ARTICLE

Anti-Gay, Sexist, Racist: Backwards Italy in British News Narratives

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The Berlusconi years have witnessed Italy placed in the uncomfortable spotlight of the international media; however, now that Berlusconi's power has waned, a timely reflection is due on the extent to which the vestiges of the former Premier's cultural have coloured images of Italy in British news discourse. How far do cultural myths influence the selection, narration and reception of Italian news reported in British newspapers? Do Berlusconi's verbal gaffes reverberate in the construal of newsworthiness and evaluative parameters, reinforcing and perpetuating stereotypes of Italians as a whole? These are the key issues this contribution attempts to address. Stemming from a broader research project on the representation of Berlusconi's non politically correct language in the British press, this study examines the representation of certain aspects of Italian culture that have been the focus of British news narratives in recent years. Four recurring themes are explored and discussed: homophobia, racism, sexism and fascism. Implementing a critical discourse analysis approach, news texts retrieved from a cross-section of British newspapers reporting on Italian affairs are examined. The analysis then focuses on the invisibility of translation in reconstructing discursive events in news narratives across cultural and linguistic barriers, and suggests that decisions taken in translation solutions can reproduce and reinforce myths or stereotypes.

> Ci vorranno anni per ricostruire un 'imagine sobria' del nostro paese.
> [It will take years to rebuild a 'sober image' of our country.]
> Rizzo and Stella 2012: 12

> Italy's banana republic. Squires 2014

1.1 Introduction

This study engages with British news discourse and its representation of significant social debates that emerged in Italy towards the end of Silvio Berlusconi's political dominance. Starting from Tunstall's (1996: 341) premise that 'a nation's foreign news reflects its prejudices and sentiments', this article asks to what extent current British news narratives reproduce and coincide with established cultural stereotypes of Italianness. The 'Ventennio Berlusconiano' has drawn to a close (Fella and Ruzza 2013: 38–52), but it is argued here that Berlusconi's cultural hegemony (Albertazzi and Rothenberg 2009; Ginsborg 2005; Shin and

Agnew 2008) continues to permeate images of Italy portrayed in the British press. Adopting a critical discourse analysis approach, a small dataset constructed from the year 2013–14 explores three narrative themes: 'Anti-gay Italy', 'Sexist Italy' and 'Racist Italy'. Crucial to the analysis is the role of translation in representing the discursive events discussed. The translational act is pivotal to conveying meaning across linguistic and cultural divides, yet in news media translation it is often obscured; embedded translated utterances are rarely acknowledged as such (Schäffner 2004; Orengo 2005). The analyses presented here focus on the manipulations in translation and the framing techniques adopted in order to understand the ways in which the texts construe meaning (Bednarek and Caple 2012). The study is divided into two parts: the first section outlines the methodological framework sustaining the analysis. The normativity of the British perspective in foreign news reporting is briefly discussed, while the notion of objectivity in news reporting and the use of translation in news texts are viewed in the context of news narratives on Italy. The various interpretations of 'Berlusconismo' in relation to cultural hegemony are outlined, followed by the rationales for selecting the themes anti-gay, sexist and racist. The second part of the contribution is dedicated to the analysis of the three datasets, and concludes with some closing observations and remarks.

1.1.1 A syncretism of methods

The research presented here is part of a broader project on the role of translation in the representation of Berlusconi's politically incorrect language in the British press (see also Filmer 2014, 2016). Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk 2001), in particular its application to translation studies (Schäffner 2004) and journalism studies (van Dijk 2009; Conboy 2010), forms the methodological hub of the project. In the specific context of online news, Kress's (2010: 44) multimodal approach to CDA provides a further lens through which to view the meaning-making process. For Kress, meaning is socially constructed, whereby 'communicative acts entail the "engagement" of both the "rhetor" and the "interpreter" […] each bring[ing] their cultural/semiotic resources and values'. From this perspective, news is construed through a reciprocal communicative act between newspaper audience and news producer. The role of translation in conveying news across lingua-cultural boundaries is vital. An analysis of what Munday (2012: 4) refers to as 'critical points' in translational decision-making where culture-bound issues come into play is especially useful in the context of news translation. He explains:

> The way in which [these] critical points are resolved produces a specific representation of the foreign that reflects an ideological point of view and evaluative reading and seeks to guide the response to international events.

The time-frame for this study was set as 2013–14 in order to locate the echoes of what has often been referred to as Berlusconi's cultural dominance. This was a significant year for Italy, both politically and socially. It was the year in which Berlusconi attempted a comeback to politics, reforming his political party, Forza Italia. Despite his resignation in November 2011 due to inefficient handling of the European sovereign debt crisis and the scandals surrounding his private life, Berlusconi re-emerged in the elections of 24–25 February 2013 as the second largest political force in Italy. The 'gap year' had nevertheless given Italy some time to pause and reflect on the social and cultural legacy of the Berlusconi era. For these reasons, the British and indeed the world's press were attentive to any 'news' regarding the Italian peninsula, in particular regarding cultural and social debates peripheral to, but not

disconnected from, Italian political discourse. The articles analysed were sourced from British newspaper websites and on the newspaper database *Nexus UK*. Through keyword searches and associations, such as 'Italy+gay', 'Italy+sexist', 'Italy+racist', the dataset was created, converging on the three central themes around which this research pivots (see section 1.5 for rationale). The dataset was then manually refined to include a variety of article genres (news reports, opinion pieces and editorials) from news products with different functions and diverse ideological standpoints, in order to carry out a sample comparative synchronic analysis that offers a 'developed account of alternatives' (Carvalho 2008: 161–77). From the category of quality papers, texts were sourced from the websites of the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Times*. More mainstream newspapers are represented by *Daily Mail*, *The Mirror*, *The Sun* and *Daily Star*. In the following section, the theoretical framework sustaining the analysis is briefly outlined, relating to news, national image and communication across cultures.

