



## What's Queer about Europe?: Productive Encounters and Re-enchanting Paradigms

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## Queering European Sexualities Through Italy's Fascist Past

Colonialism, Homosexuality, and Masculinities

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### [–] Abstract and Keywords

The promise of exotic and sensuous experiences lured European men away to the colonies. The colonies were also seen as a space of sexual liberation for people who did not fit European sexual norms. Within Europe, the responses to sexual dissidence have been far more diverse than acknowledged till now. In the case of Italy, the belated colonial experience in Eastern Africa coincided with fascist propaganda that cultivated a model of masculine virility. Yet the cult of the exposed healthy and athletic body harboured some contradictions. The chapter analyses the colonial response to same-sex relationships in the colonies, including the question of racial difference. A consideration of the racial and sexual politics in colonial East Africa will also be linked to contemporary theorizations of sex tourism, before the essay closes with an evaluation of how the above analyses might help reshape Queer Theory and an imaginary of Europe.

**Keywords:** Italy, Colonialism, East Africa, Fascism, Masculinity

In Italy, Ettore Scola's film *A Special Day* (Italy, 1977) left an indelible mark and continues to be acknowledged as a masterpiece that transcends national cultures and cinematographic traditions. Set at the time of Italian fascism during the 1930s, the film takes radical positions on love and politics. Emerging after neorealism, Italian comedy, and the political cinema of the 1970s, it develops a clear narrative through a polished, yet naturalistic, style that combines different Italian traditions.

We could attribute the lasting impact of the film to a number of factors. The lead actors Marcello Mastroianni and Sophia Loren are internationally renowned. Scola is widely respected.<sup>1</sup> Further, the film is set during the crucial historical period of the Nazi arrival in Rome under the Mussolini regime. Last, the film is also a moving love story, which might explain its enduring appeal.<sup>2</sup>

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The film, however, is not a typical love story but stages an unlikely encounter between a housewife and a gay radio reporter, two subjects marginalized by fascism who find solace and mutual understanding in each other. The film promotes the universal values of love and defeat, loneliness (**p.82**) and marginalization. These issues are historically specific but they transcend their local setting.

Crucially for the argument that follows, *A Special Day* revolves around the issue of Italian queerness under a fascist regime. The film begins with a ten-minute collage of archival footage from Hitler's visit to Italy on May 8, 1938. Against this background, we first meet Antonietta (Sophia Loren), an uneducated mother of six children and avid supporter of the fascist regime. She meets her neighbor Gabriele (Marcello Mastroianni) when her husband and children are away attending a fascist parade. He is a well-mannered, educated radio announcer and critical of fascism. He seems to be the only one in the building who does not attend the parade. The fascist rally on the radio and the constant interruptions to their conversation by the meddling concierge serve as the continuous background to the events of the film. We witness the growth of an intimate friendship between Antonietta and Gabriele, whose hurt and sorrow reflect the tortured cultural climate of the time.

Mastroianni and Loren are strikingly cast against type. Mastroianni, the prototype of the Italian Latin lover, plays a marginalized gay man while Loren, the dominant model of Italian femininity and seduction, portrays a frustrated and ideologically confused housewife, whose desire for Gabriele goes unrequited.

The film sets up and then troubles the distinctions between inside/outside, private/public, and the personal/political. The outside world seeps in continually through the radio broadcast of the parade, while the interior is the space of Gabriele and Antonietta's mundane daily activities (such as dialing the phone, tidying the bedrooms, dancing the rumba, making coffee, picking up the laundry, making an omelet, sorting out books, and so on). The film visually creates a gripping sense of the ideological discrepancy between the official and unofficial history of Italy under fascist rule by focusing on women and homosexuals. In its deceptively simple structure, the film shows us more about daily life in fascist Italy than most of the films that have directly addressed the issue. It was released in 1977, when fascism had been consigned to the realm of memory or simply forgotten. The issue of homosexuality was not yet part of mainstream culture, despite the prominence of public figures such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, who was killed under obscure circumstances in 1975.

