. 13.

neologism *capovolti* (upturned) to label homosexual men – a neologism that would be used in Italy until the 1970s.³⁶

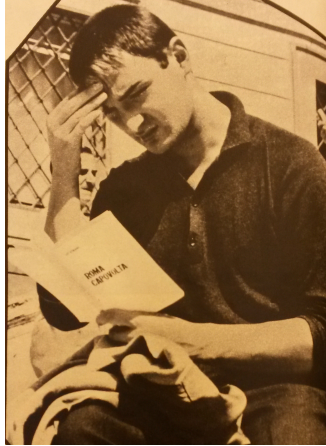


Figure 3.7. Gio Stajano (*Lo Specchio*, September 27, 1959, 18). The magazine published this picture presenting him as “grandchild of Achille Starace.” The magazine sarcastically underlined that the young painter and writer did not nurture the rough militaristic virtues of his grandfather. He preferred “to investigate, thoroughly, some very peculiar features of today’s customs.”

In the same year, 1959, the singer Ghigo Agosti wrote a song for Coccinelle, entitled *Coccinella*, in which he sang “*Amore amore amore/io sento un tuffo al cuore con te/Co-co-cinella*” (Love love love/My heart skips with you/Co-co-cinella) and “*tu mi piaci di più/se non ti vesti di blu/e metti quella gonna/che ti stava tanto bene*” (I like you more/if you do not wear blue/and if you put on that skirt/that looked so good on you). Ghigo seemed to request Coccinelle to give him the illusion of “real” femininity so that he could feel allowed to admire and love her. Moreover, calling her *Coccinella* instead of *Coccinelle*, using the Italian feminine suffix “-a,” Ghigo tried once again to “normalize” his sexual desires. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the divide between homosexuality and gender inversion was vague, as it was unclear if homosexuality had to be understood as an “essence,” a behavior, a disease, or a vice. Such ambiguity allowed Ghigo to declare his “love” for Coccinelle without any fear of being perceived as a homosexual. Declaring his masculine – and supposedly active –

³⁶ This idea of the world of culture dominated by the homosexuals became a leit motiv of the conservatives over the course of the 1960s. Malaparte talked about it in his last book, see Malaparte, *Mamma Marcia*, 263-265. For homosexuality in books see Elsa Morante, *L'isola di Arturo* (1957), Natalia Ginzburg, *Valentino* (1957), Alberto Arbasino, *Le piccole vacanze* (1957), Giorgio Bassani, *Gli occhiali d'oro* (1958), Giovanni Testori, *Il Ponte della Ghisolfa* (1958), Alberto Arbasino, *Anonimo Lombardo* (1959), Alberto Arbasino, *La narcisata ovvero Una notte nel demi-monde* (1959), Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Una vita violenta* (1959), Giò Stajano, *Roma Capovolta* (1959), Giò Stajano, *Meglio l'uovo oggi* (1959), Giovanni Testori, *La Gilda del MacMahon* (1959), Furio Monicelli, *Il Gesuita perfetto* (1960). For movies see for example Alessandro Blasetti, *Europa di notte* (1959), Mauro Bolognini, *La notte brava* (1959), Franco Rossi, *Morte di un amico* (1959), Vittorio Sala, *Costa Azzurra* (1959). For the spread of “dangerous” homosexual movies see: A.B., “Il cinema capovolto,” *Mascotte*, November 12, 1960, 8-14; Bar. “Il fascino femminile in una nuova prospettiva,” *Mascotte*, November 22, 1960, 10-13; A.B., “Cinecittà assediata,” *Mascotte*, November 22, 1960, 18-19.

attraction for a feminized – and allegedly passive – body, Ghigo asserted his virility, and dispelled any doubts about his sexual “normalcy.”³⁷

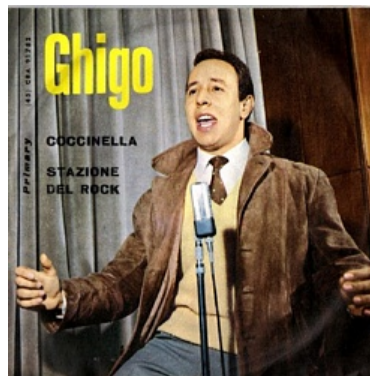


Figure 3.8. Cover of the Ghigo's 45 rpm, *Coccinella*.

At the end of the 1950s, the French transsexual Coccinelle (Figure 3.9.) had acquired an enormous popularity in Italy thanks to her appearance in the Italian movie *Europa di notte* (1959), her live performances in Rome and Milan, and the “publicity” of several magazines. The conservative press in particular, confusing gender inversion, homosexuality, transvestitism, and transexualism, tried to use Coccinelle – calling her the *uomo-donna* (man-woman), the *androgino* (androgynous), the *ermafrodito* (hermaphrodite) and sarcastically poking fun at her gender pronouns – as an example of the catastrophic consequences of the spread of homosexuality.³⁸ The moral panic spurred by the approval of the Merlin Law nurtured apprehension about the spread of sexual and gender “disorders” undermining “normative” masculinity and threatening juvenile heterosexuality. At the same time, while ridiculing the *travestiti*, the Italian press showed a certain fascination with them, and published several pictures of these “creatures.” Coccinelle was not the only *travestito* to hit the headlines. Also Bambi (Figure 3.12.) and Kiki Mistique (Figure 3.11.) – both called “men” by the Italian journalists – had their own moments of glory in the Italian tabloids, and

³⁷ The song is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FsolYdZVKM>.

³⁸ “Adamo era Eva,” *Le Ore*, January 10, 1959, 48-51; “Coccinelle. Dea in formato doppio,” *Le Ore*, August 1, 1959, 37; “Coccinelle è una donna?” *Mascotte*, September 20, 1959, 21-23; “I guai di Coccinelle,” *Le Ore*, November 7, 1959, 5; La notte di ‘Cocci’,” *Lo Specchio*, November 15, 1959, 20-21; “Fanno incasso anche i ‘travestiti’,” *Meridiano d’Italia*, December 6, 1959, 30; “Coccinelle in sartoria,” *Le Ore*, December 19, 1959, 36-39.

the show organized by the female impersonators of *Le Carrousel de Paris* (Figure 3.10.) in Milan attracted the attention of sensationalist magazines.³⁹

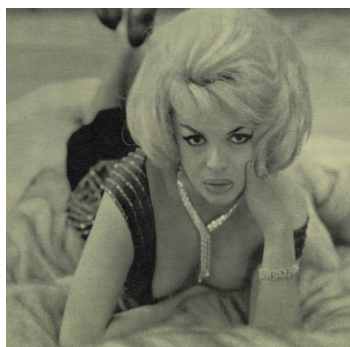


Figure 3.9. Coccinelle.
Le Ore, December 19, 1959, 36.



Figure 3.10. Female impersonators of
Le Carrousel de Paris. *Lo Specchio*, May 24, 1959.



Figure 3.11. Kiki Mistique.
Le Ore, December 26, 1959, 2.

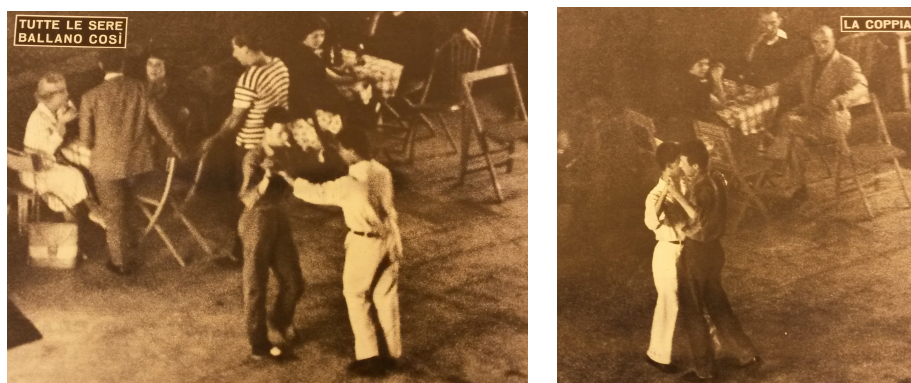


Figure 3.12. Bambi.
Mascotte, September 20, 1959, 24.

The 1950s ended with Gino Olivari publishing his pro-homosexual monograph, with Giò Stajano revealing the homosexual secrets of Rome, with French transvestites conquering the Italian night clubs, with Ghigo singing his love for Coccinelle, with Franco Cerutti arguing for homosexuality as “normalcy,” and with homosexuals having fun on dancing platforms floating on the Tiber (Figures 3.13. and 3.14.). But the decade also ended with a great anxiety about the presumed catastrophic consequences of the Merlin Law, with Antonio Gandin

³⁹ For Bambi see “Un altro travestito,” *Mascotte*, September 20, 1959, 24-25. For Kiki see “Kiki Mistique,” *Le Ore*, December 26, 1959, 2-3. Both Bambi and Kiki were “transvestites” of *Le Carrousel*. Bambi also played herself in the movie *Costa Azzurra* (1959). For *Le Carrousel* see “Milano si traveste,” *Lo Specchio*, May 24, 1959, 21-23.

publishing a book about the origin of – and best remedies against – homosexuality, and with the publication of Curzio Malaparte’s final outright indictment against “sexual inversion.”⁴⁰



Figures 3.13.-3.14. Men dancing in Rome. From *Lo Specchio*, August 2, 1959, 18-19. These two pictures show how the homosexuals were patrons of the dancing platforms floating on the Tiber. The caption of the first picture on the left says “Every night they dance like this.” The second states laconically “The couple.” The author of the article explains: “These young men ... look like Pasolini’s characters, ridiculous and disconcerting protagonists of the sordid chronicle of our present days.” See “L’ambiguo Tevere. Balletti grigi a Roma,” *Lo Specchio*, August 2, 1959, 18-19.

In order to stop the *tiles* of the *homosexual domino*, which were perceived to be falling relentlessly one after another threatening Italian masculinity and juvenile sexual “normativity,” the Italian conservatives, who were particularly active in carrying out their anti-homosexual media campaign, took action in Parliament and in 1960, for the first time in the history of the Italian democracy, they tried to criminalize homosexuality. Supporters and opponents of the neo-Fascist anti-homosexual law ended up nurturing further the circulation of discourses that made same-sex sexualities more visible, more threatening, and also more appealing.

Manco’s Bill and *Lo Specchio*’s Investigative Report

The neo-Fascist MSI presented a law proposal aimed at introducing into the Italian Penal Code a new article, no. 527A, as a supplement to article no. 527, which addressed “indecent” acts.⁴¹ The proposed new article, that never made it to the floor, stated that whoever had

⁴⁰ See Gino Olivari, *Omosessualità* (Milan: 1958) and Gino Olivari, *Omosessualità* (Milano: Tip. F.lli Azzimonti, 1959); Antonio Gandin, *Omosessualità maschile e femminile* (Roma: Edizioni mediterranee, 1959); Malaparte, *Mamma Marcia*.
⁴¹ Law Proposal no. 1920, Modification and integration of Title IX, Chapter II of the Penal Code, presented on January 22, 1960 by Clemente Manco, Giuseppe Gonella, Ferruccio De Michieli Vitturi, Antonio De Vito, Wondrich Geffer, Arturo

sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex could face a potential prison sentence from six to twenty-four months, and could be liable to a fine from 10,000 to 100,000 lire. The penalty would be increased in case of public scandal. Similarly the sentence against the adult – or the adults – would be raised if among the offenders there had been one or more individuals under eighteen years of age. This brief article, punishing any public or private same-sex sexual intercourse, could launch a real “witch hunt” against both male and female homosexuals. Moreover, it would be more punitive than the article proposed, and then pulled back, in the 1920s by the Fascists, which provided for a penalty exclusively in case of public scandal. Homosexuals as such, according to the 1960 proposal, had to be criminalized, not only their potential scandalous visibility.⁴² In order to offer more context for the article’s language, it is important to consider the reasons neo-Fascists suggested in support of this proposal. They explained that the aim of this article was “to prevent the potential spread of a phenomenon that, particularly in the last years, has worried all those who care about the moral sanity of the nation, in general, and of the youths, in particular.” According to the neo-Fascists, homosexual perversion could have different origins: pathology, vice, and “pure and simple degeneration.” The proponents of the law seemed to be particularly worried about the mass dissemination of “depraved literature.” Young novices were lured by these “pseudo-schools of sexual distortion with the mirage of new emotions.” Italian society had to defend itself from such a dangerous vice “which not only breaks up the unity of the family and of the nation but, above all, distorts the natural instincts.” The proponents underlined how several states penalized homosexuality and how recommending the approval of this proposal was in line with the Italian intrinsically Catholic morality. Clemente Manco and other supporters of the bill were particularly interested in protecting future generations, favorite preys of the

Michellini, Gianni Roberti, Pino Romualdi, and Domenico Leccisi, Parliamentary Acts, Chamber of Deputies, III Legislature, 1-3.

⁴² Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man Homosexuality in Fascist Italy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 95-110.

“perverts,” and in fighting against the circulation of literature viciously advertising same-sex sexuality. Ultimately, article 527A was characterized above all as a measure to safeguard young Italian men.⁴³

Shortly after the presentation of the neo-Fascist bill *Lo Specchio* began an investigative report in five installments entitled “*Il Terzo Sesso in Italia*” (The Third Sex in Italy). The main goals of this report were: 1) to understand who the homosexuals were and how many homosexuals lived in Italy; 2) study their mental attitudes; 3) observe how they lived and how they tried to meet each other; 4) understand if homosexuals had created in Italy a state within the state and if homosexuality was a dangerously growing phenomenon; 5) learn what homosexuals thought about the Italian society and how they tried to make sense of their own condition; and, in the end, 6) determine how, and to what extent, homosexuals were influencing Italian culture (cinema, television, theater, and literature). In order to answer all these questions the journalists not only read up books and articles about homosexuality, but they also interviewed several homosexuals.⁴⁴ The two main conclusions the journalists drew were: 1) homosexuality was much more widespread than believed, and 2) homosexuality was a dangerous social issue. About the first point *Lo Specchio* argued: “Homosexuals, homophiles, live among us, among all of us, in towns and in the countryside. Do not expect them to put make-up on their lips, do not expect them to move lamely, to speak languidly. They are, they could be [homosexual], even if they do not behave according to stereotypes. They are [homosexual], even if in their appearance, and in everyday life, they seem to be normal, exemplary, and polite.”⁴⁵ Thus, according to the author of this article, Gianfranco

⁴³ Law Proposal no. 1920, 1-2. The magazine *Meridiano d'Italia*, politically close to the MSI, published an article in which politicians, professors, and writers expressed their opinions about the criminalization of homosexuality. Most of them declared to be against it. The magazine used a picture of Coccinelle to represent the homosexuals. See Giorgio Zanzi, “Sesso numero tre. Omosessualità: vizio o malattia?” *Meridiano d'Italia*, February 28, 1960, 26-28.

⁴⁴ See Gianfranco Finaldi, “Centomila solo a Roma. Il terzo sesso. Prime cifre e primi documenti del rapporto sull'omosessualità,” *Lo Specchio*, February 7, 1960, 14-16; Id., “Le ‘zie’ e i ‘velati’,” *Lo Specchio*, February 14, 1960, 12-16; Id., “Le loro confessioni,” *Lo Specchio*, February 21, 1960, 16-18; Id., “Una fetta di potere,” *Lo Specchio*, March 13, 1960, 16-19. *Lo Specchio* published also a short article about the third sex in Europe see: Gianfranco Finaldi, “Europa capovolta,” *Lo Specchio*, February 21, 1960, 19-21.

⁴⁵ Gianfranco Finaldi, “Vi sveliamo il mondo delle amicizie particolari,” *Lo Specchio*, February 7, 1960, 13.

Finaldi – and this was an important point he highlighted – homosexuality and gender inversion were not the same. Homosexuals were not necessarily effeminate. The investigative report recognized that some homosexuals could be more feminine than others, but it emphasized that in most cases homosexual men did not show any easily detectable sign of “deviation.” Men above suspicion could be part of the homosexual clique which – and this was the second point – was consuming, contaminating, and infecting Italian society. In particular, several intellectuals and artists were said to spread this anomaly, corrupting Italian customs.⁴⁶ Homosexuals had become, as this investigative report seemed to suggest, an important matter for Italians. Some insolent and provocative public displays of same-sex sexuality, Finaldi argued, were alarming, and this development triggered political responses such as, for example, the neo-Fascist law proposal. The journalist did not think that the law would be a solution. Rather, he thought that it would cause an increase of homosexual acts, advertising rather than suppressing the “anomaly.” It was necessary not to hit anonymous homosexuals, but rather those few powerful ones who, through their “secret societies” and their cultural ascendancy, were corrupting the nation.⁴⁷

In the fourth installment of the investigative report, the magazine published a map of Italy in order to show where homosexuals lived, and where they spent their holidays (Figure 3.15.). In the legend of this map (Figure 3.16.) the author used six symbols to show where it was possible to find male prostitutes (*attività a pagamento*) and male illegal brothels (*esistenza di “case” particolari*), where there were tourist areas particularly appealing to a homosexual clientele (*località di richiamo turistico particolare*), and where it was possible to find upper class (*ambiente omofilo socialmente elevato*), middle class/working class (*ambiente omofilo medio e popolare*), and educated (*ambiente omofilo intellettuale*)

⁴⁶ There were some professional categories, according to *Lo Specchio*, with a very high *homosexual density*. The Italian homosexuals were, above all, dancers, set designers, actors and directors, painters, tailors, antique dealers, sportsmen, waiters, hairdressers, and unskilled laborers of the cinematographic and theatrical milieu (*Lo Specchio*, March 13, 1960, 17).

⁴⁷ Finaldi, “Vi sveliamo il mondo delle amicizie particolari,” 11-13.

homophiles. Some regions, such as Basilicata, Abruzzo, Sardinia, and Trentino Alto-Adige, seemed to be devoid of homosexuals. The Italian North and some areas in Campania and Sicily were said to be particularly attractive for homosexual tourists. Northern Italy, together with Rome and Naples, featured many male prostitutes, and presented socially mixed homosexual milieus. By comparison, homosexual men living in Calabria and Apulia seemed to belong to more humble social strata. In the end, the areas around the lakes in Lombardy (Garda, Maggiore, and Como) looked like homosexual colonies for tourists, but Brescia – that media would turn soon into the “Italian Sodom” – according to this map was not a “homosexual town.”

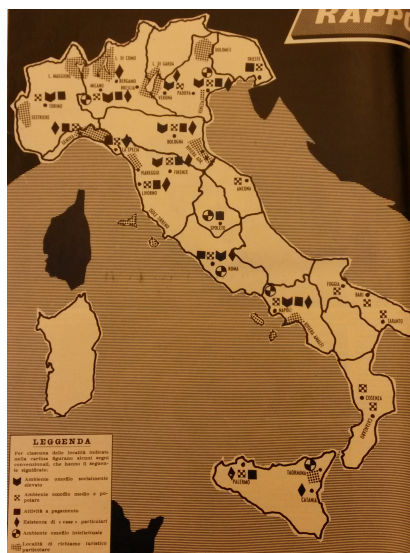


Figure 3.15. Map of Italy showing where homosexuals lived and spent their holidays (*Lo Specchio*, March 6, 1960, 14).

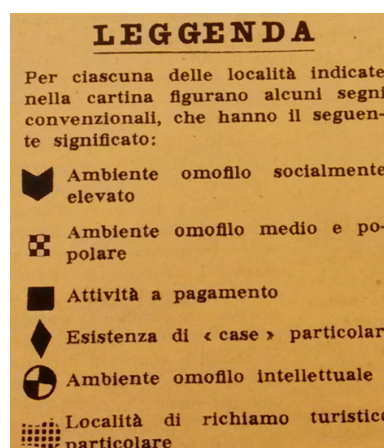


Figure 3.16. Legend of the map (*Lo Specchio*, March 6, 1960, 14).