1.2 Cultural translation and national image in news production

Lane-Mercier (1997: 46) affirms that mediating between cultures is less about linguistic difference in itself than the social and cultural *representation* of the Other that linguistic difference inevitably entails. In the context of news discourse, Conboy (2006: 108) argues that 'British culture is rooted in a history which is indelibly marked with the associations of empire and cultural presumptions of superiority'. For him, therefore, the normativity of the British perspective is central to the negative representation of the ethnic and geographical outsider in the popular press. Kelly (1998: 6), however, suggests that these presumptions are often unconscious. She sustains that 'British journalists have been socialized in the same institutions as their readers, and hence share in general the consensual beliefs of their society' (Kelly 1998: 6). Van Doorslaer (2012: 1057) contends that preconceived national stereotypes invariably influence the selection and production of foreign news, while Bednarek and Caple (2011: 43) posit that news values chime with cultural stereotypes in order to coincide with audience expectations. Furthermore, Hampton (2008: 477) claims that 'objectivity' in news reporting was merely assumed in the British context in the twentieth century: 'Among print journalists, such ideals as independence, fair play and non-intervention by the state were far more compelling than objectivity'. Now into the twenty-first century, it is posited here, in accordance with Sambrook (2012), that objectivity remains a secondary consideration with some forms of foreign news journalism. News as entertainment, or 'infotainment', is an increasingly significant factor when evaluating the newsworthiness of (discursive) events from overseas (see Filmer 2014, 2016). Leerssen's (2000, 2007) research on imagology – that is, the study of prejudices, stereotypes and clichés on national image – reveals that 'old [national] images are not abrogated by new developments […]. They remain subliminally present in the social discourse and can always be reactivated should the occasion arise' (Leerssen 2000: 278). In the case of Italy, such an occasion, or rather, figure, might be construed in the persona of Silvio Berlusconi. The next section turns to the various debates surrounding the socio-cultural phenomenon known as 'Berlusconismo', and the ways in which it has impacted on the current image of Italy as reflected in British news narratives.

1.3 Berlusconi, Berlusconismo and cultural hegemony

The term 'Berlusconismo' has been widely used in Italian political and journalistic discourse to denote the apparently omnipresent political, societal and cultural influence of Silvio Berlusconi. While the wealth of literature on the former premier spans the humanities and social sciences, paradoxically, the socio-cultural impact of Silvio Berlusconi's discourse

has met with an 'imbarazzato silenzio' [embarrassed silence] (Dei 2011: 472) from Italian researchers of Italian cultural studies.[1] Their tardive response to what has arguably been called an 'anthropological revolution' (Albertazzi and Rothenberg 2009: 4) and a 'cultural hegemony' (Ginsborg 2005; Stille 2006) is, according to Dei (2011: 472), due to 'the fear of simply repeating what has already been said on the subject'. The disengagement of Italy's cultural studies scholars is fiercely counterbalanced by some of their UK-based colleagues, who state categorically (Albertazzi *et al.* 2009: 2) that 'Berlusconi's persona, ideology and style, in one word, Berlusconismo, are now so deeply rooted in Italian society that they might well outlast his departure from the political scene'. The phenomenon of Berlusconismo that has apparently overwhelmed Italy for the last thirty years can be viewed from different perspectives. Politically, Orsina (2013: 126) defines Berlusconismo as: 'un'emulsione di populismo e liberalismo' [a combination of populism and liberalism]. According to Ginsborg and Asquer (2011: v–xxviii), Berlusconi has orchestrated a system of power sustained by a series of elements that have created a cultural hegemony. Crucial to this power is the cultural discourse that characterises Berlusconi's control of the media, in particular the conceptions of gender that have informed the former premier's actions and reflections. Ultimately, Dei (2011: 472) takes up his own challenge and finds a cultural studies approach to defining Berlusconismo that goes beyond Berlusconi's monopoly of the media and patrimonialist tendencies.[2] Dei lists the ideological tendencies that underpin Berlusconi's so-called cultural hegemony, identifying them thus: 'anticomunista, sessista e omofobica, con toni forti di revisionismo storico' [anti-communist, sexist, and homophobic with a strong undertones of historical revisionism].

Finally, the political scientist Pasquino (2011) predicts that 'Berlusconismo will outlive its founder and continue to linger in the attitudes and behaviours of Italian society. *It will survive because millions of Italians hold the basic beliefs of berlusconismo*' (my emphasis). Therefore, it could be assumed that Berlusconi, his persona, his actions and his words are a zeitgeist of the culture with which they are imbued and that he has actively created. The next section delves into the hypothetical socio-historical origins of Berlusconismo within the concept of 'amoral familism'.

1.4 Backwards Italy in the British press: Berlusconi's legacy?

In attempting to explain the popular consent that Berlusconi has maintained until fairly recently, Pasquino (2011) borrows from political scientist Edward Banfield's theory of 'amoral familism'. Banfield views amoral familism as the root of societal backwardness. He defines it as 'the inability […] to act together for the common good, or indeed for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family' (1958: 10). By contrast, what singles out a progressive society is 'the advancement of community welfare' (18). In late modernity, 'community welfare' could be construed as the extent to which a community engages with socio-political and cultural issues: civil and human rights, education and a sense of civic duty in order to improve the lives of community members. Encouraging inclusion through policies against ethnic discrimination and homophobia, promoting accessibility and gender equality: these are all indicators of a healthy, caring social environment. A more enlightened socio-political outlook delineates a more evolved society, tending towards a liberal-socialist

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[1] Here are just a few relevant to this study: Agnew 2011; Agnew and Shin 2008; Andrews 2005; Fabbrini 2013; Fella and Ruzza 2013; Gibelli 2010; Ginsborg 2005; Ginsborg and Asquer 2011; Gundle 1997, 2010; Mazzoleni 2004; Orsina 2013; Pasquino 2007, 2011; Santomassimo 2011.