Mastroianni plays the role of a gay intellectual persecuted by the fascist regime. Like women, the Roma, and disabled people, he becomes a deviant and vulnerable outcast. I suggest that by troubling Italian models of virility (**p.83**) and ideals of masculinity, the film expressed both fascist anxieties vis-à-vis an unacknowledged homosexuality but also an Italian anxiety about its model of masculinity. While Mastroianni regularly plays the archetypal Latin lover, he also portrays an insecure man both obsessed with and overwhelmed by women in Fellini's *8/2* (1963) and *La città delle donne* (1980), an impotent man in Bolognini's *Il bell'Antonio* (1960), and a failed macho in Germi's *Divorce Italian Style* (1962).

In *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema*, Jacqueline Reich argues that "although Mastroianni, as commodity, was often marketed as the quintessential Italian man, his characters betrayed instead a much more conflicting image of Italian masculinity than the category of Latin lover allowed" (xi). Reich's book focuses on Mastroianni's cult status and attempts to answer the following questions: How did he come to be

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perceived as an icon of Italian masculinity given that he so reluctantly performs that role and often tries to eschew it in public interviews? Second, given that most of the characters he played strayed from the ideal male, why was he identified as a Latin lover? Reich argues that "underneath the façade of a presumed hypermasculinity is really the anti-hero, the Italian *inetto* (inept man), a man at odds with and out of place in a rapidly changing political, social, and sexual environment" (xii). Reich provides a historical framework within which Mastroianni's characters represent the instability and self-contradictoriness of gender roles in the postwar period. Mastroianni became the prototype of the Latin lover but according to Reich this had less to do with the character he played than with "the commodification of Italy at an international level" (25). She argues that "what was being consumed in *La Dolce Vita* in 1959 was ... an Italian style, based on the emergence of Italian design, Italian sensuality, Italian fashion on the international scene" (25). As a result of the rise of an international Western consumer culture, the Italian Latin lover became the "‘imagined’ embodiment" of an unrestrained sexuality in opposition to the filmic stereotype of the restrained American (26). The Latin lover mystique surrounding Mastroianni is both a product of an international culture industry (American in particular), and a symptom of the crisis of the representations of masculinity in Italy.<sup>3</sup>

In representing the specific crisis of masculinity and sexual normativity in Italy during the period of fascism, the film provides an insightful departure-point for thinking the relation between queer and Europe. This essay queers Italy, the place of Italy in Europe, and Europe itself by analyzing the legal and social context within which the crisis played out. The link (**p. 84**) between two dimensions is crucial to this queering: the ambivalent politics of homosexual (in)visibility in Italy, and the specificity of Italian colonialism, particularly the racialization of sexual politics.

## Homosexuality and Racial Theories

In *Fascist Virilities*, Barbara Spackman argues that "virility" was the principal node of articulation of Italian fascism. She suggests that "virility is not simply one of the many fascist qualities, but the cult of youth, of duty, and of physical strength and sexual potency that characterize fascism are all inflections of that master term, virility" (xii). She shows how Mussolini presents himself as the "virile" leader who "rapes" the feminized masses. Spackman focuses on the Futurist F. T. Marinetti and on the decadent Gabriele D'Annunzio, often cited as the sources of fascist rhetoric. She explains, that the Marinettian model (characterized by Eve Sedgwick as "homosexual panic" [476]) superimposes national borders onto sexual ones in an effort to stabilize the boundaries between homosociality and homosexuality.

In line with nationalism, virility defines and defends itself against femininity, homosexuality, and Bolshevik internationalism. The D'Annunzio model is, on the other hand, one in which virility is defined and molded through the feminine; its opposite is the "adiposity" of "plutocratic" nations, and its model is the paradoxical female virility of Caterina Sforza, the Renaissance virago. Such mixing and matching, I argue, is inimical to the way in which the discourse of fascism-as-regime collapses gender and sex and biologizes both.