As Finaldi explained in this article male prostitution was a key aspect of homosexuality. Supposedly, it manifested itself in different forms from the “high class prostitute” to the “squalid streetwalker.” In Italy it was possible to find more or less casual hustlers in big cities as well as in smaller towns. Other areas where sex for money was rather common were the Amalfi coast and the Adriatic Riviera. Here, as Finaldi explained, the sex industry was a source of income for local male youths. Cinemas were the reference points for all those who were searching for “mercenary adventures,” and moreover, in small as well as in big cities,

there were specific areas where clients and hustlers could meet up. The article – doing homosexual readers a (maybe) unintended favor – not only explained the rules a man should follow to pick someone up in a cinema, but it also gave directions about where homosexual men could find male prostitutes in Rome, Milan, Florence, Naples, Bologna, Genoa, and Venice. According to this article male-male prostitution was poorly paid, and the average rate for a “sex service” was around 500 lire. In big cities prices were so low because “supply” was larger than “demand.” Homosexuality was common among various social groups and tended to constitute “oddly assorted” milieus. It was frequent that at a “gay-party” (the article interestingly used this English expression maybe hinting at the presence of foreign suitors) aristocrats, waiters, professionals, mechanics, art dealers, and sailors hung out together. And, the article underlined, it was obvious that in such “*mésalliance[s]*” the poor ended up making a profit, and the rich often fell victim to blackmail. Finaldi, even if against Manco’s bill, brought the attention of his readers once again to what it seemed to be the main issue at hand: the necessity of protecting the youths. Moreover, unlike the neo-Fascists, he underscored the correlation existing between homosexuality and male prostitution, and tried to show how the homosexualization of the Italian youth was strictly related to the socio-economic structures of late 1950s and early 1960s Italy.⁴⁸

The publication of this investigative report pushed many readers of *Lo Specchio* to send letters in order to express their thoughts, ideas, and fears about homosexuality. As the director of the magazine explained they had received allegedly more than 1,000 letters that, in his opinion, were an exceptional documentary contribution for a better understanding of how the “homosexual issue” was perceived by “normal” and homosexual Italians.⁴⁹ Some letters sent by readers who presented themselves as “normal” criticized the neo-Fascist law proposal,

⁴⁸ Gianfranco Finaldi, “Un’Italia fatta così. Rapporto sul terzo sesso,” *Lo Specchio*, March 6, 1960, 14-19.

⁴⁹ See “Lettere dall’altra sponda,” *Lo Specchio*, February 21, 1960, 17; “Lettere dall’altra sponda,” *Lo Specchio*, March 13, 1960, 19; “Lettere dall’altra sponda,” *Lo Specchio*, March 20, 1960, 20-21; “Lettere allo specchio,” *Lo Specchio*, March 27, 1960, 2.

and argued instead for the introduction of a law against procurers and blackmailers who exploited and terrorized homosexuals. Not everybody was sympathetic. A reader from Rome, for example, after having described homosexuality as *luridume* (filth) and *pervertimento* (depravity), invited the tabloid to reveal the identity of all homosexuals interviewed to write the report, and in doing so “expose to public infamy these filthy samples of a corrupt segment of mankind” afflicted with an “unmentionable deformity.”⁵⁰ Other letters sent to the magazine talked about the necessity of hiding one’s sexual orientation in order to have a decent career, about the sexual exploitation of proletarian youths, or about the ways in which many men discovered their homosexuality just “trying” once: “Homosexuality – a reader asserted – is a vice and, as many other vices, once you begin, it is difficult to back out of it.”⁵¹ These reader responses were manifestations of a fear of the “other” based not only on social views instigated by sensationalist tabloids but also on deep seated stereotypes. Media were “educating” their audience but they were also allowing many readers to develop and express their outspoken views on a thorny topic that was decidedly *coming out of the closet*.

The investigative report prompted members of the “third sex” as well to come out and talk about their experiences. One letter published in *Lo Specchio* was written by a group of homosexuals living in Ravenna who opposed the criminalization of homosexuality. They argued that the law was cruel, and that even without it they already had against them “both society and public opinion.”⁵² An anonymous homosexual from Bozen wrote a letter about the neo-Fascist proposal arguing that “ludicrous prohibitive laws” favored “the underworld of prostitution” and other “derivative criminal activities such as blackmail and assault.”⁵³ *Lo Specchio* gave space also to those testimonies more in line with stereotypes about

⁵⁰ “Lettere allo specchio,” *Lo Specchio*, Aprile 3, 1960, 2.

⁵¹ “Lettere allo specchio,” *Lo Specchio*, March 27, 1960, 2.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “Lettere allo specchio,” *Lo Specchio*, April 3, 1960, 2. See other letters opposing the law proposal in “Lettere dall’altra sponda,” *Lo Specchio*, March 13, 1960, 19.

homosexuality as an innate “third sex.” Maurizio, a waiter from Milan, for example, talked about himself in these terms:

You see, I am a good waiter: and why am I? I am good because of that innate feminine instinct which allows us [homosexuals] to stand out in some activities. We arrange a flower, bow, and hand out an object as only a good lady of the house can. For us it is natural, it is instinctive because we were born this way ... Believe me, if a waiter is not a *capovolto*, he cannot be a good waiter at all: real men, as is only right, cannot adjust to all those feminine jobs which only we [the homosexuals] can carry out with care and passion.⁵⁴

But if some homosexuals were able to band together and others considered their sexual orientation a gift, there were also homosexuals who were conflicted about what they described as their “anomaly,” and desirous to lead a “normal” life in a “normal” society, as a youth from Genoa confessed:

I have been aware of my anomaly since I was a child. From then on I have been living hiding my inclinations. Playing the part of the normal man has become for me second nature I am so deeply integrated in my family, my work environment, my friends’ entourage, that I have absorbed behaviors and mentality of the ‘normal’ world. Therefore, even if I am homosexual, I often do not feel like one of them The mask I assembled is so tightly glued to the face I had to hide, that it has almost destroyed my original features If, reading my testimony, you had the impression that I have achieved resignation or a personal balance, you are wrong: I am scared of realizing that every day the distance between my ‘real I’ and my ‘fictitious I’ grows, I am scared of realizing that perhaps they will never coincide, I am scared that, at some point, I will understand that I have wasted my life, without actually living it I think that I will never find a solution and that this painful knot that intertwines pretense and reality, and that I do not have the force of untying, will accompany me for the rest of my life.⁵⁵

This last writer strove to remake himself into what he regarded as an acceptable persona. At the same time, he was clearly aware that he was giving up something by doing so. Without the ability to live as he wished he was forced to live someone else’s life. We cannot prove in any way that these letters were real. We might even speculate that some of them – if not all of them – were written by the editorial staff of *Lo Specchio*. Nonetheless, real or not, they certainly produced discourses, and had the power to affect – positively or negatively – what the readers of the magazine thought about same-sex sexualities.

⁵⁴ “Lettere allo specchio,” *Lo Specchio*, March 27, 1960, 2.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The investigative report drew attention to the complex tensions existing between the different ways of approaching homosexuality, and to the numerous ways in which homosexuals behaved and expressed their own sexualities. Articles and letters published by *Lo Specchio*, showing the complexity of the phenomenon, presenting homosexuals as embodiment of a continuum between masculinity and femininity, and suggesting that even those men who appeared to be masculine could be homosexuals, made homosexuality even more threatening and disquieting. The scandals of 1960 solidified fears and anxieties about the homosexual menace. Shortly after the publication of the investigative report *Lo Specchio* devoted a long article to a homosexual scandal in Rome, another falling *tile* in the Italian *homosexual domino show*. Through Kostantin Feile's case, prelude to the major *Balletti Verdi* scandal, *Lo Specchio* suggested that even if there were homosexuals who, as the letters showed, were trying to lead an honest and respectable life or lived their sexual orientation as an "atrocious pain," there were still dangerous and depraved homosexuals who did not deserve compassion, who corrupted the youths, and who had to be put in jail.⁵⁶

The German Sculptor

In April 1960 Konstantin Feile, a German sculptor living in Rome and working as a tour guide, hit the headlines. The investigation began when a male adolescent, infected with a venereal disease, confessed that Feile organized sexual encounters between young "prey" and old "perverts" in his apartment. After this confession, the police searched Feile's house, and here they found hundreds of pictures of male youths, termed "*ragazzi squillo*" (call boys) by the press (Figure 3.17.). For days and days newspapers and magazines published pictures not only of Feile, but also of dozens of youths who were part of his clique (Figure 3.18.).

⁵⁶ Dino Sanzò, "Potrebbe essere vostro figlio. Mille adolescenti senza nome nell'archivio di un perversito," *Lo Specchio*, May 8, 1960, 13-16. For letters talking about homosexuality as pain, and about the relationship homosexuality/respectability see letters no. 2 and 4 in Finaldi, "Le 'zie' e i 'velati'," 14, 16 and "Lettere dall'altra sponda," *Lo Specchio*, March 13, 1960, 19.



Figure 3.17. Two of Feile's boys.
Meridiano, May 1, 1960, 17.



Figure 3.18. Feile together with some youths.
Meridiano, May 1, 1960, back cover.

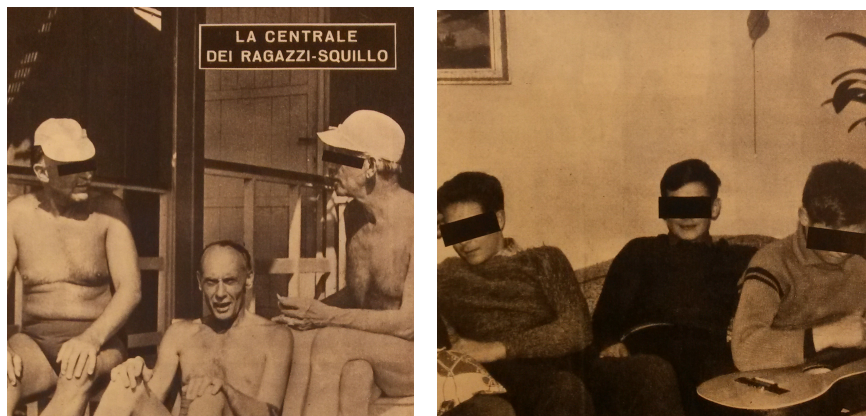
The sculptor's photographs were used to "advertise" his human "merchandise" in Italy and abroad. In March 1961, Feile was sentenced to three years for corruption of minors, whereas other five individuals implicated in the case were found guilty and sentenced to penalties between 6 and 18 months of prison.⁵⁷

In May 1960 *Lo Specchio* dedicated an article full of details and pictures to this scandal, entitled "*Potrebbe essere vostro figlio*" ("He could be your son").⁵⁸ The journalist Dino Sanzò, without making necessary distinctions between homosexuality and pedophilia, described the ways in which Feile baited his victims. He used his car as a lure. Young kids – who were between nine and fifteen years of age – were talked into following him to his apartment after a drive around Rome. Sanzò described the victims as *ragazzi "per bene"* (decent youths) "led astray and tarnished by a disgusting character." However, the real problem – as usual – were not the corrupted youths, but rather the corrupting adults. In order to underline the age difference, and thus the alleged power imbalance between "call boys" and "customers," *Lo Specchio* resorted also to the immediate power of images. The tabloid indeed published two pictures where the nakedness of the adults and the clothedness of the youths

⁵⁷ See "Un ignobile mercato si svolgeva nello studio dello scultore tedesco," *l'Unità*, April 24, 1960, 5; "Un attore di cinema e un professore responsabili di corruzione di minorenni," *Il Paese*, April 23, 1960, 4; "Un attore e uno scultore stranieri adescavano i ragazzi di scuola," *Il Messaggero*, April 23, 1960, 5; "Dilaga lo scandalo dei 'ragazzi-squillo' ma per la polizia le indagini sono chiuse," *l'Unità*, April 26, 1960, 4. One month before the Feile's scandal broke two male brothels had been discovered in Palermo and Milan. Male prostitution seemed to be a national emergency: "Una casa per 'uomini-squillo' scoperta dalla polizia a Palermo," *Il Messaggero*, March 3, 1960; "Scoperta una casa di 'uomini-squillo'," *Il Messaggero*, March 22, 1960. For the final sentence see "Tre anni allo scultore Feile organizzatore degli 'squillo'," *l'Unità*, March 7, 1961, 5. The final sentences were confirmed by the judge of appeal: "Erano 'incontri artistici' i balletti verdi di Feile," *l'Unità*, October 16, 1961, 4.

⁵⁸ Sanzò, "Potrebbe essere vostro figlio."

seemed to metaphorically represent the contrast between the sexual lust of the former and the innocence of the latter (Figures 3.19.-3.20.).⁵⁹



Figures 3.19.-3.20. *La centrale dei ragazzi-squillo*
(The headquarters of the call-boys), *Lo Specchio*, May 1, 1960, 3.

The magazine *Cronaca* also devoted a long article to Feile. The tabloid focused its attention on the members of the “third sex,” described as “unprincipled” and “immoral,” and on the youths, presented as “incurable victims” of the homosexual vice. According to Elio Polese, author of this piece, homosexuality was a recent phenomenon. It was a characteristic feature of several northern countries, but in Italy it had always been a disease affecting a small minority only. Unfortunately, especially after WWII, according to the journalist, homosexuality had spread all over the peninsula. In the beginning it had come with the occupying troops, then with tourists, and now it had reached “unimaginable” proportions. Polese denounced the existence of an increasing number of illegal brothels for men – as Feile’s case seemed to confirm, and reported the continuous emergence of new homosexual cases all over the country. The magazine bombastically talked about 100,000 homosexuals in Rome, and about two million and a half in all of Italy. The planned law, *Cronaca* argued, should be put on the legislative agenda again. Under the pressure of public opinion all parties would accept the idea that the “third sex” was “the most implacable enemy of national health,

⁵⁹ Ibid., 13. A couple of months before Feile’s case broke *Il Tempo* published an article about organizations of pedophiles in Milan: Corrado Stajano, “I ragazzi sono in pericolo,” *Il Tempo*, March 1, 1960, 18. Pier Paolo Pasolini was rather skeptical about the “innocence” of these youths. See Pier Paolo Pasolini, “A proposito di Feile,” Inedito (1961), *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società* (Milano: Mondadori, 1999), 107.

the most abominable corruptor of the youths, and the most pitiful organic defect a nation could bear.” Homosexuality was a “monster.” The disease was spreading everywhere. And the state had to intervene before sexual perversion dragged down more and more adolescent men.⁶⁰

In May 1960, *Meridiano d'Italia*, a neo-Fascist magazine, talked about this case. It explained that the young victims were lured, recruited, and then “rented out” for thousands of lire. Most of the youths were pupils and came from bourgeois and wealthy families. Moreover, according to the magazine, many of them showed signs of sexual violence, and turned out to be infected with venereal diseases.⁶¹ The magazine explained that Feile’s clients were both foreigners and Italians, often married professionals above suspicion. *Meridiano* was particularly interested in showing the terrible conditions in which these Italian youths, deprived of previous political ideals (and here the hint to the positivity of Fascism was rather obvious), were living under the Christian Democratic party’s rule. Moreover, the journalist underlined how homosexuality was not just a topic discussed by psychiatrists in medical journals. Homosexuals were by then protagonists of novels and movies, and were dangerously living among “normal individuals.” The Italian state, giving homosexual men the right to exist, was putting its future at risk.⁶²

On May 8, 1960, trying to laugh at the supposed spread of “non-normative” sexualities, *Meridiano* published two cartoons.

⁶⁰ Elio Polese, “I genitori col volto tra le mani,” *Cronaca*, April 20, 1960, 3-5.

⁶¹ Gianni Mantovani, “I quattrocento baby-squillo dell’Herr Professor,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, May 1, 1960, 16-19.

⁶² Gianni Mantovani, “La città perversa,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, May 8, 1960, 10-12.

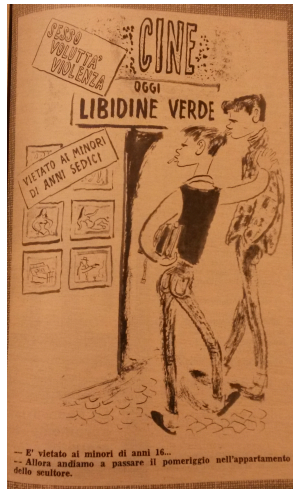


Figure 3.21. Cartoon about Feile.
Meridiano d'Italia, May 8, 1960, 33.



Figure 3.22. Cartoon about Coccinelle.
Meridiano d'Italia, May 8, 1960, 33.

In the first, two youths smoking a cigarette outside of a cinema look at the show scheduled for the day (Figure 3.21.). The title of the movie is *Libidine Verde* (Green Lusts) – where the adjective green can be interpreted as “homosexual,” “juvenile” or both. The movie is a story of “*Sesso, Voluttà, Violenza*” (sex, sensual pleasure, violence). As one of the two youths says, the movie is forbidden to people under sixteen. And the answer of his friend is: “Then let’s spend the afternoon in the apartment of the sculptor.” In the second, a young boy talking to an older man explains that the time of the *Balilla* – of the Fascist youth – is over, and that for the young the personality of the moment is Coccinelle (Figure 3.22.).⁶³ *Meridiano* openly and nostalgically talked about Mussolini’s “glorious” years, and reaffirmed the necessity of introducing a law against homosexuality. Even if the magazine published some letters written by homosexual readers who wanted to rebut the accusations raised against them, *Meridiano* showed a clear position against “sexual inversion.” It presented it as an infectious disease, dangerous not only for the youths, but also for the homosexuals themselves who were potential victims of juvenile delinquents.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Meridiano d'Italia*, May 8, 1960, 33.

⁶⁴ See Gianni Mantovani, “L’aria dei sette colli,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, May 15, 1960, 20-23; “Cinque lettere che sono cinque documenti,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, May 29, 1960, 18-19; Gianni Mantovani, “Il terso sesso impazza,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, May 29, 1960, 16-20.