[2] A detailed account of Berlusconi's media empire is beyond the scope of this study, but for an overview see Ginsborg 2004; Stille 2006.

ideology. It is for these reasons that the analysis that follows focuses on themes related to cultural otherness, gender and homosexuality, discussions used to delineate a 'backward'-thinking society compared to an enlightened one. The following section provides a more detailed rationale.

1.5 Anti-gay, racist, sexist: why these themes?

The term 'gaffe' is commonly used in journalistic discourse and has been a constant collocate for Berlusconi. A simple Google search for 'Berlusconi+gaffe' produces about 379,000 results in 0.55 seconds. 'Sexist gaffe' (1,360,000 results in 0.62 seconds), 'racist gaffe' (323,000 results in 0.66 seconds) and 'anti-gay gaffe' (about 149,000 results in 0.56 seconds) are equally frequent collocations. The lexeme, however, rather undermines the deeper meaning of the so-called slips of the tongue that clash with current ideas of the politically correct.[3] Berlusconi's contribution to the debate on acceptability in public discourse is considerable; however, for our purposes here, just a few examples suffice. The soundbites below provide the matrix for the news narratives that will subsequently be discussed:

1. Anti-gay: 'Meglio essere appassionati di belle ragazze che gay' (ANSA, 2 November 2010). This was most frequently translated in British newspapers as 'My passion for women is better than being gay', for example in *The Telegraph* (Squires, 2 November 2010). The utterance was referred to in news narratives as a 'homosexual slur' (Squires, 2 November 2010). An extremely 'free' translation found in *The Australian* read: '"At least I'm not gay", Berlusconi says in defence of passion for beautiful women' (3 November 2010).

2. Sexist: Berlusconi's ironic suggestion for a new name for his political party, 'Forza Gnocca' (*La Repubblica*, 7 October 2011). Most frequently and somewhat misleadingly translated as 'Go Pussy' in the Anglophone media (see Filmer 2016), the expression could be conceived as the verbal exteriorising of Berlusconi's vision of women.

3. Racist: Berlusconi's 'compliment' to Obama: 'Bello, alto, e anche abbronzato' [handsome, tall, and suntanned, too] (*La Repubblica*, 6 November 2008) provoked an international 'race row'. Berlusconi's 'apparently racist remark' (*MailOnline*, 7 November 2009) caused universal criticism from the world's press. He was denounced as a racist and derided for his lack of aplomb. Only 'imbeciles' would interpret his comments as derogatory, he protested (ANSA, 8 November 2008).

The **Table 1** below shows the results of keyword searches carried out on the newspaper database Nexis UK to discover which news events and which news narratives on Italy within the three themes were given most prominence in the British press in the year 2013. This was then compared with data for 1994, the year in which Berlusconi entered the political arena, to give us some idea of the evolution of these themes in the news media during Berlusconi's Ventennio.

The results might appear surprising at first glance. In the light of the sex scandals that embroiled Berlusconi towards the end of his last term as prime minister, more articles on 'sexist Italy' might have been expected. However, the 'bunga bunga' years – as they were later labelled in the Italian press – were those between 2008 and 2011; thus, we could interpret the relative silence in 2013 as simply a calming of the waters. What is noteworthy is the

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[3] Space constraints prohibit a more comprehensive discussion on current debates on linguistic political correctness; see Cameron (1995); Hughes (1993); Hughes (2010) for an overview.

Table 1: Comparison of number of news articles on the three narratives on Italy in 1994 and 2013 in UK national press. Source: Nexis UK newspaper database.

Associations with Italy	1994−5	2013−14
Anti-Gay (homophobic)	1	20
Sexist	0	9
Racist	0	187

changing tune of narratives on the theme of women; the predominant Italian news story on the theme of sexism during 2013, as we shall see, was the decision of the RAI (Italy's national public broadcasting company) to eliminate Miss Italia from its schedule. Similarly, the increase in news narratives on homophobia seen in comparing 1994 to 2013 might also be attributed to a general shift in socio-cultural awareness on the part of the receiving culture, in other words, the United Kingdom (UK), and also the source culture, Italy, on issues regarding social equality. Returning to our theme of 'backwardness' and how this is evaluated in the twenty-first century, it is worth pointing out that southern Italy, often portrayed in news discourse as the most 'backward', 'traditional' and 'Catholic' region of the peninsula, has had two left-wing gay regional governors (Niki Ventola in Puglia and Rosario Crocetta in Sicily) in the past. However, the data reveal that news narratives on racism were by far the most common theme, reflecting the socio-political transitions taking place on the peninsula related to immigration.

Having outlined the theoretical, methodological and socio-historical framework, the following sections discuss the three case studies, 'Anti-gay Italy', 'Sexist Italy' and 'Racist Italy'. The first of the themes, 'Anti-gay Italy', focuses on the news narratives constructed around some comments made by Guido Barilla, chairman of Barilla Pasta, during a radio interview.

2.1 Anti-Gay Italy – Boycott Barilla!

This section examines British newspaper coverage and representation of a discursive event involving Guido Barilla and some of his observations as to why he would not use gay couples in Barilla advertising. On a live radio chat show (*La zanzara*, 25 September 2013), the chairman of the world's bestselling pasta brand was asked if he would ever feature a gay family in the company's advertising campaigns. Barilla replied:

> Noi abbiamo una cultura vagamente differente. Per noi il concetto di famiglia sacrale rimane uno dei valori fondamentali dell'azienda. La salute, il concetto di famiglia […]. No, non faremmo uno spot gay perché la nostra è una famiglia tradizionale.
>
> [We have a slightly different viewpoint. For us the concept of sacred family remains one of the fundamental values of the company; well-being, and the concept of family […]. No, we wouldn't do a gay ad because ours is a traditional family.]