(Spackman xiii)

Spackman links fascism's dream of "Autarchia," or self-sufficiency, to homophobia and xenophobia. Exploring the earlier writing of Marinetti on Italian expansionism, she claims that the crossing of national frontiers both invites and refuses the transgression of boundaries of sexuality. Both homosexuality and colonial ambitions require the presence of other men and

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other races, while fascism abhors and distrusts their proximity. For the first time, the silence around homosexuality was broken when new laws were introduced. In the new criminal code, the Codice Rocco (1931),<sup>4</sup> the concept of race (*stirpe*) was acknowledged for the first time and, after 1938, homosexuality was criminalized for being "damaging to the prestige of race" (Petrosino, "Traditori," 93–94).

The relationship between homosexuality and colonialism becomes broachable through an analysis of racial theories in the 1930s. In 1936, concerned by Italy's slow population growth, the fascist government introduced (**p.85**) a new set of laws to protect the purity of the race. One consequence was that for the first time since Unification in 1870, homosexual practices were treated as potentially criminal acts and new taxes against single men were introduced. Yet in the Codice Rocco, there is no specific law against homosexuality (the proposed article n. 528 criminalizing homosexuality was withdrawn in the final version). Social repression remained indirect, given that specific laws would have created a category which was deemed nonexistent.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, both in Italy and its colonies, the status of homosexuality was contradictory. On the one hand, as Robert Young remarks, same-sex sexual relations had the advantage of not furthering "miscegenation" as long as they remained conveniently invisible, covert, and unmarked, as the Catholic Church wanted them to be. Young argues that "[f]ears of racial amalgamation even led to the promotion of homosexuality in the imperial game [that] was, after all, already an implicitly homo-erotic practice" (26). At the same time, homosexuality was also seen as a degenerative product of miscegenation, the result of inadequately controlled sexuality that in turn weakened the race further (Duncan, *Reading*, 46).

The Italian colonial regime's sexual policy was contradictory: On the one hand, the display of exotic love affairs was encouraged as a sign of Italian virility, while on the other, inter-racial sexual relations were condemned by racial eugenics. During the heyday of Italian colonialism, recruitment campaigns appealed to the virility and superiority of Italian men in order to encourage them to become soldiers, workers, teachers, and entrepreneurs in the far territories of the A.O.I. (Africa Orientale Italiana). Colonial expansion was furthered through a traditional rhetoric of venturing into uncharted and virgin soil supplemented by references to possible encounters with exotic native women. Photographs, advertisements, and literary accounts represented African women as beautiful, docile, and sexually available "Black Venuses." The sexual metaphor connected public and private spheres and worked as effective propaganda tools.

The conquest of women was not only a "metaphor for colonial domination" as Laura Ann Stoler suggests, but also "part of its substance" ("Carnal Knowledge" 54 – 55). At the start of Italian colonial expansion, sexual encounters between white colonizers and local women were considered not only normal but desirable.<sup>6</sup> They facilitated the regulation of sexuality in the colonies, given that white women were absent except for the wives of important officials. In this specific case, the acceptance of inter-racial sexual contact in Italian colonies was not exceptional. Similar practices were also widespread in other European colonies, as Stoler amply documented (**p.86**) in her analysis of the practice of concubinage in the French and Dutch empires. She writes that these customs were considered to have a stabilizing effect on the social order and colonial health as it "kept men in their barracks and bungalows, out of brothels and less inclined to perverse liaisons with one another" ("Making" 40). Thus, the colonies appeared as a space of sexual liberation. But these sexual politics had specific implications for the representation of homosexuality and led to a certain ambivalence. Fascist propaganda's exalting

of the athletic male body could not be clearly distinguished from homo-eroticism, even though homosexuality was condemned.<sup>7</sup>

With the introduction of apartheid laws passed to guarantee the purity of the Italian race, the manifestation of the homophobic / homo-erotic contradiction took a specific form in the Italian colonial context. Rather than replicating the Nazi regime's strict discriminatory legislation, Italy's race laws harbored ambivalence around homosexuality.<sup>8</sup> The fascist race laws of 1938, targeting primarily Jews and blacks, were being drafted when Mussolini decided to create an African Italian Empire. The creation of a colonial empire coincided with the stricter demarcation of the Italian nation in terms of blood. The clear distinction between Italians and the colonized Africans was supposed to confirm that the former belonged to a superior, nobler Aryan race.