When Feile's case erupted, *Il Borghese* brushed up the habitual accusations against Lina Merlin's law. Alberto Giovannini, in an open letter to the Senator, repeated once again that the closure of the brothels was the reason behind the spread of homosexuality. The journalist wrote sarcastically that in Merlin's Italy there was "sexual equality": at that point there were not only female, but also male prostitutes, not only "call girls," but also "call boys." After the closure of the *case* female prostitutes on the streets were forced by their pimps to increase prices. Few students, workers, and soldiers had the 5,000 or the 10,000 lire requested now by these women. These high prices were affecting youths as never before. Italian men had never had problems satisfying their sexual needs because brothels had always been affordable. In this new situation of involuntary sexual restraint instead, according to *Il Borghese*, youths and adolescents were turning into "call boys," were exposed to "German sculptors," and were becoming "young prey" in feasts organized by rich men. For these youths having sex with men was a way to achieve that sexual gratification that the Merlin Law made difficult for all, and even impossible for many. Of course Giovannini avoided saying that men under 18 years of age were not allowed in the *case*, and thus Feile's boys, even if the brothels had been still open, could not have had access to them.⁶⁵

Feile's case was also covered by liberal and Communist magazines. However, by comparison to sensationalist and right-wing tabloids, they were less vocal against homosexuality. They read the case in terms of an increasing desire for material possession among the new generations, and in terms of failing education. *L'Espresso* defined this case as the most grievous episode of corruption ever in Italy and underlined how hundreds, maybe a thousand, scions of the Roman middle and high bourgeoisie had been victims of a trade that was becoming more and more alarming in the entire country. A few thousand lire and a cozy apartment had enabled Feile to steer young students of four Roman schools toward prostitution. The behavior of these youths was rather puzzling, because they were sons of

⁶⁵ Alberto Giovannini, "Una legge 'di vita'. Lettera all'Onorevole Merlin," *Il Borghese*, May 26, 1960, 817.

professionals. According to the magazine, the lust for goods and access to money, a desire that was spreading to an alarming degree, was the principal cause of such behavior. Dino Origlia, in an article published in *Epoca*, did not blame the homosexual adults alone, however. In his opinion the parents of these youths were responsible: absent fathers and hyper-protective mothers were causing the estrangement of youths from their families. Feile's scandal was a consequence of a misguided educational system. In the end, *Vie Nuove*, magazine of the Communist Party, underlined how the youths implicated in the case, lacking a proper sexual education, had been lured by the possibility of earning money, and by their juvenile taste for danger. Then, once involved with this "organization," the youths felt there was no way out for them. Italian families, and society more generally, had failed them. Under the Christian Democrats, Italy had not been able to offer new antifascist values, and had not helped the new generations understand how to live their sexuality consciously. Moreover, the weakness of the families, and the absence of collaboration between families and schools, had left an empty space that the "depraved corruptor" had been able to occupy. Young men needed gyms, libraries, and juvenile associations that could keep them off the street. In addition, they also needed a good education that would allow them to develop a healthy sexual life. The tone of *Vie Nuove* against homosexuals was rather measured. By contrast, *l'Unità* – the official newspaper of the Communist Party that a few months later would instigate the *Balletti Verdi* scandal – was much more interested in exposing sensationalist details about "the shameful traffic of the 'call boys'."⁶⁶

Feile's case complicated the picture of male prostitution. The Roman boys who decided to sexually "entertain" affluent Italians and foreigners were not doing that out of necessity. They did not come from poor and uneducated families. It was not their poverty that

⁶⁶ Andrea Barbato, "Le amicizie eccessive," *L'Espresso*, May 8, 1960, 6-7; Dino Origlia, "È colpa dei genitori se i figli sono travati," *Epoca*, May 15, 1960, 13-15; Cesare Pillon, Franco Zillitti, "I ragazzi bruciati verdi," *Vie Nuove*, May 7, 1960, 16-21. For *l'Unità* see, for example, "Un ignobile mercato si svolgeva nello studio dello scultore tedesco," "L'inchiesta sui 'ragazzi squillo' ripresa per ordine della Procura," *l'Unità*, April 27, 1960, 4. Pier Paolo Pasolini writing about Feile's case underlined how to his eyes Communist, Catholic, and Fascist media had exactly the same attitude towards homosexuality. See Pasolini, "A proposito di Feile," 105.

pushed them into the arms of Feile and his “friends,” but rather their desire to possess more, quickly, and without asking their parents for money. According to the press, these *ragazzi* “*per bene*” were proof that the process of degeneration was insidious and that no one was definitively immune.

The Balletti Verdi: How to Fabricate a Scandal

After Feile’s case the anti-homosexual initiatives of the police intensified, and cruising areas (cinemas, gardens, public restrooms, etc.) were put under strict surveillance all over Italy.⁶⁷ In 1960 the *tiles* of the *homosexual domino show* kept falling, and the situation did not change during the second half of the year, when male homosexuality made the headlines on three occasions: the censorship of some homosexual scenes from Testori’s play *L’Arialda*, the murder of an American man in Rome, and the exposure of the *Balletti Verdi* scandal.⁶⁸ The latter, having broken just a few weeks before the 1960 election, was at first emphatically divulged by right-wing and leftist newspapers, and then commercially exploited by tabloids and mainstream magazines which flooded the mediasphere with rousing articles full of more or less imaginary details. The press, employing images already used by sensationalist tabloids in the 1940s and 1950s, talked about the *Balletti* as orgies where effeminate “peroxide

⁶⁷ See Franco Cerutti, “Ombres et Lumières en Italie,” *Arcadie*, June 1960, n. 78, 332 ; “Nouvelles d’Italie,” *Arcadie*, December 1960, n. 84, 714. The Ministry of Interior released a newsletter on April 30, 1960 ordering to pay more attention to youths and people “afflicted with homosexuality.” Moreover, this document stressed that, given that many foreigners were corrupting the Italian youths, the Ministry was allowed to expel homosexual foreigners or deny them the residence permit. See Luigi Salerno, “Appendice di aggiornamento ed errata corripge (1961),” *Enciclopedia di Polizia* (Milano: Hoepli, 1958), 5.

⁶⁸ Giovanni Testori’s *Arialda*, directed by Luchino Visconti, was performed in Rome at the *Teatro Eliseo* after having cut, as requested by Renzo Helfer (undersecretary of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage), twenty minutes from the original version. Both the language used and the issues presented (homosexuality and prostitution) were considered indecent by Helfer. The Italian press talked a lot about *Arialda*. Leftist magazines and newspapers advocated absolute artistic freedom, even if it meant to talk about embarrassing topics (“L’Arialda’ di Testori bloccata dalla censura,” *l’Unità*, November 9, 1960, 6; Nerio Minuzzo, “L’uomo con le forbici,” *L’Europeo*, November 20, 1960, 60-61; Ghigo de Chiara, “Movimentata ‘prima’ dell’Arialda’ all’Eliseo,” *l’Avanti!*, December 23, 1960, 5). More conservative journals were against the performance (Alberto Perrini, “Arialda alle porte. Nessun bavaglio è stato mai imposto alle autentiche opere d’arte,” *Lo Specchio*, November 13, 1960, 19-21; “La via pornografica al comunismo,” *Il Popolo*, November 16, 1960, 1-2; L’equivoca ‘Arialda’,” *Meridiano d’Italia*, November 27, 1960, 34-35; Giorgio Torelli, “Le Mutandine per Bandiera,” *Candido*, December 4, 1960, 8-9). The public prosecutor Carmelo Spagnuolo forbade in 1961 the staging of *L’Arialda* in Milan explaining that, among other things, the love between Eros and Lino narrated by Testori gave a false representation of a relationship that, given its homosexual nature, could not be pure, but only repugnant (Ordinanza di sequestro da parte del procuratore della repubblica di Milano dopo la prima rappresentazione presso il Teatro Nuovo, Milan, February 24, 1961, ACS, MI, Gab., 1961-1963, b. 361). For Testori and *L’Arialda* see also Francesco Gnerre, *L’eroe negato. Omosessualità e letteratura del Novecento* (Milano: Baldini&Castoldi, 2000), 297-335.

blondes” with long hair, eyelashes, and maquillage prostituted themselves with older clients wearing female garments (flashy sweaters, tight blue-jeans, softly colored chemisiers, female dresses, tutus, crinolines, high heeled shoes) and fake breasts. The scandal of Brescia was politicized by the Left and the Right. Communists and neo-fascists, treating homosexuality as a socio-economic degeneration and as a byproduct of moral corruption, tried to gain votes by accusing the city’s governing party – the *Democrazia Cristiana* – of overlooking the new generations.⁶⁹

Even if the scandal of Brescia became public in October 1960, the case had been opened five months before.⁷⁰ In May a young man, D.C., had confessed to his father that he prostituted himself. The father had gone to the Carabinieri to file an official complaint. Questioned by the Carabinieri the youth had revealed the name of the “corruptor” – A.G. – who was reported and arrested.⁷¹ But this charge had been just the beginning of a tangled affair. Once ignited, the scandal became a blaze that was hard to contain.⁷² In their investigation about this case other names had surfaced and with them, as *l’Unità* underscored, a never-ending “sequence of turpitudes.”⁷³ *Lo Specchio* highlighted how, at that point, the

⁶⁹ Azzini, “Imminenti alcuni clamorosi arresti”; Braschi, “Fuori i nomi di tutti gli implicati”; Antonio Massa, “L’orgia delle mezzecalzette,” *Meridiano d’Italia*, October 16, 1960, 18; C.A., “I magistrati a colloquio con un prete”; “Due denunciati dei balletti verdi arrestati durante la deposizione”; “Ieri due arrestati per i ‘balletti verdi’”; “Mike non c’entra.” The political exploitation of the *Balletti* can be further evidenced by the contrast with the previous homosexual “affaire” of *Villa Eden*, exposed by the police in the spring-summer of 1960 and largely ignored by the same magazines and newspapers that later “fabricated” the *Balletti Verdi* scandal. In May-June 1960 the Carabinieri had begun an investigation in Gardone Riviera. As a result of the inquiry the Italian authorities arrested the German citizen Manfred Reeb and expelled from Italy the Austrian citizen Léon Mertenich. The latter owned a hotel, *Villa Eden*, and he had turned his property into a hangout for homosexuals. Here his guests could meet young Italian adolescents willing to spend time with Germanic foreigners in exchange for money. The so called “*Scandalo di Villa Eden*” did not obtain a wide echo on the Italian press (see “Mike non c’entra,” *Le Ore*, October 25, 1960, 70). However, Mertenich was partially involved in the *Balletti Verdi* scandal for having “corrupted” an adolescent who then became a hustler in Brescia (Sentenza istruttoria, Giovanni D’Arcai, Brescia 28 giugno 1963, ACS, DGPS, DPAS, b. 333). Mertenich was in close contact with *Der Kreis* and the members of the club could get special discounts to vacation in his hotel. The letter exchange between him and Welti confirms that Mertenich, beside hosting Italian youths in his hotel, also took pictures of them, and was an active member of an inter-European exchange of homosexual erotic pictures (SAZ, Ar. 36.38.7 NW, 1.2.4, Léon Mertenich).

⁷⁰ Clemente Azzini, “‘Balletti verdi’ in una villa di Brescia: implicati industriali e attori della TV,” *l’Unità*, October 5, 1960, 6; “Mistero fitto su Mike Bongiorno.”

⁷¹ “Fiducia nella giustizia,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 7, 1960, 4; Pier Francesco Pingitore, “I Balletti verdi in visita alle ‘Squillo’,” *Lo Specchio*, April 9, 1961, 12. See also Giovanni D’Arcai, Sentenza istruttoria. Reading Arcai’s preliminary sentence it is clear how he did not consider D.C. an innocent adolescent. He was aware of what to do and where to go to find homosexuals, offer himself to them, and get paid.

⁷² Fulvio A. Scocchera, “I peccatori di Brescia,” *Il Tempo*, October 22, 1960, 10.

⁷³ Clemente Azzini, “59 esponenti della ‘buona società’ denunciati a Brescia. Il turpe mercato dei minorenni si svolgeva da tre anni,” *l’Unità*, October 6, 1960, 9. In a document sent to the Ministry of Interior by the Prefect of Brescia, it resulted that the accused were 57 men and one woman. Most of them were accused of lewd acts. But there were also some accused of

most difficult and delicate phase of the investigation had begun. In the “world of vice,” as in the “world of crime,” the tabloid explained, every person had a “nom de guerre.” It became necessary to understand who Celestina Pachiderma, Callas, Marchesa, Cleopatra, Manon, Orchidea Nera, and many others were. And after that it would be essential to convince these people to talk. Little by little, working in the most absolute secrecy, the Carabinieri had been able to make sense of several conundrums. During the investigation every person the Carabinieri had questioned revealed new names and new details. After the Carabinieri remitted the case to the investigative judge, Giovanni Arcai, and to the public prosecutor, Enzo Giannini, the list of names kept growing. The investigation, begun by a worried father, in the end, had disclosed that in Brescia there existed a “dirty and repugnant” sexual exploitation system or, as *l’Unità* wrote, a “filthy market of minors,” which had been going on for three years already.⁷⁴

Exactly one month before the election, on October 5, 1960 *Il Giornale di Brescia* and the Communist *Paese Sera* and *l’Unità* were the first newspapers to publish the news about the scandal. *Il Giornale di Brescia* reported that “long since there have been rumors about an extended operation undertaken by the local detectives in order to stop a pandemic depraved network which involved adults and youths.” The newspaper denounced “disturbing sexual aberrations” taking place in town, and revealed a world made of “immoral gatherings, parties of an unmentionable kind, soliciting, corruption, and blackmailing.” After having masterfully avoided words such as homosexuality and homosexuals, the journalist concluded his piece explaining that about sixty people had been reported for sexual violence, corruption of minors, blackmailing, and aiding and abetting prostitution. The accused men had different

sexual violence, and of abetting prostitution. See communication of the Prefect of Brescia to the Ministry of Interior, October 6, 1960, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 557.

⁷⁴ See Azzini, “59 esponenti della ‘buona società’”; R.F., “Seni finti e parrucche rosa per i boys del balletto verde,” *l’Avanti!*, October 7, 1960, 2; Mistretta, “La Leonessa Capovolta,” 5-7 and Pier Francesco Pingitore, “La verità sui Balletti Verdi,” *Lo Specchio*, January 29, 1961, 6. The press showed a great interest in the naming used by the people involved in the scandal. Journalists often made lists of these feminine names considering them as further signs of the oddity of the men involved in the *Balletti Verdi* scandal. See Clemente Azzini, “‘Balletti verdi’ in una villa di Brescia”; R.F., “Seni finti e parrucche rosa per i boys del balletto verde,” *l’Avanti!*, October 7, 1960, 2; Enzo Braschi, “Fuori i nomi di tutti gli implicati,” *Il Secolo d’Italia*, October 11, 1960, 5.

social backgrounds: there were workers, hair-dressers, salesmen, teachers, actors, artisans, professionals, etc. The list offered by the Catholic newspaper put the workers as first suspects and completely ignored the priests. The left-wing newspapers and magazines instead would tell a different story: for them the worst *monsters* in this scandal were priests, “bourgeois” men, and Christian Democrats.⁷⁵

The administrative elections would take place on November 6, 1960 all over Italy and the opposition parties, Communists and Socialists in particular, wanted to exploit this scandal to portray the Christian Democrats – the national leading party and the strongest political force in Brescia – in a bad light. Talking about homosexuals of Brescia became an opportunity to attack political rivals and the Church. *L’Avanti* – organ of the Socialist Party, *l’Unità*, *Paese Sera*, and *Vie Nuove* in their articles about the scandal talked about the *Balletti Verdi* as an example of bourgeois vice, singled out some Catholic priests as immoral corruptors, accused the Christian Democratic Party of being unable to guarantee the moral probity of the Italians in general and of Brescia in particular, hypothesized the existence of an international traffic of pedopornographic pictures related to the *Balletti*, told stories about orgiastic parties organized in luxurious villas, and in the end accused the Christian Democrats of having stopped the investigation until after the elections to avoid a political backlash. The left-wing press constantly talked of bigwigs involved in the case. Without being able to give any names, they denounced the alleged attempts of the government to bury the case under sand, asked for names of the people involved, and talked of prostitution without showing any real interest for the feelings and for the personal stories of the people who participated in these *Balletti*. The idea of the existence of a homosexual market for priests, industrialists,

⁷⁵ “60 persone denunciate per convegni immorali,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 5, 1960, 4. According to the official communication of the Prefect of Brescia to the Minister of Interior the first accused were 58. These were their professions: fruit seller, electricians (3), hair-dressers (2), apprentice, waiters (2), motorist, hotelier, industrialists (2), photographer, lawyers (2), singer, sales representatives (3), journalist, students (3), farmer, mechanics (3), employees (3), peddler, supplier, accountants (3), delivery men (2), retailer, tailors (3), varnisher, mailman, barista, surgeon, nurse, baker, confectioner, surveyor, dancer, unemployed, and retiree. Nine of them were married. The oldest was 72 years old, the youngest 17. In this list there were no priests. Communication of the Prefect of Brescia to the Ministry of Interior, October 6, 1960, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 557. In the end also two priests were put on trial don A.B. and don M.Z.. See D’Arcai, *Sentenza istruttoria*.

professionals, bankers, and actors was for the Left scandalously intriguing and politically convenient. Communists and Socialists wanted to present the working class as morally superior: the perverts were nestled in the Church, in the circles of the Democrazia Cristiana, and in high society. “Owner,” “parasite,” “corrupt,” and “homosexual” sounded like synonyms. The youths of the *Balletti*, often coming from humble families, had been exploited and corrupted, but the corruptors were not proletarian. According to the leftist media, the Italian citizens, through their votes, had to punish the immoral Catholic bourgeoisie which had showed its real face in Brescia. The journalists, looking for dramatic turns of events, contributed to making this case more and more confusing day after day: names appeared and disappeared, details changed, and every day there were confirmations and retractions.⁷⁶

The neo-fascist *Il Secolo d'Italia* sounded extremely harsh. The representatives of the “new” Right wanted to be considered as defenders of national morals. *Il Secolo* portrayed the *Balletti* as disgusting orgies organized by vicious rich men, urged for the publication of the names of the people involved in the case, and underlined how events like these would never have happened when Mussolini ruled the country.⁷⁷ The newspaper attacked more or less straightforwardly Pasolini. According to *Il Secolo*, the PCI, instead of focusing on Brescia,

⁷⁶ See Azzini, “‘Balletti verdi’ in una villa di Brescia”; R.F., “La buona società di Brescia trema per i ‘balletti verdi’,” *l’Avanti!*, October 6, 1960, 2; Salvatore Conoscente, “Età e professione dei ‘balletti verdi’,” *Paese Sera*, October 6, 1960, 2; Clemente Azzini, “Arrestata a Brescia ‘Adelina la Bionda’ che ricattava i partecipanti ai balletti,” *l’Unità*, October 7, 1960, 5; C.A., “Si tende a minimizzare i ‘balletti verdi’ ma ‘Elisa’ minaccia di tirar fuori i nomi,” *l’Unità*, October 8, 1960, 5; Clemente Azzini, “Perché si esita a fare i nomi degli implicati nei ‘balletti’,” *l’Unità*, October 11, 1960, 5; Salvatore Conoscente, “Confermata la partecipazione di religiosi ai ‘balletti verdi’,” *Paese Sera* October 13-14, 1960, 2; Clemente Azzini, “L’arcivescovo di Brescia parla dei ‘balletti’ e afferma che anche i preti ‘possono mancare’,” *l’Unità*, October 14, 1960, 5; C.A., “Sbigottimento tra i clericali bresciani dopo la fuga di un prete dei ‘balletti’,” *l’Unità*, October 15, 1960, 5; Salvatore Conoscente, “Grossi personaggi implicati nei ‘balletti’,” *Paese Sera*, October 17-18, 1960, 2; C.A., “I magistrati a colloquio con un prete. È scomparso ‘Ti dirò,’ emulo di B.B.,” *l’Unità*, October 19, 1960, 5; M.A.M., “Italia Scandali,” *Vie Nuove*, October 22, 1960, 3; Mario Segni, “Tutti gli uomini dello scandalo. Conosciamo i protagonisti dei ‘Balletti Verdi’,” *Vie Nuove*, October 22, 1960, 6-7; “Un giovane ‘verde’ scomparso da Brescia. Una manovra per insabbiare l’inchiesta fino alle elezioni?,” *l’Avanti*, 23 October, 1960, 2; Clemente Azzini, “L’inchiesta sui ‘balletti verdi’ riprenderà solo dopo le elezioni,” *l’Unità*, October 24, 1960, 7; “Le indagini sui ‘balletti verdi’ estese anche a Roma e Milano,” *l’Unità*, November 1, 1960, 5; Mario Segni, “Stupefacenti e ‘monsignori verdi’,” *Vie Nuove*, November 5, 1960, 24-25; “‘Lolita’ un giovane dei balletti verdi ha tentato di svenarsi in una toilette,” *l’Unità*, November 6, 1960, 9. Pier Paolo Pasolini condemned this ideological stance taken by the Communists. Pasolini underlined that homosexuality was not related to class or income. Pasolini, “A proposito di Feile,” 106-107.