When pressed to give an opinion on gay marriage and adoption by homosexuals, he replied that he was in favour of gay marriage but against gay couples adopting. International news outlets and social networks quickly picked up Barilla's comments; LGBT activists in Italy and

in the United States roundly condemned him as homophobic and proposed boycotting the Barilla brand.[4]

Prior to engaging in a debate on anti-gay utterances, it would be useful to establish what exactly constitutes 'homophobic language'. McCormack (2013: 93) argues that there are two requisite features; firstly, that something is said with 'pernicious intent', that is meant to offend or 'degrade or marginalise a person or behaviour', and, secondly, that what is said has 'a negative social effect' that manifests itself in 'bullying, emotional trauma, social isolation'. Having clarified this term, we now move on to situating the analysis.

2.1.2 Translation effects

The British press took great interest in the story. Articles on the discursive event and its aftermath appeared in online versions of nearly all the national papers, indicating its considerable newsworthiness. The *Independent* (26 September 2013), the *Guardian* (27 September 2013), the *Observer* (29 September 2013), and *The Telegraph* (5 November 2013), the middle-market *MailOnline* (26 September 2013), and two tabloids: the *Daily Star* (27 September 2013) and the *Mirror Online* (27 September 2013) all reported on the event.

The headline in the *MailOnline* begins with a direct quote: '"If gays don't like it, they can choose another pasta": Barilla faces global boycott after chairman says brand would never feature a homosexual family in its ads'. As mentioned earlier (see section 1.1), the translational act in news texts is rarely explicit; the fact that Barilla did not say these actual words and that someone has relayed their meaning from Italian into English is not at all evident. It could be argued that newspaper convention allows that quotation marks appear around paraphrased rather than actual citations in headlines. The tradition, however, does not justify the practice. It is misleading for the reader, and, furthermore, where translated text is concerned, the original utterance becomes further obscured.

The implicature of the target text rendering 'If they don't like it, they can choose another pasta' diverges from the grammatical mood of the source language text, thus modifying the speaker's intentionality. The Italian source text implies hypothesis rather than future fact: 'Se gli piace la nostra pasta, la nostra comunicazione, la mangiano. Se non gli piace quello che diciamo, faranno al meno di mangiarla e ne mangeranno un'altra. Ma uno non può piacere sempre a tutti' [if they like our pasta, our advertising, they'll eat it. If they don't like what we say, they'll avoid eating it and they'll eat another. You can't please everyone all the time]. The source text utterance is less categorical and arguably less offensive than the target language rendering. Barilla is then quoted in the body article, through the filter of translation, as saying 'I would never do a commercial with a homosexual family, not for lack of respect, but because *I* don't think *we* are like *them*' (my emphasis). Quoted thus, it appears that Barilla states plainly that 'we' are different to 'them'. *The Mirror* also uses the 'us versus them' (van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 1995; Kelly 1998) dialectics in translating Barilla: 'I would never do a commercial with a homosexual family, not for lack of respect but because *we* don't agree with *them*' (my emphasis). Both renderings distort what Barilla actually said: 'perché non la *penso* come loro. Penso che la famiglia a cui ci rivolgiamo noi è la famiglia classica […] in cui la donna ha un ruolo fondamentale' [Because I don't *think of* [the family] in the same way as they do. I think the family that we address is a classic family … in which women play a fundamental role]. In the *Guardian* (Davies 2013), the same quotation is

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[4] For a review of the international press coverage of the discursive event, see *Il Giornalettismo* http://www.giornalettismo.com/archives/1128765/il-boicottaggio-a-barilla-fa-il-giro-del-mondo/.

rendered as 'I don't see things like they do and I think the family that we speak to is a classic family'; thus, it is closer to the pragmatic meaning of the source text. The *Guardian*'s headline is also less inflammatory, removing the 'anti-gay' accusations and employing a transitivity shift: 'Pasta firm Barilla boycotted over "classic family" remarks'. Nevertheless, Lizzy Davies's article frames the news item within a context of legislation on gay rights in which Italy is described as 'lagging behind' other European countries, noting that 'far from moving towards the legislation of gay marriage, Italy still does not recognise same-sex unions'.[5] The *Observer*'s (McVeigh 2013) headline, 'Pasta-maker in hot water as rival posts pro-gay imagery on social media', reflects the newspaper's ironic attitude. Barilla's most potentially offensive comment is conveyed through reformulation and indirect speech, thus modulating the impact: 'he said he would only portray the "classic family" in his adverts, not a gay family, and if people objected to that, they should feel free to eat a different brand of pasta'. In contrast, the ideologically loaded adjectives 'homophobic' and 'anti-gay', appear in the tabloid headlines, construing the news value of negativity (Bednarek and Caple 2011: 42). The *Daily Star*'s (Spillett, 27 September 2013) headline, 'Homophobic Barilla pasta boss in ad ban on gays', places the key descriptor 'homophobic' in a thematic position, denoting Barilla himself. *The Mirror*'s (Bond, 27 September 2013) more informal 'Anti-gay' is adjectival and refers to the comments rather than the individual through transitivity: 'Barilla pasta boycotted over anti-gay remarks by chairman who said he would never use gay family in adverts'.

Reuters news agency, a source for all major British news outlets, published 'Italian pasta baron's anti-gay comment prompts boycott call' on 26 September, a day before some of the articles cited here. In fact, the Reuters article appears practically verbatim in stretches used in *The Star* and *The Mirror*. The offending phrase is rendered: 'If gays "like our pasta and our advertising, they'll eat our pasta, if they don't like it then they will not eat it and they will eat another brand", he said'. The same utterance is rendered and embedded thus by Michael Day of *The Independent*:

> Guido Barilla, whose firm has almost half the Italian pasta market and a quarter of that in the US, told Italy's *La zanzara* radio show last night: 'I would never do an advert with a homosexual family … *if the gays don't like it they can go and eat another brand*'.