## The Italian Paradox: Shadows of Queerness

In "Il Paradosso del Razzismo Fascista verso L'Omossessualità" (The Paradox of Fascist Racism Towards Homosexuality) Giovanni Dall'Orto, one of the few scholars to have worked on the intersection between colonialism and homosexuality, shows how homosexuals were reclassified in 1936 in the wake of the passing of new racial laws (1994; 1999). Before that, they had been termed delinquents. The fascists abandoned this category in 1939 when the war broke out and defined homosexuals again as a group of common delinquents. All the homosexuals who had been banned (confined) as "enemies of the race" were sent back home.<sup>9</sup>

As Dall'Orto points out, one must recognize a group in order persecute it. In the case of anti-Semitism, it is necessary to theorize the existence of race, to argue in favor of a hierarchy between races, and to claim that Jews belong to an inferior racial group. However, in the Italian case, regarding homosexuality, silence and denial are the rule, now as in the past. Homosexuals do not constitute a social group; homosexuality is not a lifestyle or a life choice. It is a deviance, an error, or even a vice (*vizio*). The homosexual (**p.87**) is perceived as engaging in reprehensible acts not explained by his nature but as a form of deviance. To categorize homosexuals as a threat to the "tutela della razza" (defense of the race) was an unsuccessful way of mimicking Nazi Germany, and was transferred to a cultural context that had developed its own specific history of dealing with homosexuality. In short, the contradiction of defining homosexuals as a "race" alongside Jews and Blacks attributed to them a status and social recognition as deviants and criminals.

In the context of Italian colonialism the contradiction took on a racial dimension. The colonial discourse of racial difference intersected with the legal discourse on homosexuality. It undermined the category of homosexuality in racial law making its emergence ambiguous. This decision to categorize homosexuals as "enemies of the race" led to discussion around the exact status of homosexuality as a civil or political crime. Dall'Orto mentions the case of Othello A. who ran a restaurant in Eritrea and was condemned on October 31, 1938 for "undermining the prestige of the race by passively abandoning himself during homosexual acts with a native of Italian Oriental Africa. The problem was not so much the interracial contact per se but the fact that the white man had taken on the passive role in his sexual liaisons, which in Mediterranean masculinist culture corresponds to the role of the dominated" (Dall'Orto, "Il paradosso," 516-17, my translation).<sup>10</sup> This case made the category of the homosexual male legally visible, contradicting the cultural discourse of Mediterranean masculinity. In 1931, Dall'Orto argues, the legislator had rejected the introduction of anti-homosexual laws because it would have acknowledged the existence of homosexual acts among Italian men, contradicting the model of

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excessive virility attributed to them. That tradition explains why the new law was so rarely invoked: Between 1936 and 1939 only ninety men were sentenced to internal exile.

For seventy years Italians have repeated that homosexuality was a vice typical of English and German people, and now, fascism itself had to admit the inadmissible, that homosexuality existed *even* in Italy. It is therefore no surprise that the race laws did not bring homosexuality within their purview: the extension of the “defence of the race” policy to homosexuals took place through administrative measures, and not through specific laws as was the case of Nazi Germany. In practice what happened was that 80 homosexuals were sentenced to “political exile” instead of “common crime exile.” That was all.

(Dall'Orto, “Il paradosso,” 518, my translation)<sup>11</sup>

**(p.88)** This is not to say that homophobia did not exist: many instances of anti-gay violence did take place but no trace can be found in the official archives, and the press deemed these incidents unworthy of publicity, hence the absence of historical research on this topic.