⁷⁷ Enzo Braschi, “I ‘Balletti verdi’ di Brescia,” *Il Secolo d'Italia*, October 6, 1960, 5; E.B., “Proseguono le indagini dei ‘Balletti verdi’,” *Il Secolo d'Italia*, October 8, 1960, 5; Braschi, “Fuori i nomi di tutti gli implicati”; Enzo Braschi, “Io non c’entro affatto” dichiara Mike Bongiorno,” *Il Secolo d'Italia*, October 13, 1960, 5; E.B., “Prosegue il lavoro dei magistrati,” *Il Secolo d'Italia*, October 15, 1960, 5; “Cinque interrogatori per i ‘balletti verdi’,” *Il Secolo d'Italia*, October 22, 1960, 7. For this argument see also Antonio Massa, “L’orgia delle mezzecalzette,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, October 16, 1960, 16. *l’Unità* counterattacked the right-wing press as we can read here: Azzini, “Mike Bongiorno convocato dal giudice.”

had to pay more attention to the ways in which Pasolini and other representatives of the homosexual intelligentsia in the capital were sexually exploiting the poor youths of the Roman *borgate*.⁷⁸ The same argument was made by *Il Borghese*. The magazine was particularly ruthless against Pasolini and the Communist Party, and tried to argue that, in spite of its prudish rhetoric, the PCI was actually favoring the spread of the homosexual vice.⁷⁹

Il Borghese, dealing with the *Balletti Verdi* scandal, bashed not only the Communists but also the Catholics. Main protagonist of the anti-homosexual campaign carried out by the magazine was the journalist Gianna Preda – pseudonym of Maria Giovanna Pazzagli Predassi. The conservative periodical wanted to keep riding the wave of apprehension about youth sexuality started with the Merlin Law and grown with Feile's case. On October 20, 1960 *Il Borghese* published an open letter sent by Maria T. This young mother from Brescia wrote that she had a healthy and diligent fifteen-year-old son. She underscored how in Brescia thousands of mothers were worried about the uprightness of their sons. And she continued by casting a shadow on both priests and Communists: "When the 'corruptors' wear [the clerical] clothing, when the general social atmosphere is such that the illicit becomes licit, but also indispensable and useful for a good career or for lavish earnings, when the Marxists – who now show indignant faces – forget the vices hyped up by many of their famous protégés, it is not enough to hope in the honesty of our sons, in our supervision, and in their resoluteness."

⁷⁸ Braschi, "Io non c'entro affatto" dichiara Mike Bongiorno." See also E.B., "Prosegue il lavoro dei magistrati"; E.B., "In un notes gli amici dei 'balletti verdi'," *Il Secolo d'Italia*, October 16, 1960, 5. Magazines, such as *Lo Specchio*, published particularly insinuating and offensive articles about Pasolini (see Dino Sanzò, "Pasolini e i ragazzi di Anzio. Le Prede," *Lo Specchio*, July 24, 1960, 14-15 and "Gli accattoni di Pasolini," *Lo Specchio*, April 16, 1961, 37).

⁷⁹ The *Partito Comunista*, according to the right-wing press, was protecting Pasolini and other Communist *capovolti*, rebaptized on that occasion *Pasolinidi*, who were corrupting the *ragazzi di vita*. *Il Borghese* presented the Communist party as a dangerous den where perverts were infecting "normal" youths and searching for new *adepts*. See Gianna Preda, "I 'Pasolinidi' alla riscossa," *Il Borghese*, July 21, 1960, 96-97. The expression "pasolinide" was used as a synonym of homosexual ("Pasolinide," *Il Borghese*, August 31, 1961, 716). Against Pasolini see also A.G. Solari, "Un'ambigua officina per l'eroico Pasolini," *Lo Specchio*, March 22, 1959, 12 and Dino Sanzò, "Le prede. Pasolini e i ragazzi di Anzio." Conservative magazines published satirical pictures of Pier Paolo Pasolini see: *Il Meridiano d'Italia*, November 29, 1959; *Il Borghese*, November 3, 1960; *Il Borghese*, December 22, 1960; *Il Borghese*, September 16, 1962; *Il Borghese*, October 12, 1962; *Il Borghese*, December 20, 1962; *Il Borghese*, December 27, 1962; *Il Borghese*, March 14, 1963; *Il Borghese*, July 11, 1963; *Il Borghese*, September 12, 1963. Another Italian intellectual fiercely bashed by the conservative media for his sexual orientation and his political beliefs was Luchino Visconti. *Il Borghese* used as synonym of homosexual also the expression "luchinide." See the satirical pictures of Visconti published in: *Il Borghese*, September 22, 1960; *Lo Specchio*, January 1, 1961, 30-31 (on this occasion the magazine was particularly disrespectful publishing a picture of Visconti beside the picture of one of Feile's victim, and using as a title *Il maestro e l'allievo* – The teacher and the pupil – hinting at Visconti as a homosexual "initiator"); *Il Borghese*, July 6, 1961; *Il Borghese*, April 21, 1963; *Il Borghese*, December 19, 1963.

Maria concluded her letter asking Preda for suggestions. She wanted to know how to recognize dangers, and what measures could parents take against “filthy and shameful perversions.”

In her answer Preda explained that it was relatively easy to defend the youths from “‘official’ tempters such as Pasolini.” At the same time she underlined that it was instead often difficult to recognize those corruptors “who showed honesty and pharisaic morality.” In the end she offered a rather peculiar recipe to defend the youths from homosexuality:

First of all be brave enough to challenge current morality, which causes the forfeiture of every magazine showing pictures of beautiful women. I am not saying, for Heaven’s sake, that you have to exhibit pornographic pictures at home, but that some pictures of real women, showing off their décolleté, will take the curiosity of your son in the right direction. I could even suggest to choose a young, healthy, and merry [sexually available] servant.

Preda recommended Maria to monitor her son’s friends and readings, and emphasized the necessity of “burning magazines, newspapers and books which exalt the [homosexual] vice or talk about it as a normal erotic sin.” But, in her opinion, the most effective remedy against homosexuality was prohibiting sons to spend time in “Communist cells” and in religious recreational associations, because the homosexual vice was common to both Marxists and priests. Preda encouraged mothers to be rather open-minded about the “normal” sexual experiences of their sons, and she thought that parents should be happy when their sons have “normal” sexual intercourses with the family servant, with the neighbor’s daughter, or even with a sex worker.⁸⁰

If leftist and right-wing press abundantly reported about the scandal and its supposed ramifications, Catholic newspapers took care of dealing as little as possible with what they saw as a thorny topic. For example, *Il Popolo* – organ of the Christian Democrats – essentially ignored the scandal until the end of 1960 and then talked about it in short articles. For the

⁸⁰ “Consigli contro i ‘Balletti Verdi.’ Lettera a una madre,” *Il Borghese*, October 20, 1960, 619-621. Preda’s answer caused vitriolic reactions, as some letters sent to *Il Borghese* showed. “Polemica sui ‘balletti verdi,’” *Il Borghese*, November 10, 1960, 748-753; “Ancora sui balletti,” *Il Borghese*, December 8, 1960, 748-753.

Democrazia Cristiana dealing with the *Balletti* might cause a drop in the electoral support and, hence, they preferred to hold a “no comment” stance. *Il Giornale di Brescia*, as we saw before, did not avoid the topic, but its editorial line was entirely opposed to both leftist and right-wing press. The first goal of the *Giornale* was to defend the reputation of the community as well as the moral façade of the Episcopal Curia, omitting any reference to “priests” within their list of suspects. The newspaper hoped for fast investigations, but when the judges seemed to suggest a possible pause before the administrative elections of November 6 it did not complain. *Il Giornale di Brescia* wanted the Christian Democrats to win the local elections without surprises, and it considered the prosecution of the investigation during the electoral period, as well as the publication of the list of suspects, as quite risky. However, several readers sent letters to the director of the *Giornale* asking in vain for the names of the “perverts”: they wanted to know who had taken part in these presumed orgies. The newspaper, as a reader put it, was minimizing and concealing. It was framing up sensational news against the Communists and hiding under a “complicit” protective shield “scandals and perversions of some people who wanted to pass off as the best citizens.”⁸¹

After the elections the number of articles about the scandal drastically decreased, not only because the *Balletti* lost the intrinsic appeal of what was novel, but also because one of the main reasons for its surge, namely electoral propaganda, had no salience anymore.⁸²

⁸¹ For *Il Popolo* see “A Roma l’inchiesta sui ‘balletti verdi’,” *Il Popolo*, January 19, 1961, 7; “Continua l’inchiesta per i ‘balletti verdi’,” *Il Popolo*, January 20, 1961, 6; “Autonomi i balletti verdi romani,” *Il Popolo*, January 21, 1961, 6. For *Il Giornale di Brescia* see “Fiducia nella giustizia,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 7, 1960, 4; “Protagonisti e comparse dei balletti verdi stanno per presentarsi al giudice,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 11, 1960, 4; “Sono 158 le persone nominate nel rapporto al Giudice istruttore,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 12, 1960, 4; “Hanno deposto ieri davanti ai giudici i primi dieci chiamati per i balletti verdi,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 20, 1960, 4; “Gli interrogatori per il processo dei balletti verdi sarebbero aggiornati ai primi di novembre,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 23, 1960, 4; “15 interrogati a Lecco per i ‘balletti verdi’,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 29, 1960, 4; “Altre due persone tratte in arresto mentre proseguono gli interrogatori,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 30, 1960, 4; “Il ‘Manon’ dei balletti verdi arrestato durante l’interrogatorio,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, November 15, 1960, 4. For readers’ letters see “Fuori i nomi,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 9, 1960, 5; “Il reato di corruzione,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 11, 1960, 5; “Il segreto istruttorio,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, October 12, 1960, 5.

⁸² In terms of electoral results the Communist Party and the Socialist Party were able to get, compared to the previous provincial elections, 2 seats more each, passing from 3 to 5 seats for the PCI and from 4 to 6 seats for the PSI. The DC lost, on a provincial level, 3 seats, passing from 24 to 21 representatives. In the commune of Brescia though the DC lost only 1 seat (from 25 to 24 representatives), while PCI and PSI’s representatives remained unchanged from the previous elections of 1956: respectively 8 for the Communists and 9 for the Socialists. The situation of the neo-Fascists remained unvaried compared to the previous elections: 1 representative in the provincial council and 3 representatives in the communal council.

L'Unità, which rode the scandal until it was politically useful, stopped giving prominence to it in January 1961, and when the trial ended in 1964 the organ of the Communist Party, which had talked so much about the *Balletti Verdi*, essentially ignored the final verdict. This is suggestive of the political purpose pursued by this newspaper. More generally we might argue that the homosexuals of Brescia became a pretext: Communists used them to attack Catholics; right-wing parties used them to attack Communists and Catholics; and Catholics tried to defend themselves by rejecting any allegations of “sexual deviance.”

The Italian political opposition, on the Left and on the Right, ended up playing a major role in promoting the scandal of Brescia. Communists, Socialists and neo-Fascists tried to use the *Balletti* to undermine the authority of the leading powers.⁸³ But they only succeeded in carelessly disparaging innocent men. Several homosexuals read their names in newspapers and magazines. A secret scrupulously shielded was made public and the effects, in a social context that did not tolerate forms of same-sex sexuality, were devastating. Homosexuals were presented as sex maniacs, prostitutes, and sexual harassers. They were judged guilty before the verdict. And, ironically, when the final verdict was actually delivered the same venues that had “fabricated” the case did not admit their mistakes, and were not interested in rehabilitating the suspects. A scandal manufactured for electoral purposes turned out to be one of the most important *tiles* of the 1960 *homosexual domino show* because it produced a multiplication of discourses about male same-sex sexuality in several periodicals.⁸⁴

Tabloids and mainstream magazines, seizing the moment and thinking about their commercial revenue, revealed the names of the men involved in the scandal, and published

All in all the scandal did not revolutionize the political balance in Brescia. See *Il Giornale di Brescia*, November 9, 1960, 1 and 4.

⁸³ Brendan Nyan, “Media Scandals Are Political Events,” *Political Research Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2017): 223-236.

⁸⁴ Bolognini, *Balletti Verdi*, 77, 83. In 1965 was released a movie, *I complessi* (The Complexes), composed of three episodes. One of them, directed by Franco Rossi and entitled *Il complesso della schiava nubiana* (The Complex of the Nubian Slave), was actually inspired by the *Balletti Verdi* scandal. Gildo Beozzi (interpreted by Ugo Tognazzi), a Catholic moralist, husband, and father of four kids, finds himself unwillingly in a party for homosexuals. During the party the police arrive and, as a result, his name ends up on several newspapers ruining his reputation. The movie seemed to suggest how media could overturn innocent people’s lives.

not only several articles but also pictures and drawings.⁸⁵ Sensationalist press particularly valued such language because visualizing news could have a dramatic impact on the audience. Images were enticing, and could be rather persuasive not only in conveying political messages but also in condemning social behaviors. On October 20, 1960 *Il Borghese* published this image (Figure 3.23.):

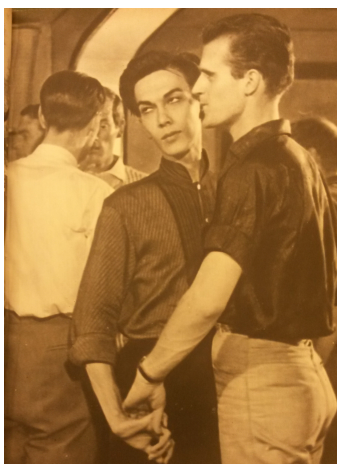


Figure 3.23. *Il Borghese*, October 20, 1960.

The picture shows two men dancing together. One of the two men looks more “masculine” and mature, while the other looks more “ephebic.” The tabloid used this picture not only to represent a stereotypical idea of a homosexual couple, but also to “cite” the *Balletti Verdi* in an almost literal way. *Balletto* in Italian means dance and these two men, dancing together, were used as a metaphor of the scandal.⁸⁶ This picture was published by both *Il Borghese* and *Lo Specchio*. The first did not specify where this photograph was taken, but it suggested that this picture represented two Italian men. The latter, which published this photo on the cover of the issue of October 16, 1960, explained that it was a picture taken in the Netherlands in *De Odeon Kring*, a bar for homosexuals.⁸⁷ The following week *Lo Specchio* published a drawing entitled *Balletti e ballerini* (Ballets and dancers) (Figure 3.24.). The image pretended to be, as

⁸⁵ The list of the names was published by the tabloid *Le Ore* in November: Filippo Gaja, “Quando il vizio diventa tragedia,” *Le Ore*, November 15, 1960, 11. A group of anonymous lawyers sent a letter to the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Interior criticizing the publication of the names of men allegedly involved in the case, and the ways in which the press was using the scandal for electoral purposes. See letter sent on November 10, 1960, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 577.

⁸⁶ *Il Borghese*, October 20, 1960.

⁸⁷ See Mistretta, “La Leonessa Capovolta,” 6-7.

the title suggests, a satire of the homosexual scandal of Brescia. We see a man, probably dancing on scenery props, who wears jewelry, tight pants, and a loose blouse. He wears lipstick, long and varnished fingernails, and long eyelashes. This image aimed at equating homosexuality with effeminacy.⁸⁸



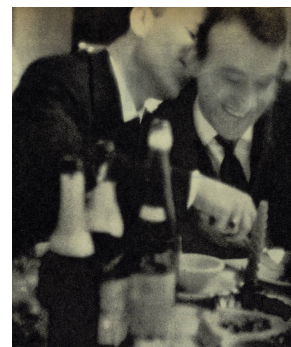
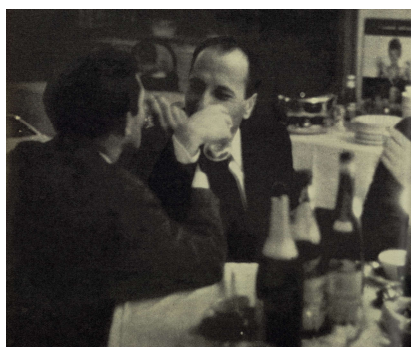
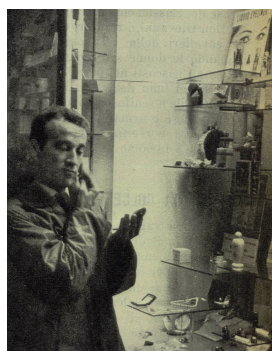
Figure 3.24. *Lo Specchio*, October 23, 1960, 25.

The magazine *Le Ore*, trying to alarm its readers about the spread of homosexuality, used staged pictures and displayed them as photographs taken on real occasions. In November 1960, for example, the tabloid published a series of images under the title “Intimate candle-lit dinner among young bon vivants” in which men were presented freshening their make-up, and showing intimacy and attention to one another (Figures 3.25.-3.28.). The comment of the tabloid was “After patiently waiting in ambush our photographer immortalized this gastronomic episode of the ‘dolce vita’ in Brescia.”⁸⁹ Looking at these pictures it is evident how the magazine was trying to represent homosexuality as an ambiguous relationship between masculinity and femininity: homosexuals powdered their nose but felt at ease also wearing a suit and a tie. These images aimed at underlining the age difference of the men participating in this three-way date, and emphasized in a way the “kinkiness” of this encounter with the man in the center toasting the date on his right with arms intertwined, a kind of reference to heterosexual marriage, and then flirting with the man on his left. These three pictures alluded to the sexual nature of this encounter and suggested, without much

⁸⁸ *Lo Specchio*, October 23, 1960, 25

⁸⁹ *Le Ore*, November 15, 1960, 12-13.

subtly, that the dinner was going to be followed most likely by a more intimate ménage à trois.



Figures 3.25.-3.28. *Le Ore*, November 15, 1960, 12-13.

The right-wing tabloid *Meridiano d'Italia* did not miss the chance of using the *Balletti Verdi* to argue, once again, that homosexuals – and male prostitutes – had multiplied after the introduction of the Merlin Law. The increasing number of homosexuals was one of “aunt Merlin’s presents,” the magazine underlined. Men like “Claretta,” a young male prostitute photographed by *Meridiano*, were the “typical products” of the closure of the brothels. The magazine, publishing two full-page photographs of this effeminate hustler, aimed at underlying once again how homosexuality endangered the new generations (Figures 3.29-3.30).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Mantovani, “I regali della zia Merlin,” 19-23. Claretta seems to be the same male prostitute presented in a picture published by *Il Borghese* on July 2, 1959 (see above).



Figures 3.29.-3.30. “Claretta.” *Meridiano d’Italia*, 19, 23.

One week after the publication of these pictures a man was killed in Rome by a *ragazzo di vita*. This murder nourished fears about Italian youths, fears that Feile and the *Balletti* had already exacerbated.