Comparing source and target text, Day's translation omits the central part of Barilla's statement, thus appearing more brusque and dismissive than the source language text – an editing mechanism used to adapt the discourse of a source to the ideological line of the journalist or the newspaper. The rendering also reveals a considerable translational shift in attitude: 'If the gays don't like it they can go and eat another brand' sounds distinctly aggressive. In the same article, evaluative adjectives are used to introduce the translated quotes, thus framing expectation and guiding audience interpretation: 'But then the pasta magnate upped the ante by *attacking* gay adoption. "I have no respect for adoption by gay families because this concerns a person who is not able to choose," he said'. Once again, by selecting and editing translated information, the journalist is able to slant the narrative to his aims.

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[5] Since the article was published, new legislative proposals have been presented in parliament by Forza Italia senator Giancarlo Galan on civil rights, including the introduction and ratification of civil unions between people of the same sex. At the time of completing this article, mayors of large Italian cities are ratifying same-sex civil partnership in open conflict with the Ministero degli Interni [the Ministry for Internal Affairs].

3.1 Sexist Italy – misogyny and 'Miss Italia'

This section analyses the dataset constructed around the theme of 'Sexist Italy'. Of the seven articles retrieved for this dataset, four report on the fact that 'Miss Italia', the national beauty contest, had been cut from the schedule of the Italian state broadcaster, La RAI. Anna Maria Tarantola, then head of the RAI network, led the decision to remove the show from public television channels, stating that it was not in line with the values she wished to promote on public television. The contest, whose history goes back over seventy-five years, was first aired on television in 1979 and first broadcast by the RAI in 1988. Following the RAI's decision, the contest was aired instead on the private channel La7, gaining only 5.5% of the television audience, which would indicate the lack of interest that the Italian public now has for such programmes. The second part of this section deals with the representation of the social role of women in modern Italian society.

3.1.2 'Everyday sexism is the norm in Italy'

The *MailOnline* (18 July 2013; 6 November 2013) gives particular importance to the news that 'Miss Italia' would no longer be shown on the RAI channels, reporting on it on two separate occasions. The *Guardian* (5 November 2013) and *The Telegraph* (17 July 2013) also published articles on the subject. The first *MailOnline* article (Pisa 2013) carries the headline 'Italian TV drops Miss Italy beauty contest that launched careers of Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida'. Laura Boldrini, Speaker of the Italian House of Deputies, is quoted in the article as saying: 'Only two percent of women on [Italian] TV express an opinion and speak. The rest are silent and more often than not semi-dressed.' This same comment by Boldrini is rendered in the *Guardian*'s article, entitled 'Misogyny and Miss Italia' as 'women are often depicted [on television] as mute and sometimes undressed' (Davies 2013). According to the *Guardian*, Boldrini's comment was 'a clear dig at former PM Silvio Berlusconi's TV channels which regularly show a gallery of semi-naked women on everything from talk shows to quiz programmes and cookery items – as well as news and weather'. The chains of discourse (Fairclough 1995) here remind us of Berlusconi's cultural legacy, and Berlusconismo in Italian culture as a whole. The journalist observes again:

> In a country notorious for the scantily clad showgirls who came to populate television screens during Silvio Berlusconi's era of huge political and media power, the symbolic nature of the move was clear.

Reuters, the news agency that claims neutrality in foreign news reporting, seems less than objective on the same subject if we look at the following quotation:

> Predictably in a country where skimpily clad women are a common sight on mainstream television channels, especially those owned by former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's Mediaset empire, the decision sparked a vigorous debate. (Hornby for Reuters, 17 July 2013)

These formulaic criticisms of women on Italian TV as 'scantily clad', 'semi-naked' and 'barely clothed showgirls' could, nevertheless, equally describe the portrayal of women in some British newspapers. As Wykes and Gunther (2005: 82) observe, 'our national press presents women as "news candy" – to please the eye and sweeten the business of reportage'. The journalist then insinuates that Tarantola's decision to remove Miss Italia from the RAI channels was long overdue, whilst simultaneously suggesting that the 'culturally superior' UK had done away with such sexist trappings a long time ago:

> Twenty-eight years after the BBC stopped broadcasting Miss Great Britain for being
> an anachronism verging on the offensive, RAI too, under Tarantola, wants to send a
> message that Italian television needs to start cleaning up its act. (Davis 2013)

Some months later, *Mail Online* (Thornhill, 6 November 2013) reports on the outcome of
the beauty contest, announcing that 'Nineteen-year-old Giulia Arena was crowned Miss
Italia 2013 in a glittering ceremony – but it was not aired by Italy's state broadcaster'. The
adversarial 'but' infers disapproval of the fact that the programme was not broadcast on
the RAI channels. Tarantola is quoted indirectly in the strapline: 'President of the state
TV station, RAI, *deems* the contest – which launched the careers of screen sirens Sophia
Loren and Gina Lollobrigida – a sexist anachronism' (my emphasis). The reporting verb
'deem' means 'to give or pronounce judgement; to act as judge, sit in judgement' (*OED*
online) and therefore conveys the idea that Tarantola judges the contest from a position
of superiority. The clause regarding Loren and Lollobrigida serves to legitimise the value of
the contest, countering Tarantola's opinion. *The Mail*'s online article is interspersed with
several gratuitous images of bikini-clad Miss Italia contestants, thus demonstrating that
semi-naked female bodies are a regular feature of *all* popular media cultures (Conboy 2006:
123). Other photographs show a young Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida, forming part
of a paratext that attempts to justify the beauty pageant. The argumentative structure of
the article provides testimonies against the RAI's decision with a series of 'experts' who
are quoted in order to legitimise *The Mail*'s stance. Finally, in order to lend authority to
its source, the evaluative adjective 'respected' is used to describe the Italian newspaper,
Corriere Della Sera, whose editorial is quoted thus: 'If banning Miss Italia from TV makes us
feel more modern and civilised as a country then we really are in a bad way'. Once again, it
is the careful selection of information and sources that construct the news so as to reflect
the newspaper's stance.