German fascism was in conflict with its Italian variant because a catholic-Mediterranean mentality preferred one form of discrimination over another. For the Nazis, Jews, non-Aryans, gypsies, people of African descent, homosexuals, and disabled people were considered a potential source of degeneracy. According to Dall'Orto, Italy did not adhere to that world view. He concludes that the refusal to include homosexuals in racial laws was not dictated by a more enlightened vision but by the presence of a social form of repression that was so subterraneous and implicit that it made explicit legal eradication of homosexuality superfluous. Dall'Orto concludes that

[d]ue to the persistence of this mentality after the fall of fascism, homosexuality in Italy remains within the realm of whispers, euphemisms, circumlocutions, and masks: a world that is there but does not exist, because it is not allowed to surface in reality.

(Dall'Orto, “Il paradosso,” 528, my translation)<sup>12</sup>

These conclusions tend to support the commonly held view that Italian colonialism and Italian homosexuality were different from the rest of Europe, Northern Europe in particular. First, Italy's colonial enterprise started when most of the other European empires were collapsing. Further, Italian colonialism was the effect of an unplanned solution to internal economic issues (an *imperialism straccione* [tramp colonialism]). It was primarily southern Italians that escaped poverty and social unrest by enrolling in the military campaigns in Africa unaware of what they were signing up for. Last, Italian colonialism was perceived as disorganized because it lacked a structured ideology of superiority (hence the myth of Italiani Brava Gente [the nice Italians]). For example, the relative proximity in race and class between the Italians in Africa (originating primarily from Southern Italy)<sup>13</sup> and the relatively light-skinned people of Eastern Africa, where a mix of races and religions coexisted with each other, could not sustain a clear dichotomy between colonizer and colonized. This situation of proximity was also theorized by anthropologists such as Giuseppe Sergi, who claimed that Italians were part of a Mediterranean rather than Aryan race (which he considered to be of Barbarian descent) and therefore closer to Africa (1901 [1895]). Sergi controversially placed Ethiopians and Mediterraneans within the same stock (*stirpe*). According to him, the Mediterranean **(p.89)** race, the “greatest race in the world,” was responsible for the great civilizations of ancient times, including those of Egypt, Carthage, Greece, and Rome. They were quite distinct from the peoples of Northern Europe.

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These theories were developed in opposition to Nordicism, the claim that the Nordic race was of pure Aryan stock and naturally superior to other Europeans. The common origin implied the absence of repulsion between the peoples of the two areas and a desire for union. That view was censored and denied with the rise of Italian fascism. Attempts were made to establish a legal opposition between the colonizer and the colonized through a racial model of superiority that penalized forms of *madamismo* and *meticcianto* (interracial relationships).<sup>14</sup> But as had already happened with anti-homosexuality laws, Dall'Orto explains, very few Italians in the colonies felt threatened by the new legislation and instances of concubinage, and interracial relationships continued, or possibly increased given the larger number of Italian soldiers deployed in Africa during the war against Ethiopia.

It could be argued, therefore, that both colonialism and sexual politics around homosexuality in Italy form parts of a disorganized regime. Repression, in other words, remained amorphous and unarticulated, rather than explicit through the state and new legislation or administrative procedures.

Further, Italian homosexuality occupies an anomalous place in the European imaginary. The myth of the Mediterranean as the place of origin of the homoerotic ideal of masculinity, as Robert Aldrich (1993) argues, contrasts with the views of the Catholic Church for whom homosexuality is a vice to eradicate.<sup>15</sup> The latter tend toward the suppression of discussions on homosexuality in the public sphere while arguing for its elimination in private through silence, denial, and (non-legal) moral correction.