The American “Spy” and the Italian Busboy

The homicide of a 50 years-old former American colonel overlapped with the *Balletti Verdi* scandal and drew once again – five months after Feile’s case – the attention of the media on male prostitution in the capital. On October 31, 1960, Norman Donges’ corpse was found in his car in the outskirts of Rome. In the beginning newspapers tried to give some credit to the idea that the American man had been killed as a secret agent. But, at the same time, they also highlighted that Donges had no female friends, and hung out with young men on Via Veneto. The Italian media tried to avoid the word *omosessuale* talking about this affair. But the Socialist *l’Avanti!* and Communist *Paese Sera*, in the end, spelled out that Donges was a member of the homosexual “fishy world” and not a spy.⁹¹

⁹¹ See “È stato assassinato il colonnello americano,” *Paese Sera*, November 1-2, 1960, 1, “Era un agente segreto l’ex colonnello americano strozzato nella sua automobile sulla Via Tiburtina,” *l’Unità*, November 3, 1960, 5. One of the most important newspapers of Italy, *Il Corriere della Sera*, also suggested, on November 2, 1960, that it was not possible to exclude completely that the former colonel might have been involved in the American espionage (“Il morto nell’auto. Fu dovuta a strangolamento la morte dell’ex-colonnello americano,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, November 2, 1960, 6). Also the right-wing *Secolo d’Italia*, the Socialist *l’Avanti!* and the Communist *Paese sera* suggested that the espionage lead did not have to be completely abandoned (“Forse ucciso da più persone,” *Secolo d’Italia*, November 3, 1960, 4, “L’autopsia non esclude che Norman Donges possa essere stato ucciso da due persone,” *l’Avanti!*, November 3, 1960, 4, “La misteriosa vita del colonnello Norman Donges. Era un agente segreto l’americano strangolato,” *Paese sera*, November 2-3 1960, 1, 4; “L’agente dello spionaggio USA coltivava amicizie particolari,” *Paese sera*, November 3-4 1960, 1, 4). But, actually, this lead did not seem to be particularly convincing. The homosexual one appeared to be more fruitful (see “L’ex colonnello americano è stato assassinato” and “Forse ucciso da più persone”).

Some newspapers even started talking about this homicide as related to the scandal of Brescia and to youth trafficking. *L'Avanti*, *l'Unità*, and *Paese Sera*, a few days before the 1960 elections, wrote that Donges was in contact with some of the people involved in the *Balletti* and that, maybe, he had been killed because *someone* was afraid he could reveal *something* about the scandal. *Paese Sera* even suggested that, maybe, the American was one of “those who run the ‘youth’s market’” in Lombardy.⁹² On November 1, 1960 the judges of Brescia went to Rome trying to verify possible connections between the *Balletti* and the homicide of Donges. The press announced that the *Balletti* inquiry seemed to be moving from the Italian periphery to the Italian capital, the real control room of this supposed “homosexual mafia.”⁹³ But the connections between Donges and *Ballerini Verdi* would prove to be non-existent. The American colonel had been killed by the 17-year-old Orante Cardarelli who had nothing to do with the *Balletti* (Figures 3.31-3.32).⁹⁴

⁹² “È stato assassinato il colonnello americano.”

⁹³ “Le indagini per i ‘balletti verdi’ spostate da Brescia a Roma?” *l'Unità*, November 17, 1960, 5; “Importanti accertamenti a Roma per l’istruttoria dei balletti verdi,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, November 18, 1960, 4; G.M., “I segreti di Manon. Allarme a Roma per i ‘Balletti Verdi’,” *Lo Specchio*, November 27, 1960, 28-29. Already in October 1960 the leftist press talked about a Roman thread in the *Balletti Verdi* scandal. Rome was supposed to be the “headquarters” of the alleged homosexual organization coordinating the prostitution system in Brescia, in other Italian cities and abroad (L. Dav., “Allarme a via Veneto per i ‘balletti verdi’,” *Paese Sera*, October 6, 1960, 4; Azzini, “L’arcivescovo di Brescia parla dei ‘balletti’”; Salvatore Conoscente, “È a Roma la centrale dei ‘balletti verdi’,” *Paese Sera*, October 16, 1960, 2; Conoscente, “Grossi personaggi implicati nei ‘balletti’”).

⁹⁴ See “L’ex colonnello americano è stato assassinato. Era implicato nei balletti verdi?” *l'Avanti!*, 2 novembre 1960, 4, “La misteriosa vita del colonnello Norman Donges,” “L’agente dello spionaggio USA coltivava amicizie particolari.” The Catholic press essentially ignored the case. *Il Popolo*, media outlet of the Christian Democrats, devoted to Donges’ murder only short pieces avoiding any reference to sexuality (see, for example, “Assassinato l’americano trovato morto sulla Tiburtina,” *Il Popolo*, November 2, 1960, 6; “L’ex colonnello americano è stato strozzato: spionaggio o ‘balletti verdi’ dietro il delitto?”, *l'Unità*, November 2, 1960, 5; “L’ex colonnello americano è stato assassinato. Era implicato nei balletti verdi?”, *l'Avanti!*, November 2, 1960, 4 “Arrestato l’assassino del colonnello Americano,” *Il Popolo*, November 4, 1960, 8; “Per 1000 lire un aiuto-cameriere di 17 anni ha ucciso l’ex colonnello americano Donges,” *l'Unità*, November 4, 1960, 5; “Riprese le indagini per la morte di Donges,” *Il Popolo*, November 23, 1960, 6). *Il Corriere della Sera* never linked Donges’ death to the *Balletti Verdi* scandal. After having talked about it as a case of espionage and counter-espionage, the newspaper espoused the hypothesis of a murder related to the Roman homosexual milieu: “Fu dovuta a strangolamento la morte dell’ ex-colonnello Americano,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, November 2, 1960, 6; “Ridda di ipotesi sul movente del ‘delitto dell’automobile’,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, November 3, 1960, 11.



Figure 3.31. “When vice becomes tragedy.”
Le Ore, November 15, 1960, 5.



Figure 3.32. “The Murder of Via Veneto.”
Lo Specchio, November 13, 1960.

Cardarelli, like other young and proletarian murderers we encountered before – such as Quartesan and Pesce who killed Micheletto in 1946, and Lisandri and Lazzari who killed Caucci in 1952 – aimed for economic gain and a hedonistic lifestyle. Quartesan, Pesce, Lisandri and Lazzari were the product of a country different from the one in which Cardarelli lived. The first were the sons of a nation that was trying to revive after a long Fascist dictatorship and a destructive war. They were youths who had grown up without strong familial bonds and ready to hustle, for money or gifts, to face the generalized economic hardship.⁹⁵ Cardarelli, even if he had spent time in a reformatory just like Lisandri and Lazzari, had a supporting family by his side, and was living in a completely different country: the Italy of “*la Dolce Vita*,” the Italy of consumption, the Italy that was transforming itself “from a relatively backward agricultural country into one of the world’s most powerful modern economies.”⁹⁶ He wanted to become part of Donges’ bourgeois world, he wanted to own and be well off.⁹⁷ If Quartesan, Pesce, Lisandri and Lazzari were the product of a hungry

⁹⁵ For post-war economic hardship see *Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia (1951-1952). Materiali della Commissione Parlamentare*, Paolo Braghin ed. (Torino: Einaudi, 1978), 50-64 and Christopher Duggan, *Force of Destiny: A History of Italy Since 1796* (New York: Allen Lane, 2007), 554.

⁹⁶ Duggan, *Force of Destiny*, 554. See, for the economic development of Italy, Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958-74* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1999), 359-364; Duggan, *Force of Destiny*, 554-566; Palmer Domenico, *Remaking Italy in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 112-121; Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1982* (New York: Longman, 1984), 418-436.

⁹⁷ See Gorgolini, “Un mondo di giovani. Culture e consumi dopo il 1950,” 301-307. For the power of consumerism on pushing youth to hustle see Vittorio La Monaca, *Il Tommaso di Milano* (Milano: Sugar, 1962), 220-224.

country, Cardarelli was the son of a bulimic society that, as Roy Palmer underscored, “was changing at a substantial cost to its soul.”⁹⁸

Orante and his family had moved to Rome from a small town, Luco dei Marsi (Abruzzo), five months before the murder. He had spent 18 months in a re-education center in Bologna for minor misdemeanors but eventually seemed to have brought his life back on track. He was working as a busboy in a hotel, earning 16,000 lire a month, and his major goal, according to the media, was to collect enough money to buy a car, the status symbol of the new consumerist times.⁹⁹ Both his parents were trying to begin new careers in the capital after having spent most of their lives working as farmers. The three of them lived together in a decent apartment and the family did not seem to have financial issues. Nevertheless Cardarelli was described by the press as psychologically unstable, and as “tainted and immoral.” He was not presented as a homosexual but as someone exploiting the vulnerability of “people like that.”¹⁰⁰ He came from a respectable family, but he had become, according to the socialist *l'Avanti!*, a “customary homosexuals’ exploiter.”¹⁰¹

Donges met Cardarelli on Via Veneto and broke the ice handing a cigarette to the young man. They started talking, they had drinks, and then the American, offering 6,000 lire, convinced Cardarelli to get in his car and spend time together, first in Villa Borghese and then on Via Castelfidardo. Here something went wrong. Cardarelli explained that Donges had become harassing, and that he did not want to pay the agreed amount of money, asking for a 1,000 lire discount. Moreover, the American did not want to let Cardarelli go, and started touching the Italian youth. At that point Cardarelli, according to the press, feeling a “sudden disgust” for what he had done, became violent and strangled Donges. Once he realized that he

⁹⁸ Palmer, *Remaking Italy*, 121.

⁹⁹ For the importance of the car as a status symbol see Marwick, *Sixties*, 92-93; Gorgolini, *L'Italia in movimento*, 306; Scarpellini, *L'Italia dei consumi*, 141-145.

¹⁰⁰ “Arrestato il diciassettenne che uccise l'ex-colonnello,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, November 4, 1960, 11. See also “Diciassettenne l'assassino del colonnello,” *Il Secolo*, November 4, 1960, p. 7; “Per 1000 lire un aiuto-cameriere di 17 anni ha ucciso”; “L'assassino di Norman Donges ha ancora qualcosa da dire,” *Il Secolo*, November 5, 1960, 7 and “Il ragazzo accusato di omicidio volontario sarà sottoposto ad una perizia psichiatrica,” *l'Unità*, November 5, 1960, 4.

¹⁰¹ “L'assassino del Colonnello Donges è stato arrestato a Villa Borghese,” *l'Avanti!*, 4 November 4, 1960, 4.

had killed him, the busboy drove the car away from the city center, snatched 2,500 lire from Donges' pockets, and left the corpse and the Volkswagen on Via Tiburtina (Figures 3.33.-3.34.).¹⁰²



Figures 3.33.-3.34. Donges' corpse and his car on via Tiburtina. *Lo Specchio*, November 13, 1960, 35.

As in the case of Caucci's homicide, the Italian media talked about Donges as a sick homosexual victim, and about Cardarelli as an immoral young *marchetta*. The first was repugnant, while the latter was just a naïve teenager anxious to live an easy life in the big metropolis. He wanted to live luxuriously and he thought that he could have that kind of life thanks to the beautiful people of Via Veneto – people who, as *l'Unità* explained, had a respectable face, but who actually wanted to lead astray innocent youths who were blinded by their appearance, their money, and their promises.¹⁰³

L'Espresso argued that, even if the crime had been solved with the capture of Cardarelli, the major problem revealed by this case, the "male prostitution issue," needed to be sorted out. Donges and Cardarelli, the journalist Luigi Locatelli explained, were two typical representatives of the dynamics of the homosexual world. Donges was an American retiree, economically secure, who lived in Rome and enjoyed *meeting* young Italian men,

¹⁰² See "Il delitto dell'automobile. L'ex-colonnello americano fu ucciso nel corso di un diverbio," *Il Corriere della Sera*, November 5, 1960, 11, "Per 1000 lire un aiuto-cameriere di 17 anni ha ucciso" and "Il ragazzo accusato di omicidio volontario sarà sottoposto ad una perizia psichiatrica," *l'Unità*, November 5, 1960, 4. Cardarelli tried to give another version of the story explaining that Donges had died during an orgy organized in an apartment ("Norman Donges sarebbe morto all'EUR durante un festino con cinque individui," *l'Unità*, November 23, 1960, 4, "Dubbi sul caso Donges. Ecco gli uomini accusati da Orante Cardarelli," *Lo Specchio*, December 4, 1960, 14-15). This story was found to be false. In 1962 Cardarelli was then sentenced to thirteen years for involuntary manslaughter ("Tredici anni a Cardarelli: uccise Donges senza volontà," *l'Unità*, January 19, 1962, 5; "Non volevo!" grida ai giudici il giovane assassino di Donge," *l'Unità*, January 18, 1962, 5. This violent reaction of Cardarelli followed the pattern described by Albert J. Reiss, "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers," *Social Problems* 9, no. 2 (1961): 116-119). Cardarelli tried to defend himself during the trial making a "gay panic defense" argument.

¹⁰³ "Il ballerino amico del Cardarelli sarà forse interrogato dal giudice," *l'Unità*, November 24, 1960, 5.

whereas Cardarelli was a teenager always longing for more money, and ready to spend time with someone willing to pay for his company. For many youths, coming from the Roman *borgate*, from the countryside, and from the South, prostitution had become a lifestyle, a profession.¹⁰⁴ Walking in Rome at night it was possible to see that male prostitution was a widespread phenomenon.¹⁰⁵ From sunset to dawn hustlers offered their services, together with the *peripatetiche* – as media called the female prostitutes – on Via Veneto, in Castro Pretorio, at Termini Station, around Trinità dei Monti, near the Trevi Fountain and the Coliseum, and along the Tiber. Some of these youths were explicit about their activity, while others, the majority, tried to search for company discreetly, pretending to be reserved and respectable. But why were so many teenagers hustling? How did they start? How did people like Donges know where to go in order to find “company”? Did these youths have pimps? *L'Espresso* underscored that it was time to answer all these questions. The “world of the homosexuals,” according to this mainstream magazine, was a world of crimes, robberies, extortions, and homicides. The police had discovered clandestine brothels in Rome, proving that, at least in the capital, male prostitution was a particularly worrying phenomenon. Locatelli, concluding his article, underscored that felonies had to be solved by the police, but that doctors, educators, and sociologists should have spent more time trying to understand why the Roman youths were rushing into homosexuals' arms.¹⁰⁶

On November 20 and 27, 1960 *Lo Specchio* devoted two articles to the phenomenon of male prostitution, entitling this short investigative report “*I battoni*” (“The male whores”) (Figures 3.35.-3.36.). The first issue was about Rome, Milan, and Florence, the second one was about Venice, Bologna, and Genoa. The first article described the *battoni*'s activity as

¹⁰⁴ In 1940 Rome had 1,300,000 inhabitants. Between 1951 and 1961, because of emigration from the South and from the countryside, the residents passed from 1,651,754 to 2,160,773. See Gorgolini, *L'Italia in movimento*, 46.

¹⁰⁵ A study carried out in Milan around the same time showed that male prostitution was a rather warring and widespread phenomenon also there. See *Delinquenza e disadattamento minorile. Esperienze rieducative*, Piero Bertolini ed (Bari: Laterza, 1964), 69-85.

¹⁰⁶ Luigi Locatelli, “I corruttori solitari di Roma notte. Domande angosciose dopo il delitto di Orante Cardarelli,” *L'Espresso*, November 13, 1960, 12.

“Orante Cardarelli’s job” and explained that male prostitution was a disconcerting trend. It talked about the *battoni* as *friends of the homosexuals*, drawn to them by the lure of easy money. Streets and third-order cinemas were places where homosexuals searched for their prey. These youths offered “services” in order to have enough money to buy cigarettes, and go out with their girlfriends. The *battoni* were the victims and the state had to intervene to stop this system of exploitation.¹⁰⁷



Figures 3.35. and 3.36. “I battoni.” *Lo Specchio*, November 20, 1960, cover and page 11.

Donges and Cardarelli’s case fuelled a new alarmist discussion about male-male prostitution, and the young killer was presented by the press as a dangerous by-product of Italian consumerism. However, the desire to possess, despite economic restraints, was not a prerogative of Cardarelli, therefore his story was used by the Italian media as an example. Magazines and newspapers invited parents to monitor their children underlining how predators were constantly searching for new victims. Cardarelli epitomized all those youths who, just arrived in the big city, were trying to find their own place in a completely new and unfamiliar social context. His experience was not only about sex and sexuality. It showed how immigrant families were having problems adjusting to the hustle and bustle of their new urban lives, and it demonstrated how the young members of these families were struggling to become productive parts of Italian society.

¹⁰⁷ “I battoni. Il mestiere di Orante Cardarelli,” *Lo Specchio*, November 20, 1960, 11-16 and “I battoni. La trappola dei soldi facili,” *Lo Specchio*, November 27, 1960, 19-21. The word *battoni*, singular of *battoni*, is the male version of *battona*. It comes from the verb *battere* which vulgarly means “to walk the streets.”

The murder of the American colonel convinced the judges of Brescia to move back to Rome in January 1961 searching for new investigative threads and, according to some in the press, to begin a national inquiry into crimes related to homosexuality. *Paese Sera* announced that it was not hasty to suppose that the real crusade against the “third sex” was just about to start. The tabloid *Le Ore* in February 1961 accused journalists and public opinion of having focused their attention for too long almost exclusively on female prostitutes, drawing a “veil of silence” on “the plague of male prostitution.” Press and citizens, the magazine underscored, had understandably showed “a certain repugnance to talk about such topics and such individuals.” But this “plague” had become more and more evident and the world of homosexuals and *marchette* was now revealed to be “ample and terrible.”¹⁰⁸

L'Espresso, taking a similar stance, published in April 1961 a long article about male prostitution entitled: *Il Peccato maschile (The Male Sin)*. This piece was published at the same time as the third visit to Rome of the judges of Brescia, who declared on that occasion, using a Fascist expression, that the homosexual issue needed to be faced vigorously because it was endangering the “*integrità della razza*” (racial integrity).¹⁰⁹



Figure 3.37. Illustration of the article “*Il Peccato maschile*.” This picture, put beside the title of the article, seemed to suggest once again a conceptualization of homosexuality as effeminacy, and as an overlapping of masculinity and femininity. The female watch and the long nails contrasted with the more masculine looking hairy wrist. *L'Espresso*, April 2, 1961, 12.

¹⁰⁸ “Interrogatori a Roma per i ‘balletti verdi’,” *Paese Sera*, January 19, 1961, 2; “Conclusa clandestinamente l’inchiesta sui balletti verdi,” *l’Unità*, January 21, 1961, 5; Alberto Moretto, “La giustizia in guerra contro ‘la dolce vita,’” *Le Ore*, February 7, 1961, 71. For the investigation moved to Rome see “Gli inquirenti sui ‘balletti verdi’ a Roma per continuare le indagini,” *l’Unità*, January 19, 1961, 5; “‘Operazione Cicerone’ a Roma per i balletti verdi attuata dai magistrati incaricati dell’inchiesta,” *l’Avanti!*, January 19, 1960, “A Roma l’inchiesta sui ‘balletti verdi’,” *Il Popolo*, January 19, 1960, “I magistrati bresciani a Roma indagano per i ‘balletti verdi’,” *Il Giornale di Brescia*, January 20, 1961, 4; “Molte persone interrogate per i ‘balletti verdi’ a Roma,” *Il Corriere della Sera*, January 20, 1961, 7; “I fantasmi verdi,” *L’Espresso*, January 29, 1961, 1; Andrea Barbato, “Dentro il Km² di Via Veneto,” *L’Espresso*, January 29, 1961, 11; Pingitore, “La verità sui Balletti Verdi”; Pier Francesco Pingitore, “I Balletti Verdi in visita alle ‘Squillo’,” *Lo Specchio*, April 9, 1961, 12-14.

¹⁰⁹ “Uomini e caporali,” *Le Ore*, April 11, 1961, 59.