   In a crescendo of myth and stereotype, the article 'Meet the Italian women fighting to
be more than mothers and lovers' (*The Telegraph*, 4 April 2013) is a synthesis of the British
quality press's representation of the 'condition' of Italian women:

> Italy's parliament now has more women in it than ever before, and yet Italian women
> still battle a daily culture of overt sexism both in the workplace and at home. *The
> Telegraph*'s Marta Cooper, who is of Italian descent, reports.

The strapline (above) introducing the article attempts to create a dichotomy between the
relatively high number of women in Italian parliament, and what the journalist, whom we are
told is of Italian descent – presumably to legitimise her 'expertise' on all things Italian – refers
to as 'the reality' of Italian society. According to Cooper, women in Italy are perceived as either
'mothers or lovers'. The article then claims:

> Italy's mass media has played no small role in normalising this: private television
> channels owned by the country's former colourful Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi
> and state-owned broadcasters both routinely cast women as showgirls, allowing
> misogynistic attitudes to become more passively accepted over the past two
> decades.

Once again, intertextual chaining (Fairclough 1995: 79) links the current news to Berlusconi's
past cultural influence and the backward societal models proffered by his own commercial
channels, and to his indirect control of the state channels, too.

In a subsequent article on femicide in Italy, Cooper (*The Telegraph* 2013b) reports that Italy has only 'just' ratified a Council of Europe Convention (Istanbul Convention 11 May 2011) to combat violence against women. For the purpose of legitimation, the journalist overlooks the fact that the treaty had yet to be ratified by nations such as France, Sweden, Denmark and the UK. The Convention actually came into force on 1 August 2014 with the necessary ten ratifications; on this list, the UK is conspicuous by its absence. Under the headline 'Italy may finally be recognising that women aren't "dispensable"', the strapline reads that Italy's ratification of the Convention is 'a small step in the right direction for a country that is battling a plague of femicides and deeply entrenched sexism'. The hyperbolic metaphor of a 'plague' might imply a number of femicides far above the two a week quoted in the article. Clicking on the link, we arrive at an Italian website, where ISTAT's figures are quoted: 'nel 2011 in Italia sono state assassinate 137 donne' [in 2011, 137 women were killed in Italy], while in '2010 le donne uccise sono state 156; nel 2009 erano state 172; nel 2003 il picco del decennio scorso con 192 vittime' [in 2010, the number of women killed was 156, in 2009 there were 172 and in 2003 the peak of the last decade with 192 victims]. It is unlikely that the average British reader would understand Italian, and, therefore, in spite of the link, would not have access to the statistics that actually demonstrate falling numbers of femicides.

Entering the debate on violence against women and the frequency with which women are dying at the hands of men in Italy, as in the UK, is beyond the scope of this study.[6] What is relevant here is that journalists appear to be churning out the same phrases, perpetuating stereotypes that provide a 'common sense' explanation of cause and effect. According to Cooper, Italy has 'a culture of sexism that permeates from the office to Parliament, from television screens to the street'(Cooper 2013b). Presumably, for the journalist this is enough to explain the phenomenon of femicide. It is not our aim here to deny that these sexist currents exist in contemporary Italy. Statistics from the Global Gender Gap Index 2013 are chilling: Italy's overall ranking is seventy-first out of a total of 136 countries, placed between Romania and the Dominican Republic. The UK is ranked eighteenth. Statistics, however, must be interpreted with care and this is not the place for a detailed examination. The point we wish to focus on here is another: the way in which these facts and figures are reported, framed and narrated within the context of foreign news reporting in the British press, and to what aim. Once more, Cooper's article names Berlusconi's assumed cultural hegemony as the cause of 'misogynistic perceptions' of women:

> [Italy] is still a deeply chauvinist and sexist society. Over the past two decades misogynistic perceptions of women have been reinforced by the mass media, with private television channels owned by former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and state-owned broadcasters regularly casting women as showgirls. (Cooper 2013b)

The citation above is almost a word-for-word repetition of a statement made in the article 'Meet the Italian women fighting to be more than mothers and lovers' written by the same journalist and published two months earlier. It appears from these examples that stereotypes

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[6] The figures of ISTAT, the Italian National Statistical Agency, indicate that every two days an Italian woman dies at the hands of a man – frequently an ex-partner or relative – while, in the UK, according to Women's Aid, 'On average 2 women a week are killed by a male partner or former partner: this constitutes around one-third of all female homicide victims' (Coleman and Osborne 2010; Povey, ed. 2004, 2005; Home Office 1999; Department of Health 2005). However, as can be seen, the statistics are based on slightly outdated sources. If the UK follows the trend, the numbers are likely to be higher.

of Italy and Italian women are hammered home by reiterating stock phrases and platitudes from a set repertoire.

4.1 Racist Italy – Italy's first black minister and Balotelli vs. Berlusconi

The third theme discussed here generated the most press coverage in the year 2013–14: 'Racist Italy', where the focus shifts from gender to ethnicity in the Italian societal context. It was a particularly telling year for racism in Italian news narratives. Here we examine three discursive events: two concerning the then Minister for Integration, Cécile Kyenge, and one regarding the footballer, Mario Balotelli. Finally, we look at how the broadsheets interpret the tensions around the theme of racism in Italy in two opinion pieces.

In April 2013, Cécile Kyenge became Italy's first black cabinet minister as part of the coalition government lead by the Democratic Party. While she was in office, she was subjected to highly offensive racist insults from some extreme elements of the opposition. During a political rally (13 July 2013), Roberto Calderoli of the Northern League said: 'Amo gli animali, orsi e lupi com'è noto, ma quando vedo le immagini della Kyenge non posso non pensare, anche se non dico che lo sia, alle sembianze di orango' [I love animals, bears and wolves, as you all know, but when I see images of [Ms] Kyenge I can't help but think, even if I'm not saying she is one, of the image of an orang-utan] (*La Repubblica*, 14 July 2013). Following outrage and criticism from across the party spectrum, at home and abroad, he was asked to resign from his role of vice-president of the senate, which he did not. He was also charged with 'diffamazione aggravata dall'odio e dalla discriminazione razziale' [racially aggravated public order offence], of which he was finally acquitted (*La Repubblica*, 6 February 2015). Insulting behaviour towards the minister was not the prerogative of the political class: in the same month of July, a spectator threw bananas at Ms Kyenge during a party rally in Emilia-Romagna.