## Conclusion

Italy occupies a queer place within Europe because of the specific intersection between homosexuality and colonialism. The combination of race laws and the (in)visibility of homosexuality both repeats and undermines the received understanding of the place of Italy within a European imaginary. Italian homosexuality is inherently different from northern European constructs of male same-sex desire as Derek Duncan argues (2006). Given that Italy cannot boast figures such as André Gide and Oscar Wilde, Duncan argues, homosexuality has always been expressed through masking, strategic silences, and productive reticence.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the emergence (**p.90**) of a gay and lesbian culture has been slower and more contradictory than elsewhere. This argument, however, runs the risk of perpetuating the Northern European temptation to view minoritized Italy in its alterity. Two commonplaces persist: First, Italy is behind in the cultural process of modernization and in acknowledging unpalatable histories (such as colonialism), contemporary issues (such as xenophobia), and forms of social alterity (such as homosexuality); second, homosexuality has a curious form of visibility in Italian culture since it is neither acknowledged openly, nor denied officially. Given the climate of silent repression and persecution, the gay rights movement is hindered because power in Italy operates through socially diffuse rather than explicitly legal mechanisms. Italian queerness, one could argue, does not connote the excluded other; rather, queerness skews the normativity of gender and racial hierarchies. Precisely for this reason, Italy's queer position within Europe makes the transfer of primarily United States-based queer theory (for example, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Teresa de Lauretis) to the European context problematic. Europe itself is skewed as an object of queer theoretical inquiry.

## Notes:

(1) . His films include *C'eravamo tanto amati* (*We All Loved Each Other*, 1974) a dramatic comedy on friendship and love and the challenges of postwar Italy, and *Brutti sporchi e cattivi* (*Ugly, Dirty and the Bad*, 1976), a comedy about everyday poverty.

(2) . The domestic sphere occupies the major portion of the film except for the opening scenes that focus on the events.

(3) . See also Gundel (1996; 2002).

(4) . Alfredo Rocco's new legal code came into force in 1931. It strengthened the powers of the prosecution while curtailing individual rights in the name of state security. It also increased the number of offenses punishable by death. The Codice Rocco was amended several times but remained within the Italian legal system until the 1970s. See Finaldi (58). Although the criminalization of homosexuals did not materialize, gays were sent into internal exile and discriminated against. The exposure of homosexuals was used as blackmail by the secret police against certain men in power, including Prince Umberto II and Augusto Turati, former secretary of the Fascist Party.

(5) . For further details, see "La rispettabilità nel codice Rocco" (The Respectability of Code Rocco), <http://www.museodelleintolleranze.it> (accessed on December 8, 2009).

(6) . With the outbreak of World War II, Italy lost its colonial territories to the British (1941) through military defeat and diplomatic sanctions, rather than nationalist revolts by colonized people. This has repercussions on how Italian colonial history has been written and remembered. In Italy, both colonialism's considerable violence and the shame of its defeat by Britain were repressed. See Rochat (1973), del Boca (1976–86), Labanca (2002), Ben Ghiat and Fuller (2005), and Ponzanesi (2004).

(7) . Mussolini built not only the Foro Mussolini sport complex in Rome, to celebrate physical fitness and his obsession with "mens sana in corpore sano," but also the Stadio dei Marmi, adorned with sixty enormous classically inspired statues of male athletes. The statues were paid for by Italy's provinces and exemplified the fascist adoration of youth and of the male form. Some critics have pointed out the ostentatious display of masculinity that the statues symbolized. They were supposed to be admired not only by fascist girls, but also by certain sort of fascist men (see Cresti 1986). On the other hand, some perceptions claimed these statues had nothing homoerotic about them (Mosse).

(8) . Italy had always been ambiguous in its embracing of the Nazi model. On the one hand, fascist propaganda worked to create "la fabbrica del consenso" (the consensus factory) by depicting Rome as part of the great Aryan Empire; on the other hand, Mussolini's fascist discourse relied on invocations of the great Roman Empire, which barbaric invasions from the North had weakened.