In *Il Peccato maschile*, Marialivia Serini and Livio Zanetti talked about the existence of “a city in the city,” of a place inhabited by men desiring other men, a place they decided to name *Andropoli* (the city of men). As they explained, the “inhabitants” of this peculiar place liked to get together and hang out in bars, private parties, and night-clubs, but they also liked to go to poor urban neighborhoods in search for sex. Some of them, at the end of the evening, could go back home together with their committed special *friends*, some others, the single men, went hunting, searching for young and available prey. The age of the streetwalkers of *Andropoli* ranged from 17 to 25 years of age, and they received between 500 and 2,000 lire for their sexual services. Every year, according to *L'Espresso*, three or four of these youths ended up living in a penthouse in Piazza di Spagna taking care of “the Truman Capote” they happened to meet. But most of them languished on sidewalks. Among their clients were not only the “official citizens” of *Andropoli*, but also many men who had to painfully conceal their passions and emotions. The latter were particularly vulnerable; they were often victims of unscrupulous blackmailers who exploited their fears and secrets. *Andropoli* also had foreigners among its visitors. In the past they went to Capri, Taormina, Naples, Venice, and Florence. Now the “*eccentrici*” (eccentrics) coming from Hamburg, Stockholm, Philadelphia, Boston, and London seemed to prefer for their vacations the goods offered by *Andropoli*, which was bigger and more anonymous. The astute streetwalkers hanging around Trinità dei Monti, disguised as ordinary youths and innocent students, were able to seduce these foreigners obtaining gifts and money.¹¹⁰ Serini and Zannetti, in one of the last paragraphs of

¹¹⁰ Reading *Der Kreis* it is possible to find a few short stories about (most of the times) paid relationships between young Italian boys and foreigners. See: Philip Dell-Creed, “The Boy on the Spanish Steps,” *Der Kreis*, 10 (1957): 30-36; Richard Arlen, “At the Foro Romano,” *Der Kreis*, 4 (1960): 47-48; Frank Whitfeld, “Italian Beach,” *Der Kreis*, 3 (1961): 39-48; William Wainwright, “Roman Policier,” *Der Kreis*, 7 (1962): 29-35. There were also young men – known as *pappagalli* – who seduced foreign women and old rich Italian ladies. At times having sex with these women was the only aim, but on several occasions these youth asked for money. See, for example, Mino Guerrini, “Il farfallone amoroso,” *L'Espresso*, August 10, 1958, 6-7; “Occhio all'italiano,” *Le Ore*, June 20, 1959, 34-37; Gianni Grandoli, “Noi galli o loro galline?” *Crimen*, July 9, 1960, 12-15; Gianni Franceschi, “Mai più in Italia!,” *Lo Specchio*, March 22, 1964, 36-37; “Il ‘pappagallismo’ contagia anche i ragazzetti,” *Il Quotidiano*, April 1, 1964; “Misure a Rimini contro i ‘pappagalli,’” *Il Messaggero*, April 13, 1964; “I pappagalli,” *Il Mattino*, July 14, 1964; Nicola Silvi, “Il ‘pappagallismo’ fa parte del folklore,” *Momento Sera*, April 9, 1965; Francesco Matarese, “I ‘pappagalli’ frutti di stagione e del turismo,” *Ordine Pubblico*, June 24, 1965; “Gli accattoni dell'amore,” *Il Messaggero*, July 26, 1965; Vittorio Pescatori, “Gli arrampicatori sessuali,” *ABC*, November 28, 1966, 8-10.

their long article, underscored how homosexuality and male prostitution were such deeply rooted features of the Italian capital that it was difficult to understand what the Italian state could do in order to change the situation.¹¹¹ This article claimed that Rome was becoming an important center for the development of homosexual subcultures and for the emergence of homosexual identities. The Roman *Andropoli* – but probably the same argument could be made about other big cities such as Milan, Turin, Genoa, Bologna, and Naples – was a space of desires, of possibilities, and anonymity where men could try to live their otherwise forbidden lives.¹¹²

The existence of *Andropoli*, according to *L'Espresso*, depended on the misery of some areas of Rome from where most of the streetwalkers came. Poor neighborhoods such as Torpignattara, Tiburtino III, Pietralata, Mandrione, Maranella, Borgata Gordiani, and Primavalle supplied laborers for the Roman underworld: thugs, thieves, criminals, pimps, and *marchette*. Many *charity boys* were able to turn their male bodies and their manliness into commodities that allowed them to buy entertainments, shelter, food, cigarettes, and even engagement rings for their unaware fiancées.¹¹³ Feile, the *Balletti Verdi* scandal, and Norman

¹¹¹ Marialivia Serini, Livio Zanetti, “Rapporto Morale su Roma. Il Peccato maschile,” *L'Espresso*, April 2, 1961, 12-13.

¹¹² For the relationship between homosexualities and urban spaces see John d'Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity” (1983), *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 3-16; Gayle Rubin, *Thinking Sex*, 111. For sexual tourism in Italy in the nineteenth and twentieth century and for the seduction exercised by Mediterranean boys on American and Northern European men: Sper, *Capri und die Homosexuellen. Eine Psychologische Studie* (Berlin, Oraniaverglag, 1903); Gandin, *Omosessualità maschile*, 172; Michael Sidney Tyler-Whittle, *Wanton Boys* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1960); Dennis Drew and Jonathan Drake, *Boys for sale: A Sociological Study of Boy Prostitution* (New York, NY: Brown, 1969), 29-31, Michael Davidson, *Some Boys* (Kingston, NY: Layton Press, 1971), Giovanni Dall'Orto, “Contro Pasolini,” *Desiderio di Pasolini*, ed. Stefano Casi (Torino: Sonda, 1990), 153-154, Robert Aldrich, *Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art, And Homosexual Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 2009). It would be important to understand if post-WWII male prostitution in Italy was somehow related to the pederastic Mediterranean tradition. George Chauncey in his book *Gay New York* underlined: “the patterns of homosexual behavior noted in Sicily appear to have persisted in modified form in the Italian enclaves on the Lower East Side, in Greenwich Village, and in East Harlem. Although more research would need to be done to substantiate the point, it seems likely that an important part of the homosexual culture of fairies and their sex partners visible in turn-of-the-century New York represented the flowering in this country of a transplanted Mediterranean sexual culture” (Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 75). Given that, after the end of WWII, many youths moved with their families from the South to Rome and to the North it would be fascinating to investigate if they brought with them traditional sexual patterns. In the 1960s magazines and tabloids talking about male prostitution underlined that very often the *battoni* were youth moving from the South to the big cities (Rome and Milan, first of all) to exploit foreign tourists. See Gianni Lucio, “Nelle notti d'estate emerge dalla metropoli la squallida colonia della gioventù bruciata,” *Il Tempo*, June 11, 1964 (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 565, Roma-Polizia dei Costumi, Segreteria del capo della polizia, Ufficio Stampa); Dino Sanzò, “I delitti del terzo sesso,” *Lo Specchio*, June 6, 1965, 47-49; Filippo Lancia, “I travestiti di Milano,” *Lo Specchio*, July 11, 1965, 16-17. For this internal migration and its relation with male prostitution see also Pini, *Quando eravamo froci*, 29, 99.

¹¹³ I think that particularly fascinating is an argument made by Don Romesburg in one of his articles. He explained: “For working-class boys ... taking cash from men as part of a treating exchange could, and for some did, affirm greater

Donges' case, ushered in an openly alarmist debate in the media about homosexuality, male prostitution, and above all the necessity of intervening in order to rescue a generation of young men who, tempted by the products of the economic miracle but unable to afford them, searched desperately for money and fell under the allure of immoral homosexual men.¹¹⁴

Letters to the Editor

The year 1960 ended with a major sex scandal (*Balletti Verdi*) and a murder (Donges), both related to male-male prostitution, that pushed many readers of magazines such as *Il Borghese* and *Le Ore* to express their own ideas about homosexuality and homosexuals. The letters they sent showed a rather negative attitude towards same-sex sexualities. A young student from Bologna, for example, thought that homosexuals were disgusting and that, instead of moving freely in the city, they should have had the decency of living in the shadow.¹¹⁵ A woman from Rome explained that homosexuals could be divided into two categories. The first included those who loathed their “defect,” tried to hide it as much as they could and, above all, carried their cross with resignation, avoiding to drag others into their vice. They deserved pity and compassion. The second category included all those who advertised their condition to attract others and infect them with their “leprosy.” These repugnant individuals deserved to be ostracized, because their “crimes [were] worse than any homicide.”¹¹⁶ A reader from Genoa seemed to be particularly worried about the youth. He thought that it was not possible to turn

heterosexual masculine interactivity and participation” (383). Thus, from this perspective, queer prostitution favored the heterosocial system, see Don Romesburg, “‘Wouldn’t a Boy Do?’ Placing Early-Twentieth-Century Male Youth Sex Work into Histories of Sexuality,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 3 (2009): 367-392. See also Alessio Ponzio, “La prostituzione uomo-uomo in Italia attraverso alcuni esempi letterari degli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta,” in *La prostituzione nell’Italia contemporanea. Tra storia, politiche e diritti*, Annalisa Cegna, Natascia Mattucci, and Alessio Ponzio eds. (Macerata: eum, 2019), 105-120.

¹¹⁴ See Locatelli, “I corruttori solitari di Roma notte,” 12; Dino Sanzò, “Il Delitto di Via Veneto. Perché Orante Cardarelli ha ucciso il colonnello Americano,” *Lo Specchio*, November 13, 1960, 33-36; “I battoni. Il mestiere di Orante Cardarelli,” 11-16; “I Battoni. La trappola dei soldi facili,” 19-21; Marialivia Serini e Livio Zanetti, “Perché sono ragazzi di vita,” *L’Espresso*, 9 aprile 1961, 17-19. For the *borgate* see: Gianni Mantovani, “20.000 baraccati attorno al cupolone,” *Meridiano d’Italia*, July 10, 1960, 22-25; “I lazzaretti della capitale. Chi sono, quanti sono, come vivono gli abitanti delle borgate romane,” *L’Espresso*, August 14, 1960, 6-7; Giovanni Berlinguer, Piero Della Seta, *Borgate di Roma* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1960); *Inchiesta sulla miseria*, 65-76; Gorgolini, *L’Italia in movimento*, 46-47.

¹¹⁵ “Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, March 2, 1961, 357.

¹¹⁶ “Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, June 29, 1961, 357.

inborn “inverts” into “normal” men but it was essential to understand in what ways parents could prevent their “normal” kids from becoming “perverts.”¹¹⁷ A young woman from Como was concerned about “the rampant sexual immorality.” She wondered if wives could deal with husbands who had had sexual experiences with other men, if these men could fall back into the vice even if married, and if it was possible for a “normal” man to become a “pervert.”¹¹⁸ There were also readers who were less alarmist. Talking about his town, Bologna, a man asserted that the “deviants” there were a small group. They kept a low profile and they did not bother anyone. He thought that Bologna, compared to other towns, was far less corrupted and that the best way to deal with homosexuals was to ignore them.¹¹⁹ However, in general, homosexuals were seen as dangerous predators whose one and only goal was corrupting as many “normal” men as possible.

Browsing *Il Borghese* I also found letters addressed to Preda by homosexuals. One of them, who looked at himself as a sick and disgusting human being, considered her as a counselor, as someone who could suggest him a way to heal. The other one wrote to the journalist to express his personal point of view about homosexuality, maybe with the hope of pushing other readers to look at same-sex sexuality from a different perspective, as a “divine mistake” more than as a “vice.” The letter of the first homosexual was published in February 1961. He explained that he felt so ashamed about his condition that he was not able to talk about it with anyone, and he thought that Preda was the only person who could help him. He wrote that he wanted “to heal” and “be like all the others.” He wanted “to love a woman,” “get married and have kids.” He was trying to do his best to fight against “thoughts and desires,” but if there were no remedies for his condition he “would prefer to die.” This young man then asked Preda to put him in touch with someone who could cure him. The journalist,

¹¹⁷ “Così è se vi pare,” *Le Ore*, December 13, 1960, 1.

¹¹⁸ “Così è se vi pare,” *Le Ore*, January 3, 1961, 2.

¹¹⁹ “Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, April 6, 1961, 557. Another reader harshly criticized this letter inviting to have a walk around via Righi and via Indipendenza, at the train station, and in the gardens of the Montagnola. In this way it was possible to see that homosexuality was a real problem in Bologna too: “Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, April 20, 1961, 638.

admiring his desire to heal and his battle against himself, promised to help him.¹²⁰ A different attitude was expressed by Preda to the second homosexual, whose letter was published in June 1961. He explained that nature played the homosexuals a dirty trick and that it was not right that other human beings were cruel to them as well. He thought that God did not have to create such human beings with unnatural instincts, but He did so. This homosexual reader, who signed his letter as “*un infelice perpetuo*” (a man endlessly unhappy), could not stand Preda’s attitude, the anger she showed against homosexuals.¹²¹ He wanted to know if, at least in the name of God, Preda was ready to love him. The journalist, in her answer, explained that she loved her neighbors, but she could not stand homosexuals anyway.¹²²

This correspondence further increased the visibility of homosexuals, and demonstrated how concerns about them and about their supposed damaging effects on the youths were spreading. These letters were at the same time symptoms and devices of the proliferating *homosexual domino show*. “Homohysteria” reached its peak in the spring of 1961 with the presentation of a new law proposal for the criminalization of homosexuality.¹²³

Trying to Contain the “Contagion”

This bill was a consequence of the *domino tiles* fallen over the course of 1960, but above all of the *Balletti Verdi*. Some tabloids and newspapers, talking about the scandal of Brescia, had indeed underlined how it was necessary to introduce a law to punish crimes related to

¹²⁰ “Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, February 23, 1961, 317-318. With regard to this letter a reader sent a note to *Il Borghese* wondering how a homosexual could ask for help to Preda who was an enemy of homosexuals (“Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, March 9, 1961, 397-398). Another reader, always with regard to this letter, invited this young homosexual man to read Antonio Gandin’s *L’amore omosessuale maschile e femminile*, because in that book the author suggested some useful remedies to “cure” homosexuality (“Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, March 16, 1961, 437-438).

¹²¹ Preda was usually very harsh answering letters written by homosexuals or by people who showed some form of sympathy towards homosexuality. See “Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, March 9, 1961, 398; “Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, May 11, 1961, 77.

¹²² “Domande e risposte,” *Il Borghese*, June 8, 1961, 237-238.

¹²³ According to Eric Anderson the emergence of homohysteria in a society depends on three elements: 1) mass awareness that homosexuality exists as a static sexual orientation, 2) a cultural *Zeitgeist* of disapproval of homosexuality, 3) the conflation of femininity with homosexuality. Moreover, fundamental to the creation of a culture of homohysteria is the necessity of public awareness that reasonable and “normal” people can also be homosexual. In this homosexually panicked culture it is commonly believed that anyone might be gay. In the early 1960s all these elements seemed to be present in the Italian society. See Eric Anderson, “The Rise and Fall of Western Homohysteria,” *The Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 1 (2011): 80-94; Id., *21st Century Jocks. Sporting Men and Contemporary Heterosexuality* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 37-42.

homosexual activities: the Merlin Law and the article prohibiting acts of public indecency were not enough to repress homosexuality.¹²⁴ This new law proposal – which similarly to Manco’s bill the Parliament never discussed – was presented on April 29, 1961 by the surgeon Bruno Romano, former deputy of the Monarchist Party and member – since September 1960 – of the *Partito Social Democratico Italiano* (Italian Social Democratic Party, PSDI).¹²⁵ It sanctioned that whoever had sexual intercourse, or committed other sexual acts, with a person of the same sex was punishable by imprisonment from 6 months to 3 years and liable to a fine from 50,000 to 500,000 lire (art. 1). If sexual activities involved an adult and a minor younger than seventeen, even if consenting, the adult was punishable by imprisonment from 5 to 10 years (art. 2). Both articles decreed that the penalty was halved if the “corruptor” was a minor. According to the third article of the law penalties were instead doubled if the offender used violence or took advantage of feeble-minded people and people made incompetent by the use of drugs, alcohol, or other substances. Penalties were doubled also 1) if the offender took advantage of his/her authority over the partner, 2) if he/she corrupted the partner using money or other goods, or 3) if the crime was committed in public. In the end the fourth and last article of the bill prescribed that whoever promoted or organized actions and demonstrations aimed at defending homosexual behaviors by means of press, radio, television, theater, cinema, conferences, meetings or any other system of propaganda was punishable by imprisonment from 5 to 10 years.

In introducing this bill, Romano tried to argue the reasons why it was necessary to turn homosexuality into a crime. He highlighted how other countries in the world punished with more or less severe penalties sexual perversions in order to defend their societies from

¹²⁴ See, for example, Mistretta, “La Leonessa Capovolta.”

¹²⁵ While other countries, such as Great Britain (Wolfenden Report, 1957), were thinking about the possibility of decriminalizing homosexuality, Italy seemed to move in the opposite direction.

widespread degeneracy and vice.¹²⁶ Romano could not understand why a country where two straight lovers were not allowed to kiss in public, where the pudenda of statues were covered with fig leaves, where movies and theatrical performances were fiercely censored, and where it was difficult to introduce sexual education in schools, treated “sexual anomalies,” which had been punished harshly for centuries, so open-mindedly. Italy, Romano continued, had to guarantee sexual freedom only to “normal” heterosexuals. The deputy argued further that “sexual perversion” was not a congenital, psychological, or hormonal disease. The “homosexual pervert” was healthy from a psycho-sexual perspective but, *de facto*, s/he was an immoral human being. His/her condition was a voluntary form of degeneration. It was therefore necessary for the Italian state to tackle with appropriate means the spread of this serious social pathology. And the word “spread,” Romano underscored, was particularly appropriate: “Up until a few years ago the [homosexual] phenomenon seemed to be a prerogative of some intellectuals and a few rich bourgeois ... nowadays instead the problem hits more and more widely the middle and popular classes, causing serious anxieties.”

The deputy emphasized that the youths were particularly in danger because they did not always have a clear perception of what was beneficial for them. Social and environmental influences could convince weak-minded, naïve or corruptible individuals to take deviant attitudes which would push them towards homosexual or bisexual perversions. Any civilized society had to take care of the sexual education of the youth and repress sexual perversions by means of inflexible penalties. Romano thought that the introduction of sexual education for the youths would be the best and easiest solution to avoid perversions, but he also thought that it would be difficult to institutionalize it in school curricula. Instead, he thought, it was the right moment to face the problem, and rescue Italians from the continuous and more and more impudent attacks of the “perverts” who were, to his opinion, particularly active in the

¹²⁶ According to the magazine *Vita* Romano, before presenting this bill, had consulted some authoritative colleagues, had visited England, France, and the Netherlands, and had studied laws regulating same-sex sexualities in the US, in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Austria, Germany, and Greece. See “Lotta al vizio,” *Vita*, May 11, 1961, 19.

intellectual and artistic environments. Romano could not understand how the Italian society could accept passively such a debasement of the sexual mores, such “an incredible contamination organized by increasingly copious, cynical and aggressive *untori* (plague-spreaders).” The deputy asked how the Italians could allow the homosexuals to carry out a kind of media campaign through meetings, conferences, movies, literature, radio and TV programs, and he wanted to know who could protect the youth from such a “social cancer” which was directing them toward “a life of shame, abjection, and progressive moral regression.”¹²⁷ Italians, according to Romano, could not accept the current legislative gap, the impunity of such grave crimes. If “the legislation of almost every civilized country wisely provides for punishability of homosexual behaviors, it is necessary to wonder if it is our society to be at fault.” It was time to prevent definitively the spread of human corruption and abjection.¹²⁸

While the proposal presented by the MSI at the beginning of 1960 aimed at integrating an already existing article of the Penal Code, Romano’s proposal aimed at introducing a completely new law in the Italian legal order. The documents introducing both proposals make it clear that their supporters were particularly interested in protecting the new generation and in impeding the circulation of perverted (and perverting) culture. However, compared to the law presented by Manco, Romano’s proposal was much more detailed and much more repressive. It called for more severe penalties and much higher fines. A troublesome article was the fourth. The idea of punishing anyone talking, representing, or dealing with homosexuality in artistic or scientific contexts might have had serious socio-cultural repercussions. Romano knew that his bill would not have had an easy life. He was aware that jurists would criticize the law for curtailing sexual freedom, and that doctors would argue that

¹²⁷ For homosexuality in movie: A.B., “Il cinema capovolto,” and A.B., “Cinecittà assediata.”