4.1.2 Baptism with bananas

Many British newspapers reported on both of these discursive events, underlining their high news value. Due to space restraints, we mention in particular articles in *The Telegraph* (Squires, 15 July 2013), *MailOnline* (McCann, 27 July 2013), and *The Times* (Clemence, 27 July 2013). *The Telegraph*'s headline, 'Italy Race-Row has "shamed the whole country"', contains a verbatim quote from the then Italian Prime Minister, Enrico Letta, who was interviewed (in English) on British television (Channel 4, 15 July 2013). The strapline reads: 'The xenophobic, anti-immigration League is not part of the coalition government but was once Silvio Berlusconi's key ally and *remains powerful*, especially in the north of the country' (my emphasis). While no-one would disagree that the Northern League are xenophobic and anti-immigration, it is debateable whether, with only 4.09% of the national vote in the 2013 general elections, they could be described as 'powerful' or representative of Italian public opinion at that moment in history.[7] If we compare these data with the figures for two right-wing parties in the UK, it can be seen that in the last national elections in 2010 the British National Party gained 1.9% of the national vote while UKIP took 3.1%. However, UKIP gained 27.49% of the national vote in the European elections held in May 2014, beating both Labour and the Conservatives, and now have twenty-four MEPs. The Northern League has just five. This would indicate that right-wing populism is not unique to Italy; it is a phenomenon shared by other European countries. The difference lies not so much in attitudes and beliefs but in how those attitudes and beliefs are expressed. For instance, while Nigel Farage has to some extend learnt to avoid offending

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[7] Data source: Italian Chamber of Deputies; see http://elezioni.interno.it/camera/scrutini/20130224/C000000000.htmDatiufficialidelMinisterodell'Interno.

politically correct sensibilities, even condemning those who do not toe the politically correct line, right-wing politicians in Italy say exactly what they think, ignoring Kyenge's plea to 'reflect on their use of communication' [che tutte le forze politiche debbano riflettere sull'uso che fanno della comunicazione] (*La Repubblica*, 14 July 2013).[8] *The Telegraph*'s strapline also creates consonance with past news narratives by invoking the name of Silvio Berlusconi. The adversarial 'but' focuses attention on the clause in which textual chains (Fairclough 1995: 79) associate Calderoli's racist discourse with Berlusconi's coalition government, thus implying that the incident is part of Berlusconi's cultural legacy. An analysis of the transitivity structures and the lexicogrammar of *MailOnline*'s headline (McCann, 27 July 2013) reveals the underlying attitude expressed in the article:

> Italy's first black minister has condemned a spectator who threw bananas towards her while she was making a speech at a party rally.

The noun phrase 'Italy's first black minister' in thematic position focuses on difference (first black minister) and shifts the agency to Kyenge, who finds the act of throwing a banana reprehensible. This might imply that the act in itself is not unacceptable but that it is Kyenge who 'condemns' the perpetrator of the act. The following sentence continues: 'Integration minister Cecile Kyenge, who was born in Democratic Republic of Congo, has angered far-right groups with her campaign to make it easier for immigrants to gain Italian citizenship'. *The Mail*'s over-lexicalisation with the non-defining clause 'who was born in Democratic Republic of Congo' reveals a negative attitude by once again underlining deviation from the white establishment norm. The 'anger' of the 'far-right' groups is legitimated by claiming that Kyenge intends to 'make it easier for immigrants to gain Italian citizenship', and then 'Kyenge's proposal to make *anyone* born on Italian soil a citizen' (my emphasis). The lexical choice of 'immigrants' in the first example is misleading. Kyenge in fact advocates that those who are born on Italian soil of immigrant parents should have the right to apply for Italian citizenship. Van Dijk (1989) has noted that racism has the social function of protecting the interests of the in-group. This is often reflected in journalistic discourse on ethnic issues and affairs (van Dijk 1992). *The Mail*'s anti-immigration stance has been analysed elsewhere (Conboy 2006: 94–122). Here, the newspaper's protectionist perspective is implicit yet discernible. The premise is that Italy is the gateway to Europe; more 'immigrants' in Italy will ultimately lead to more immigrants entering the UK. A final example from the article seems to infer that the minister overreacted to the incident, as the bananas did not actually hit the 'target': 'Although the bananas missed the stage where Kyenge was speaking, she responded to the gesture on Twitter, calling it '"sad" and a waste of food, considering the economic crisis'. The paper also ignores Kyenge's intended irony in referring to the incident as 'a waste of food'.

4.1.3 Berlusconi and Balotelli – 'nigger' versus 'negro' – translation effects
Politics was not the only sphere of Italian public life that furnished the British press with opportunities to construct news narratives on racist discourse in Italy. Racism in football is an issue that reaches far beyond national boundaries. From the skinheads and the National Front of the 1970s to the latest 'race rows', British football, for instance, has harboured examples of shamefully racist behaviour from fans and players over the last

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[8] MEPs for UKIP called for the expulsion of Mario Borghezio, MEP for the Northern League from the right-wing Europe of Freedom and Democracy group due to his racist tirade against Kyenge (Squires and Waterfield, 23 May 2013).

forty years, and this continues today. Far too complex a subject to discuss in any depth here, suffice to say that in recent years racial tensions have been emerging in Italy too. Balotelli has been the object of strong verbal abuse and racist gestures throughout his football-playing career. The discursive event analysed here concerns Silvio Berlusconi's brother, Paolo, the vice-president of AC Milan, for whom Balotelli played. During a political rally, the younger Berlusconi was caught on video referring to Mario Balotelli as 'il negretto di famiglia' [the little negro of the family], as he suggested that all present should go and watch his debut match for AC Milan. The offending phrase was variously translated in the British press as 'little nigger', 'little negro', 'little black boy', and also censored with asterisks.