(9) . A historical account of homosexuals sent to the *confino* can be found in the unique work of Dall'Orto, "Per il bene della razza al confino il pederasta," in *Babilonia* (1986, 14–17). Dall'Orto has also conducted an interview with an ex-confined homosexual: "Ci furono dei 'femmenella' che piangevano quando venimmo via dale Tremiti!" ("Ci furono," 26–28). These writings can also be found in "La Gaya Scienza," Dall'orto's personal website on homosexuality and culture, <http://>

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www.giovannidallorto.com (accessed March 2010). Dall'Orto mentions Franco Goretti's more comprehensive study on the subject (Goretti).

(10) . “Menomazione al prestigio della razza, essendosi abbandonato passivamente ad atti di pederastia con indigeno dell’Africa Orientale Italiana.’ In questo caso si noti come il problema non fosse tanto il contatto interrazziale in sé, né l’omosessualità in quanto tale, ma il fatto che il bianco avesse permesso che il ruolo ‘attivo,’ che nella cultura maschilista mediterranea è il ruolo del ‘dominante,’ fosse ricoperto da un ‘dominato.’”

(11) . Dall'Orto's argument in the original Italian reads:

Per settant'anni gli italiani avevano ripetuto che l’omosessualità era un vizio tipico da inglesi e da tedeschi, e ora proprio il fascismo avrebbe dovuto confessare l’inconfessabile, e cioè che l’omosessualità esisteva *perfino* in Italia? Non stupisce insomma che le leggi razziali italiane non abbiano portato con sé nessuna legge anti-omosessuale: l'estensione della politica di ‘difesa della razza’ agli omosessuali a venne con misure amministrative, e non per mezzo di leggi *ad hoc* come nella Germania nazista. In pratica ciò che avvenne fu classificare come ‘confinati politici’ anzichè come ‘confinati comuni’ un’ottantina di omosessuali, o poco più. Tutto qui.

(12) . Dall'Orto's conclusion in the original Italian reads: “Grazie a questo atteggiamento, che non è stato rinnegato con la caduta del fascismo, l’omosessualità è diventata, in Italia, il regno del non-detto, dei sussurri, degli eufemismi, dei giri di parole, dei volti nascosti: un mondo che c’è però non esiste, perché non ha diritto ad affiorare alla realtà.”

(13) . John Dickie analyzes the stereotypical representation of the South in the post-Unification period (1999). The Mezzogiorno was widely seen as barbaric, violent, and irrational, an “Africa” on the European continent, while paradoxically integrated into the imaginary of the emerging nation.

(14) . *Madamato* or *madamismo* was the Italian term for the consorting of Italian men with local women through which Eritrean women effectively considered themselves married while there were no legal implications for their Italian counterparts. See Ponzanesi (2007).

(15) . Aldrich shows that the Mediterranean as a place of the manifestation of the homoerotic ideal of masculine beauty and virility is a recurring motif in gay literature and art between the 1750s and the 1950s. Aldrich's examples include over 40 writers such as Thomas Mann, Lord Byron, Johann Winckelmann, and E. M. Forster. During this period, many homosexual writers left their Northern European homes to live in the Mediterranean, especially Italy. This fantasy of a gay-friendly Mediterranean lost its currency in the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of the gay rights movement in Northern Europe.

(16) . Duncan provides a novel reading of the relationship between homosexuality, nationality, and class within Europe. He shows that

Italy attracts the upper-middle class aesthete, but it also draws aspiring rent boys from North Africa and the Balkan States convinced that Italian identity is imbricated in complex economics of class, national difference, and cultural capital. It is not just the case, however, that foreigners have got the wrong end of the stick. Northern Italian men project similar fantasies onto the South. All Southern Italian men, it is sometimes asserted, have sex with each other although none of them is gay ... a kind of compensatory activity

because the general backwardness of the South makes unmarried women sexually unavailable. The idea of the South as a pastoral haven of unfettered homoeroticism roots the region in a state of archaic underdevelopment. Modern or Northern visions of homosexuality ... both long for and repress this sense of difference that might be termed racial as much as sexual for the object of desire is determined more by geography than gender. This example suggests that on a discursive level at least, homosexuality amongst Italians is not a transparent category. (*Reading 4*)

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