¹²⁸ Law Proposal no. 2990, Norms repressing homosexual behavior, April 29, 1961, Parliamentary Acts, Chamber of Deputies, III Legislature, 1-10. Lina Merlin did not seem to be against this law. She thought that in case of sexual deviance dangerous for the youths it was necessary to intervene and punish (“Lotta al vizio,” 19).

it was necessary to recognize the pathological components at the heart of the homosexual “anomaly.”¹²⁹ However, to his opinion, the most important thing was to bring to the table an issue that recent scandals had shown to be of primary importance. The youths had to be protected and male prostitution had to be fought: only the criminalization of same-sex sexuality would have avoided other Kostantin Feiles, other Orante Cardaellis, and other *Balletti Verdi*.¹³⁰

Maurizio Bellotti severely criticized Romano’s bill in a piece entitled *Une proposition immonde (A vile proposal)*. In this article published by *Arcadie* he maintained that, if this law had been introduced, many innocent gestures, like touching the shoulder of a friend of the same sex, could have been considered as sexual acts subject to punishment. And even sharing a hotel room with a friend of the same sex could have become a risky behavior: who could prove that they did not sleep together? And what about article number 4 of the law? Several serious scholars did not think about homosexuality as a vice. Could they be considered corruptors for defending homosexuals or just for talking about them? What would happen to novelists and poets? Should Pasolini, Penna, Arbasino, Testori, and Patroni Griffi go to prison for talking about homosexuality in their literary works? What about directors and actors working in plays and movies where homosexuality was not clearly condemned? Would it be necessary to put them in prison together with the audience, responsible of complicity? And what about publishers? What about books coming from abroad? Bellotti concluded his piece labeling Romano ignorant because he regarded homosexuality as a vice and a transmissible infection.¹³¹

¹²⁹ “Lotta al vizio,” 20.

¹³⁰ Bruno Romano, “Perché mi batto contro gli omosessuali,” *ABC*, June 25, 1961, 24-25. Actually the Merlin law, using in its text the gender neutral “person” and referring to people of both sexes as potential prostitutes, could be used to regulate cases of both male and female prostitution. See “Due denunciati dei balletti verdi arrestati durante la deposizione”; Azzini, “L’arcivescovo di Brescia parla dei ‘balletti’”; sentence against Z.G. and S. N.G. October 2, 1961, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 334; sentence against G.D., December 13, 1962, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 334.

¹³¹ Maurizio Bellotti, “Une proposition immonde,” *Arcadie*, 94 (1961): 509-513.

Readers of both *Le Ore* and *Il Borghese* seemed to be particularly interested in knowing the position of these magazines about Romano's proposal.¹³² Sarcastically commenting on Romano's law, Preda asserted that if the Parliament had approved the proposal, the Italian prisons would not have had enough space to accommodate all the "new guests."¹³³ Also the director of *Le Ore* thought that, with the new law, the number of potential prisoners would have been so high that to make arrangements for all of them it would have been necessary to build many new correction centers.¹³⁴ But he also thought that Romano's bill was excessive and dangerous. To his opinion, given that human beings are "social animals," the discrimination caused by this law would push homosexual men and women toward new forms of sociality, and would favor groups and associations where the excluded could freely express their personality. The law, if approved, was not going to cure the "plague" it wanted to heal. Rather, it was going to favor the creation of a solid organization of victimized homosexuals, more powerful and more dangerous than the "mafia of the inverts" which secretly domineered Italian socio-cultural life.¹³⁵ This idea that repression would cause a homosexual counter-reaction was somehow also supported by a homosexual reader of *Lo Specchio*. In his letter to this tabloid, whose director did not support the introduction of the law because he believed it to be dangerous and counterproductive, he wrote that Romano did not realize what it meant to be a homosexual, and that he did not know the difficulties and the problems that homosexuals had to face every day. This anonymous reader from Rome underlined that, if this bill had passed, it would have been necessary for the homosexuals to create a league to protect themselves from "normal" people.¹³⁶

¹³² "Così è se vi pare," *Le Ore*, May 16, 1961, 7; "Domande e risposte," *Il Borghese*, May 18, 1961, 118; "Così è se vi pare," *Le Ore*, July 11, 1961, 6.

¹³³ "Domande e risposte," *Il Borghese*, May 18, 1961, 118.

¹³⁴ "Così è se vi pare," *Le Ore*, May 16, 1961, 7.

¹³⁵ "Così è se vi pare," *Le Ore*, July 11, 1961, 6.

¹³⁶ "Il Terzo Sesso," *Lo Specchio*, July 16, 1961, 2. See also "Il Terzo Sesso," *Lo Specchio*, July 9, 1961, 2.

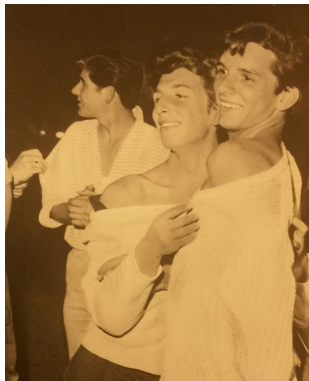
Scandals, Tabloids and the Vernacularization of Sex

In the early 1960s several tabloids described homosexuality, male prostitution, sexual deviance, transsexualism, and transvestitism as “cancers” carrying out an attack against the youths.¹³⁷ The magazine *Cronaca* published between September and October 1962 an investigative report about sexual deviance in which it tried to explain to the readers, without avoiding judgmental tones, the differences existing between male and female homosexuality, bisexuality, transvestitism, and transsexualism. Investigative reports like this one, in spite of their judgmental tones, ended up being somehow valuable educational tools for the general audience, and for all those who were trying to define themselves. These articles explained medical jargon and clarified the meaning of words that media often confusingly and incorrectly presented as synonyms.¹³⁸ Pieces about homosexuals, transvestites, and transsexuals attracted both “normal” people – curious about these odd “creatures” – and men and women “like that” – who wanted to see their counterparts and understand themselves. The diffusion of prostitution among young men continued to be a topic particularly dear to conservative tabloids, such as *Meridiano d'Italia* and *Il Borghese*, which kept nurturing alarmist arguments about the feminization of working class youths (Figures 3.38. and 3.39.). Most articles published by popular tabloids were illustrated with powerful pictures that aimed at making the situation even more disquieting for the readers, and more enticing for homosexuals and gender non-conforming people. The first things that most readers noticed in

¹³⁷ See Enzo Catania, “I malnati di Milano. Nel centro della città, di notte, i travestiti spadroneggiano,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, June 22, 1961, 8-9; Adalberto Baldoni, “Le notti verdi di Villa Borghese,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, August 3, 1961, cover, 8-9; Adalberto Baldoni, “Troppo ‘verde’ a Roma,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, August 10, 1961, cover, 8-9; “Le schedate di Milano,” *L'Espresso*, October 29, 1961, 14-15; Piero Sani, “Nel verde dipinti di verde,” *Cronaca*, February 10, 1962, 10-11; Giorgio Mistretta, “Il tribunale del terzo sesso,” *Lo Specchio*, February 11, 1962, 36-37; Arno Falkenburg, “Omossessualità,” *Cronaca*, April 7, 1962, 12-15; Arno Falkenburg, “Gli invertiti,” *Cronaca*, September 15, 1962, 12-15; I.R. Swainson, “Una cura per il terzo sesso,” *Cronaca*, April 20, 1963, 4-6. The case of Aldo Calvanese, a 27 year old man killed by Cosimo Palmieri, a 66 year old homosexual, was presented by the tabloids as the umpteenth proof of how homosexuality could be dangerous for the youths. The two had seen each other for four years. Every time the killer recompensed the victim for the time spent together. Usually Aldo accepted 1,000 lire, but the last time he wanted more. The two men argued, and the argument turned into a tragedy. Aldo had a good job, a good family, and he was supposed to marry his fiancé in a few months (Piero Sani, “Che succede nelle pieghe della città,” *Cronaca*, July 8, 1961, 6-7; Aldo Lualdi, “Graffiano come donne e uccidono per 1000 lire,” *ABC*, July 9, 1961, 52-54; Enzo Catania, “Senza legge il terzo sesso dilaga. Uccide l'‘amico’ per poche lire,” *Meridiano d'Italia*, July 13, 1961, cover, 12-13).

¹³⁸ Arno Falkenburg, “La giungla dei sessi,” *Cronaca*, September 29, 1962, 12-15. See also Falkenburg, “Gli invertiti;” Arno Falkenburg, “Le eredi di Saffò,” *Cronaca*, September 22, 1962, 12-15; Leo Sandi, “Coccinelle un crimine contro natura,” *Cronaca*, October 27, 1962, 4-7.

a tabloid were the pictures and, for some of them, a provocative photograph was the only reason why they would decide to read the entire article.¹³⁹



Figures 3.38.-3.39. Pictures of young “flamboyant” Italian men. *Il Borghese* tried to emphasize how homosexuality was catching on among working-class men and blamed the political Left for this. The caption of the picture on the left says “Italy opens to the Left” (*Il Borghese*, May 25, 1961). The one on the right is described in these terms: “New representatives of the proletariat in the suburbs” (*Il Borghese*, September 7, 1961). The magazine wanted to argue that many youths living in the poorest areas of the city were experiencing a process of feminization, and that one of their most lucrative activities was hustling.

Sex and gender “non normative” individuals, many of them ignorant of the existence of people like themselves, discovered through news reports concerning Feile, Donges, and *Balletti* details about coded languages, places where homosexuals, transvestites and transsexuals consorted, and ways they behaved. Sensationalist tabloids, more or less inadvertently (maybe just aiming at selling more copies), sabotaged the punitive logic that guided their reporting and helped “non normative” people gain knowledge about themselves and about their world.¹⁴⁰ The press, by publishing articles against homosexuals, offered important pieces of information about homosexual milieus to all those interested in them.¹⁴¹

Writing about Coccinelle, Feile, Donges, and *Balletti* familiarized the working-class audience with new concepts, produced discourses which influenced general public thinking, and favored the production of new identities and new subjects.¹⁴² In the 1960s, according to

¹³⁹ Simonetta Piccone Stella, Annabella Rossi, *La fatica di leggere* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1964), 84.

¹⁴⁰ Cohen, *Sex Scandal*, 95.

¹⁴¹ In 1966, for example, when a Danish publishing house released the “EOS guide” – a baedecker of homosexual tourism – the magazine *ABC* wrote a long article about it. It even published the address of EOS helping all those Italian readers who wanted to get a copy. The article even gave very precise information about gathering places in big cities. It almost seems that these magazines were favoring the homosexuality they wanted to oppose. See Uberto Quintavalle, “Il vademecum del terzo sesso. Pubblicata in Danimarca e diffusa in tutto il mondo una guida turistica per omosessuali,” *ABC*, August 21, 1966, 19-20 and “Il manuale del terzo sesso,” *ABC*, September 4, 1966, 2.

¹⁴² Magazines and tabloids, as the book *La fatica di leggere* argued in 1964, had a very wide readership and in 1961 newspapers, magazines, and comics reached 70% of the Italian population. Some people bought them – even one for every

Alberto Arbasino, the vernacularization of sexological categories among the working class was reshaping sexual behaviors.¹⁴³ The bourgeois process of labeling, naming, and defining invaded the working-class discursive sphere through sensationalist tabloids.¹⁴⁴ Scandals and media were a powerful instrument of education. They provided “the opportunity for new types of knowledge about sexuality to circulate publicly.”¹⁴⁵ If in the 1960s “transvestite” and “transsexual” began – and I underline “began” because the process was all but linear – to be distinguished from the category “homosexual,” and if “gender inversion” and “sexual orientation” began to be differentiated, that did not stem from the popularization of Hirschfeld’s or Krafft Ebing’s works.¹⁴⁶ Major scandals and prominent figures, such as the transsexual Coccinelle, were essential in popularizing concepts, categories, and labels among the Italian population in general, and among the Italian working class in particular.¹⁴⁷ Again

day of the week, but some others read them while waiting, for example, at the hairstylist’s. The waiting rooms where tabloids were available for free turned to be very important centers for the socio-cultural education of the masses. Many read the tabloids to follow the lives of their favorite celebrities but, in the process, they also learned something more about the society they lived in. Piccone Stella, Rossi, *La fatica di leggere*, 10, 78-87, 166-167, 229, 284, 401.

¹⁴³ Arbasino, *Fratelli d’Italia* quoted in Gnerre, *L’eroe negato*, 357.

¹⁴⁴ Steve Valocchi, “Class-Inflected Nature of Gay Identity,” *Social Problems* 46, no. 2 (1999): 210.

¹⁴⁵ Cohen, *Sex Scandal*, 11.

¹⁴⁶ See Dino Sanzò, “La dolora confessione di un travestito,” *Lo Specchio*, February 3, 1963, 38-39; “Hanno approfittato del carnevale,” *Cronaca*, March 9, 1963, 20; AF, “Diseducazione sessuale,” *Cronaca*, April 18, 1964, 11; AF, “I falsari del sesso,” *Cronaca*, April 25, 1964, 15; “Come cambiare il sesso?” *ABC*, May 1, 1966, 2; Piero Sani, “Lulù si chiama Annibale,” *Cronaca*, September 3, 1966, 8-10; Enzo Giustiniani, “La Casbah di ‘Toledo’,” *Lo Specchio*, December 11, 1966, 12, 16. In 1965 the review *Il Delatore* (March, n. 5) published an entire issue completely devoted to *I travestiti*. In big Italian cities, beside masculine *marchettari*, there were also individuals who hustled wearing make-up, wigs, and female attire (*travestiti*). In August 1965 *Lo Specchio* published some pictures of *travestiti* caught by the police in Via Veneto. On this occasion the magazine used in a very confused and confusing way the concepts *travestito* and *omosessuale* collapsing them together. It showed images of transvestite hustlers, but it talked about them as male prostitutes (“Retata a Via Veneto,” *Lo Specchio*, August 22, 1965, 14-15). In December 1965, in an article of the magazine *ABC* about male prostitution in Turin, the journalist Renato Proni talked about two different kinds of male prostitution. One was the prostitution of the transvestites, the other was the prostitution of the so-called “*tipi*” (dudes). But, in the end, also in this article there was a lot of confusion between transvestites, homosexuals, and male prostitutes (Renato Proni, “Si chiamano ‘Soraya’ e ‘Betty Curtis’ i capovolti di Torino,” *ABC*, December 5, 1965, 12-14).

¹⁴⁷ In November 1960 *Le Ore* started publishing periodically the story of Coccinelle’s life. The fact that a tabloid devoted six issues to her story is a sign that “non-normative sexuality” could be now a topic for a general public. We have to underscore that *Le Ore* published several pictures of her trying to highlight her femininity, talked about her with respect, but also with a good amount of irony, and that the tabloid stopped the publication of Coccinelle’s story earlier than expected. Maybe not everybody liked such openness (see “I segreti di una vita assurda e sconcertante,” *Le Ore*, November 29, 1960, 37-44; “Sono nata due volte,” *Le Ore*, December 6, 1960, 56-65; “Il mio primo amore,” *Le Ore*, December 13, 1960, 4-9; “Quel giorno divenni donna,” *Le Ore*, December 20, 1960, 4-9; “Gli Italiani adorabili mascalzoni,” *Le Ore*, December 27, 1960, 22-27; “I miei amici famosi,” *Le Ore*, January 3, 1961, 4-9). But even before and after this set of articles about her life Coccinelle had conquered the Italian media (see “Bellissime sì ma con riserva,” *Le Ore*, January 9, 1960, 26-27; “Coccinelle è una donna” *Lo Specchio*, January 10, 1960, 28-29; M.G.P., “Coccinelle sull’Arno. Venne-Vide-Vinse,” *Meridiano d’Italia*, April 10, 1960, 20-21; “Il fidanzato di Coccinelle,” *Lo Specchio*, August 21, 1960, 20-21; Sergio Saviane, “Un Coccinelle televisivo,” *L’Espresso*, October 9, 1960, 23; Pietro Melini, “Coccinelle voleva sposarsi in Santa Croce,” *Lo Specchio*, October 29, 1960, cover, 18-19; P.M., “Coccinelle ha fatto ruggire i giovani leoni di Firenze,” *Lo Specchio*, October 29, 1960, 20-21; “La partecipazione di Coccinelle,” *Lo Specchio*, March 18, 1962, 35; Enrico de Boccard, “La prima notte di Coccinelle,” *Lo Specchio*, March 25, 1962, 30-33 and back cover; “E’ un uomo mutilato,” *Le Ore*, September 27, 1962, 62 and 65; “Lui, lui e

such emergence was not definitive, categories were all but clearly fixed, and homosexuals would be – and still are – confused with transsexuals and transvestites. However, it is possible to claim that at the beginning of the 1960s something was changing in the ways in which sexuality and gender were conceptualized and understood in Italy. Such changes were also a product of the mediatization of scandals.

Case Closed

The year 1963, which ended with another unsuccessful attempt to penalize homosexuality and with a new homosexual scandal in Salerno, saw the end of the *Balletti Verdi* inquiry.¹⁴⁸ On June 28 the investigating judge Giovanni Arcai filed his preliminary decision and indicted 31 defendants in the main *Balletti Verdi* trial.¹⁴⁹ This long document, filled with typos and major mistakes such as the misspelled *uomosessuale* (sexual man) instead of *omosessuale* (homosexual), exuded anti-homosexual passion and disdain.¹⁵⁰ The defendants were accused of lewd acts, gross indecency in public, and violation of the Merlin Law (aiding and abetting prostitution, induction to prostitution, and exploitation of other people's prostitution). However, accusations of lechery and gross indecency fell through because of the amnesty the President of the Republic granted on January 24, 1963 (Presidential decree n. 2). The only crimes prosecutable then were those related to the alleged violation of the Merlin Law. The first part of Arcai's preliminary decision was focused on underlining that this was not

l'altro," *Le Ore*, October 11, 1962, 10-11; "E adesso Coccinelle cambia pure marito," *Lo Specchio*, October 14, 1962, back cover; "Un nuovo marito per 'Cocci'," *Cronaca*, October 20, 1962, back cover).

¹⁴⁸ The law proposal presented on November 14, 1963 by Manco was never discussed. For the so-called *Balletti Verdi* di Salerno see Enzo Todaro, "I 'verdi' ballano. A Salerno come a Brescia," *Cronaca*, January 25, 1964, 20-22. For this case were pressed charges against 27 men between the age of 15 and 51. The accusations moved against them were minors' corruption, exploitation of male prostitution, aiding and abating male prostitution, and lewd acts in public (see letter of the Prefect of Salerno to the Ministry of Interior, September 25, 1963 and letter of the Prefecture of Salerno to the Minister of Interior, November 19, 1963, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 581).

¹⁴⁹ At the beginning of 1962, was held a "*processo stralcio*" (brief lawsuit) against some men implicated in the *Balletti Verdi* scandal for prostitution, lechery, extortion, and theft. This "ancillary trial" was meant to judge rapidly felonies against assets and people, whereas the "main trial" was supposed to throw light on crimes against public morality (Giorgio Mistretta, Dino Sanzò, "Le confessioni dei ballerini," *Lo Specchio*, December 10, 1961, 6-9; Nullo Cantaroni, "Gioventù perversa," *Le Ore*, February 8, 1962, 41-46). The verdict of the first trial, ended on January 30, 1962, convicted all the 15 defendants with penalty between 8 years and 1 month (see newspapers clippings, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 577).

¹⁵⁰ For the full document see *Sentenza istruttoria*, Giovanni D'Arcai.

supposed to be a trial against homosexuality, and on explaining why and how the Merlin Law was perfectly applicable to cases of male-male prostitution. Nonetheless, Arcai did not miss the opportunity of turning his argument into a condemnation of same-sex sexuality, and vaguely asking for its criminalization. Homosexuality, Arcai underlined, had been only a moral issue that the legislator completely ignored for decades. But in the last years it had been advertized by plays, movies, and books, and the press had extensively talked about it, thereby popularizing stories, making the homosexual jargon known, and explaining how cruising worked. Writers, playwrights, and movie directors had tried to make acceptable relationships that were not “normal.” Arcai considered the situation alarming, and he found legislative agnosticism unacceptable.

Homosexuality was, continued Arcai in his document, a danger for Italian society and a source of criminality. Homosexuals lived in close contact with other men, and they could affect and infect them. Arcai argued that homosexuality was “a congenital malady,” but it also was a contagious condition that everyone could catch, particularly during the developmental age. Homosexuals, he stressed, could be passive, active, or both. And there were also more complex forms of homosexuality in which the subjects were at the same time passive and active, and had regular sex with women too. An important characteristic of homosexuality, according to the judge, was its inconsistency in terms of feelings and relationships.

Homosexuals rarely had long-term partners. A “friend” could last for a few meetings, but then he was abandoned and the homosexual would move on to another “friend.” Such a situation made it necessary to enroll “new members.” And homosexuals searched for new blood, first of all, among local poor and working-class adolescents. These youths, according to Arcai, often became homosexual themselves and tried to allure and corrupt others. But proselytism did not limit itself to adolescents. Also the so called *fusti* (hunks) were in homosexuals’ sight. They searched for soldiers and for youths coming from the countryside and from local

factories, as long as they were *maschi* (males). Many homosexuals, Arcai explained, considered relationships with *omosessuali costituzionali* (innate homosexuals) repulsive, and their greatest ambition was to bend to their own pleasures virile and “normal” youths.

In spite of this long anti-homosexual introduction, Arcai reiterated that the trial was not against homosexuality per se, but against the social and juridical consequences of male prostitution. Such activity was not only immoral, but it was also damaging Italian society. According to Arcai, female prostitutes had an important function. They often initiated men to normative sex and, thus, they were useful for the single individual and for the Italian society more generally. Questioning youths could be pushed toward normalcy by the “affectionate arts of a [female] prostitute.” Different was the situation with regard to male prostitution. Male-male sexual practices had no “productive” consequences. Female prostitution could be important for insecure men, but male prostitution deviated and tarnished both hustlers and clients.

Arcai’s document is a detailed account of protagonists, situations, places, and dynamics of the homosexual life in Brescia. He explained who was who in this complicated map of encounters, sex, and parties. He talks about young hustlers fighting over clients, about good looking, masculine, and “sexually normal” soldiers entrapped by convincing and generous homosexuals,¹⁵¹ about adolescents acting as procurers, about famous dancers of the Italian public television using their fame to lure youths, about “normal” men hustling to pay female prostitutes, about priests fond of adolescents and kinky practices, and about men living

¹⁵¹ The desire for sex, the desire for human warmth, and the desire for money were presented by Arcai as the reasons why some young soldiers accepted the sexual advances of the homosexuals. But once they entered the “circle” it was very difficult to get out of it. The Italian magazines talked about the meager daily allowance of the conscripts (117 lire per day in 1961 and 158 lire per day in 1965), and they hinted at soldiers having sex with other men because local girls were not willing to have sex with them, and because female prostitutes were too expensive (see Antonio Terzi, “Diciotto mesi di disperazione,” *ABC*, January 22, 196, 30-33; “La paga dei soldati,” *Cronaca*, September 3, 1965, 2). A novel, *Il soldato nudo* (*The Naked Soldier*) (1961), written by Gian Piero Bona talked about soldiers prostituting themselves for money. About soldiers having sex with men see also Parca, *I sultani*, 241-242, 245. Parca denies that soldiers’ prostitution increased after the introduction of the Merlin Law. They prostituted themselves even before 1958. In 1960 two songs talked about homosexuality in the Italian army: Laura Betti’s *Seguendo la flotta* (*Following the fleet*) in which she talked about a homosexual sailor, and Gianni Meccia’s *I soldati delicati* (*The delicate soldiers*) in which he talked about “gracious,” “refined,” “delicate” soldiers who did not want to hurt themselves, who sheltered themselves from the sun using colorful umbrella, and who interlaced flower crowns seating on a lawn.

together as committed couples. Reading this document it is clear how these men met in houses or in public spaces (gardens, parks, isolated roads, and parking areas). The “orgy trope” I have encountered in the media since the 1940s was also present in Arcai’s long analysis. But what emerges from this document also is that in Brescia there was a widespread homosexual circle with “friends” having sex with each other for money or for free. Sometimes “hunks” and young prostitutes were involved, sometimes they were not. Sometimes people organized parties where youths were paid for their sexual services, but some other times they were just parties among men who were trying to create their own safe spaces. Trying to understand who was a prostitute and who was not in this system was anything but easy. And the same holds true for the distinction between “corrupted” and “corruptor.” From Arcai’s document shines through a voyeuristic pleasure in describing situations that were not necessarily useful for the inquiry, but that he wanted to share to draw attention to behaviors that to his eyes were immoral and deplorable. Arcai morally condemned a sexual system that he was not capable of understanding. Two weeks after the official presentation of Arcai’s document *Lo Specchio* published a short version of the preliminary decision focusing in particular on its anti-homosexual section (Figure 3.40.). In this way Arcai’s prejudiced arguments became public, thus feeding and further stimulating the *homosexual domino show*.¹⁵²



Figure 3.40. First page of an article about the preliminary decision of the *Balletti Verdi* case. “Preliminary Decision about Brescia. The most important document about Italian contemporary customs.” “We publish the most significant part of the preliminary decision about the ‘balletti verdi’: a three years inquiry, a meticulous investigation, and the zeal of the investigators allowed to draft the most passionate bill of indictment against the corruption disseminated everywhere by the ‘third sex.’ A reprimand of the judge about homosexuals exploited by Communists for espionage purposes.” *Lo Specchio*, July 14, 1963, 38.

¹⁵² See “La sentenza istruttoria di Brescia,” *Lo Specchio*, July 14, 1963, 38-41.

Stefano Bolognini in 2000 interviewed some homosexuals involved in the inquiry. They talked in their testimonies about sex, friendship, and love. Some of them admitted that “mercenary exchanges” could also occur from time to time. They noted that Italian press had grossly mischaracterized the *Balletti*. As A.C., one of the youths implicated in the scandal, sarcastically stressed, “a dozy small town in a Catholic and bigoted country became aware out of the blue of having in its womb tens and tens of monsters who dared to make love.” In his interview he explained that in Brescia there were many homosexuals. Some of them were underage, some of them were in their thirties. They always met in different places, they knew each other, and they had sex with one another. A. admitted that some minors had sex in exchange for a dinner or a pack of cigarettes. He did not consider these young men as prostitutes and the adults having sex with them as exploiters. They were just men having sex with other men.¹⁵³ R.G., a homosexual involved in the scandal, explained that they did not meet in villas and they did not wear extravagant outfits.¹⁵⁴ They chose private dwellings as ideal venues for their meetings:

They were not out-and-out parties, they were meetings among friends and I never saw more than ten people. One of the houses where we met was in Castelmella, here we gathered in a crummy stable: forget the “Arabian nights” villas they talked about in the newspapers! We also met at my place, on Sunday afternoon when my parents were not at home...Someone brought pastries, someone brought wine, and we chatted, we danced, we kissed, and sometimes we made love.

About the presumed crimes committed in Brescia he explained:

The crimes? This is what actually happened. A gay friend of mine invited me to have dinner together, and he introduced me to an older gay friend. I was happy about it because I liked mature men. If I liked him, I slept with him. I discovered later on that that friend of mine received a reward from that older man, but I am sure that there was not an organization and I was not exploited: I knew what I was doing and I was never paid.

And he added that at some point, while the press was talking about the scandal, the people involved in these parties did not know what was lawful and what was unlawful: “Some of us

¹⁵³ Quoted in Pini, *Quando eravamo froci*, 206-209.

¹⁵⁴ Bolognini, *Balletti Verdi*, 74.

were accused of abetting prostitution just because we had hosted some gay friends at our places who had made love in the bedroom.”¹⁵⁵ Another accused homosexual explained in his interview:

I was in the farmstead of Castelmella twice. We met in the stable while the mother and the father of the host were sleeping. In the stable, beside us, there were hay and three cows. In this farmstead there were young and mature men. It could happen that some older men asked the younger ones to have sex, but saying that young men were brought there on purpose [as prostitutes] is too much.¹⁵⁶

These testimonies are particularly important because they bring into play what the Italian press and Arcai did not seem able to conceive: the possibility that these men could actually have feelings for one another. A.C., G.M., and R.G. talked about sex and they did not deny the possibility that young men could have received “presents” from the older ones. But in their words we can also sense affection, emotions, and love. From their perspective they did not meet for *meaningless sex* only. Their gatherings were also a possibility for sharing emotional intimacy with one another, without having to fear the hostility of the outside world. The *Balletti*, according to these witnesses, were not merely gatherings in which some men exploited others, but rather *affective loci* where emotions circulated between the guests, uniting them, and making them realize that they could love and be loved. These meetings were expression of a homosexual community in the making. The *ballerini* were men trying to carve out their own space in a rather anti-homosexual society. They were trying to create new kinds of “families” and the so-called *zie* (aunties), usually seen as exploiters by those outside of the *Balletti* circle, were often the ones who actually helped the newcomers find their own role and their own place in their new queer family.

¹⁵⁵ Interview of R.G. in Bolognini, *Balletti Verdi*, 63-65. Pier Francesco Pingitore, in an article published in January 1961, had already written that the “true story of the ‘balletti’ of Brescia” was “far less exciting than imagined” and that probably there was nothing luxurious in these gatherings. See Pingitore, “La verità sui Balletti Verdi.”

¹⁵⁶ Interview of G.M. in Bolognini, *Balletti Verdi*, 65.

On January 28, 1964 the judges Alfonso Mascolo Vitale, Mario Sacchi, and Giorgio Allegri put an end to the *Balletti Verdi* scandal reading their final decision in the case.¹⁵⁷ In their verdict one word was particularly recurring: *disgusto* (disgust). Vitale, Sacchi and Allegri underlined that, even if homosexuality was not a crime, it was certainly a morally reprehensible phenomenon. Homosexuals were not mentally ill, but they certainly were depraved and repugnant individuals who had to be considered “*immorali costituzionali*” (innately immoral). 16 of the 31 defendants were deemed guilty of slander (one person), of extortion and fraud (one person), of sexual exploitation (three people), and of abetting prostitution (eleven people). The judges had decided to grant some mitigating circumstances. Even if the crimes committed were heinous and repugnant, the judges underlined, they thought that it was necessary to keep in mind that the defendants, even if mentally sane, were people intrinsically rotten. Moreover, it was also indispensable to remember that the youths involved in the case were despicable people who sold their bodies for mere lust or to earn money. Thus, they shared culpability with the homosexuals who paid them. Most of the accused were given sentences between 4 and 17 months, and they had to pay fines between 42,000 and 120,000 lire. Then, as the *Eco di Brescia* underlined, the criminal suit ended up with a few felons, and the scandal turned out to be “a regrettable fabrication, too late downsized to its correct and puny proportions.”¹⁵⁸ In their final remarks the judges asserted that the people involved in this trial had no ethics, and lived their life following pure animal instincts. They were poor wretches. Mascolo Vitale emphasized that the judicial panel “concluded such a long, strenuous, and ungrateful job with a sense of depressing moral nausea and with an indescribable sense of disgust.” However, they wanted to end their final decision highlighting that the social body was not completely rotten and that society had the moral strength to eradicate, trap, and control the evil.

¹⁵⁷ Sentenza n. 41, 1964, 28 gennaio 1964, Archivio Tribunale Penale di Brescia.

¹⁵⁸ “Finalmente ridimensionata la montatura dei balletti verdi,” *L'Eco di Brescia*, January 31, 1964, 8.

Conclusion

The *tiles* of the *homosexual domino show*, falling one after the other since 1958, seemed to be unstoppable. Even if homosexuality was already an object of analysis, reflection, and condemnation before 1960, the uproar caused in a few months by Feile, *Balletti*, and Donges was unprecedented. The scandal of Brescia in particular provoked clamor in the media because of the numbers of people thought to be involved and because opposition parties – the Communists in particular – turned the *Balletti* into an electoral issue. The press talked about male homosexuality more frankly than before, and the scandal was discussed in renowned magazines and newspapers which reached a broad public.¹⁵⁹ Starting in 1960 the expression *Balletti Verdi* acquired a specific meaning, becoming an idiomatic expression. The scandal was so notorious that for the rest of the decade magazines, authorities, and common people used the phrase *Balletti Verdi* to imply every situation in which men consorted with other men for sexual purposes.¹⁶⁰

The scandals of 1960, happening one after the other, allowed several Italian magazines and newspapers to talk about homosexuals as predators and corruptors, and about homosexuality as a spreading disease that was endangering the physical and moral integrity of Italian youths. Homosexuals were portrayed as dangerous for Italian society, in general, and for Italian new generations, in particular. What stands out reading many articles about sexual “deviations” published in the early 1960s is exactly the overwhelming use of words and metaphors related to the alleged spread of homosexuality as a contagious infection. And such tropes – that media had already used in the 1940s and 1950s – were not mere images or empty figures of speech, but instruments through which same-sex behaviors had been understood,

¹⁵⁹ According to Francesco Alberoni the circulation of newspapers and magazines increased notably between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. Newspapers went from 3.5 million sold in 1954 to 4.3 in 1963, whereas weekly magazines went from 10.7 to 14.4 million during the same period. Alberoni, *Pubblicità, televisione e società*, 31.

¹⁶⁰ Media focused on the *Balletti Verdi* of Salerno (1963) and about the *Balletti Verdi* of Reggio Emilia (1969). But even in an anonymous letter sent to the police by a group of people in order to complain about the presence of an illegal male brothels in Piazza Cavour (Naples), the petitioners talked about the homosexual activities happening there as “*balletti verdi*.” See petition from Naples to the Police, November 4, 1963, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 579.

articulated, deplored, and made visually intelligible for a long time. In order to “contain” the “epidemic” – that in the early 1960s was perceived as uncontrollable – Italian conservatives attempted to criminalize homosexuality in 1960, 1961 and 1963 but Manco’s and Romano’s proposals were ignored by the Parliament. Homosexuality was for the Italian Catholic ruling class a moral, not a legal issue. Not criminalizing – not even talking about homosexuality – was considered the best way to repress it. As Franco Cerutti wrote in 1960 the “democratic Christian regime” was deeply influenced by the Catholic Church that inspired “not only the ideal directives but also the actual political and moral actions of the nation.”¹⁶¹ A law against homosexuality would have created victims and activists. Silence was the effective political instrument used by Liberals and Fascists first, and Christian Democrats later to exert their moral power over Italian homosexuals. The police continued its actions against female prostitutes and homosexuals, and quietly used the Law 1,423 of 1956 to repatriate and warn men caught hustling on the streets.¹⁶² The Italian government under the Christian Democrats opted for silence even during the *Balletti Verdi* scandal.¹⁶³ Sinking any attempt to criminalize

¹⁶¹ Franco Cerutti, “Ombres et Lumières en Italie,” *Arcadie*, June 1960, no. 78, 331.

¹⁶² See letter from the Prefect of Turin to the Minister of Interior, August 31, 1961, ACS, MI, Gab., 1961-1963, b. 67; note from the Questura of Rome, February 27, 1964 and note from the Questura of Rome, March 3, 1964 (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 580); reports of the Questura of Rome of March, April, June 1964, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 275; letter of the Prefect of Milan to the Ministry of Interior, October 26, 1964, telegram of November 28, 1964 from the Prefect of Milan to the Ministry of Interior, and note of the Prefecture of Milan to the Ministry of Interior, December 4, 1964 (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 579); report for the year 1963 of the Prefect of Turin (May 13, 1964), report for the first 4 months of 1964 of the Prefect of Turin, report of the first 6 months of 1964 of the Prefect of Turin (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 581); letter from the Questura of Mantua to the Minister of Interior, June 27, 1964, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 578; note of the Questura of Rome, June 11, 1964, list of female prostitutes and homosexuals brought to the Commissariati of Rome between September 18 and 30, 1964, list of female prostitutes and homosexuals brought to the Commissariati of Rome between December 15 and 31, 1964 (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 580); communication of the Prefecture of Bologna to the Ministry of Interior, July 13, 1964, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 564; Prefecture of Cremona to the Ministry of Interior, September 8, 1964, Prefecture of Cremona to the Ministry of Interior, September 11, 1964 (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 578); Commissariato of Bari to the Minister of Interior, November 17, 1964, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 577; Prefecture of Massa Carrara to the Minister of Interior, December 16, 1964, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 578; Prefecture of Bergamo to the Ministry of Interior, March 9, 1965, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 577; note of the Questura of Rome, July 18, 1965 and note of the Questura, August 15, 1965 (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 580); letter of the Prefecture of Verona to the Ministry of Interior, April 12, 1965, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 581; letter of the Ministry of Interior to the Prefect of Milan, July 19, 1965, letter of the Prefecture of Milan to the Ministry of Interior, August 6, 1965 (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 579); letter of the Commissario Antonino Manfrè of Pordenone to the magistrate, June 4, 1965, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 581; Prefecture of Campobasso to the Minister of Interior, September 2, 1965, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 577; Prefecture of Pistoia to the Minister of Interior, January 4, 1966, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 580; Prefecture of Varese to the Minister of Interior, February 5, 1966, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 581; report of the Questura of Rome (March 1, 1965-February 28 1966), March 30, 1966, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 580; report of the Questura of Rome to the Minister of Interior, August 15, 1966, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 580; Prefecture of Milano to the Minister of Interior, May 3, 1966, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 579; Questura of Bolzano to the Minister of Interior, July 25, 1966, ACS, MI, DGPS, DPAS, b. 577.

¹⁶³ Gianni Rossi Barilli, *Il movimento gay in Italia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1999), 38.

homosexuality was a way to avoid the victimization of homosexuals, not for Christian empathy, but to cast them into harmless oblivion.

For the Democrazia Cristiana, silence was a powerful dispositif to regulate same-sex behaviors, but tabloids and mainstream media nurtured the discursive “epidemic” making a profit out of it. Media clamor did not produce anti-homosexual discourses only. The proliferation of articles produced knowledge, nurtured “reverse discourses,” and enhanced self-awareness and self-understanding. In the 1950s homosexuals timidly intervened to talk about themselves in periodicals such as *Scienza e sessualità* and *Sesso e libertà*, but in the 1960s homosexuals began to respond directly to their opponents, as the letters sent to *Il Borghese* and *Lo Specchio* showed. Homosexuals, presented as carriers of a contagious condition, tried to communicate with a wider audience, prove their “normalcy,” and rebut accusations of depravity and immorality. Homosexual panic and fears of contamination did not fade. They reached a new peak at the end of the decade. But, as we will see in the next chapter, in 1969 more combative and self-aware homosexuals opposed conservative forces and anti-homosexual press.