MailOnline (Pisa 2013) reported the incident under the headline: 'Balotelli is victim of Berlusconi's brother's shocking racist taunt'. The semantically loaded noun phrase primes the reader for what *The Mail* frames as a deliberately offensive provocation on the part of Paolo Berlusconi. A subtitled video clip of the discursive event accompanies *The Mail*'s online article; the paratext guides our expectations with the straplines 'watch Berlusconi's shocking speech' and 'watch the censored video of Berlusconi's speech'. By referring to Berlusconi's informal address as a 'speech', *The Mail's* representation of the discursive event as an intentional slur is legitimised. Describing the video as 'censored' is deceptive; the film clip originates from *La Repubblica* website and the Italian source text is uncensored. On *The Mail*'s website, it has been subtitled and the offending word rendered with asterisks, thus emphasising the taboo nature of the insult in Anglophone contexts and suggesting that the word uttered was 'nigger': 'That's all. Now let's go watch the household n****r, the crazy head'. The impact of this rendering on Anglophone audiences is significant. As Allan and Burridge (2006: 107) affirm, '[w]hile some people still complain about hearing [rude] words in the public arena, what is now perceived as truly obscene are racial and ethnic slurs'. It could be argued then that, in translation terms, dynamic equivalence has not been maintained. What Berlusconi said was:

> Questo è tutto. Adesso andiamo a vedere il negretto di famiglia. Le signorine sono anche invitate se vogliano venire con me, avrete anche la possibilità di conoscere il presidente [of Milan Football club, Silvio Berlusconi]
>   [That's all. Now let's go and watch the family's little negro. The ladies are also invited, if they'd like to come with me, you will also have the chance to meet the chairman].

The diminutive form 'negretto' could be construed in two ways: patronising or affectionate, and here the question of intentionality is fundamental to the interpretation. In either case, to imply that it carries the same loaded meaning as nigger is misleading (see Tosi 2001: 84). In the first line of the article, the journalist, Nick Pisa writes: 'Mario Balotelli is at the centre of a race controversy *after he was called "a little n*****"* by the brother of AC Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi' (my emphasis). The construction of meaning in this sentence infers that Berlusconi called Balotelli a nigger in a direct confrontation. For the journalist, the translation process appears to be a question of linguistic equivalence, or an opportunity to make headlines; there is no attempt to negotiate meaning between languages and cultures in the rendering of these highly culturally sensitive lexemes.

The Times's (Bone 6 February 2013) headline simply states: 'Silvio Berlusconi's brother uses racist term to describe Mario Balotelli'. The expression is then reported in the second line as 'little negro in the family', a far less contentious representation than any of the options discussed above. While 'negro' is now considered outdated and offensive in Anglophone

contexts, it does not have the semantic force of 'nigger'. The journalist goes on to discuss the possible translations of the offending phrase: 'Negretto can be translated in a range of ways, from "little black boy" to "little n*****"'. What he fails to mention is that 'negro' in Italian cannot possibly carry the same semantic force as 'nigger', because it does not carry the same socio-historical connotations. Although 'negro' in Italian is increasingly considered politically incorrect, the *Corriere della Sera* (5 February 2013) light-heartedly refers to the comment as 'La Gaffe'.

   Dictionaries of the Italian Language, such as *Zingarelli online*, denote 'negro' as 'che, chi appartiene a gruppi etnici di pelle nera' [that, or who belongs to dark skinned ethnic groups] and 'relativo alle popolazioni di tali gruppi etnici' [relative to the populations of such ethnic groups], but, for example, add a further connotation:

> Negro definisce chi appartiene al gruppo umano caratterizzato da pelle nera o scura, capelli molto ricci, naso piatto; il termine è oggi percepito perlopiù come offensivo e sostituito da nero o dalla locuzione di colore, considerati più corretti.
>
>   [Negro defines those who belong to the human group that is characterised by black or dark skin, very curly hair, flat nose; the term is generally perceived today as offensive and is substituted by black or by the expression 'coloured', which are considered more correct].

The dictionary entry in itself is rather problematic, yet beyond our aims here. 'Negretto' is then given as the diminutive form to what is referred to as a 'nuance' between 'negro' and 'nero'. In *Il Dizionario della lingua Italiana* (De Mauro 2000), the first acceptation of 'negro' is also denotative: 'Che, chi appartience alle diverse razze del ceppo negroide' [what/who belongs to one of the various negroid races] with a physical description of the characteristics perceived to be 'negroide', with the addition in brackets: '(il termine talvolta è avvertito o usato con valore spreg. E sostituito da *nero*)' [the term is sometimes perceived or used with a disparaging value and substituted with black]. In discussing the younger Berlusconi's remarks, Bone's article also makes intertextual reference to Silvio Berlusconi's comment about Obama – 'His tasteless comments echo previous remarks by his older brother, Silvio, who once described Barack Obama as "suntanned"' – thus highlighting the echoes of the cultural legacy of the past while emphasising Berlusconi's influence on the present.

4.1.4 Opinions, opinions…
Finally, we offer some examples of how the broadsheets portray racism in Italian society. Both commentators for the left-wing *Guardian*, Tobias Jones (30 July 2013), author of *The Dark Heart of Italy* (2003), asks 'Why is Italy still so racist?', while the headline of John Foot's (15 July 2013) opinion piece affirms '[w]hy ignorant racists still flourish in multicultural Italy', thus promising to answer the question posed by Jones. Both headlines put 'why' in theme position, stressing the investigative nature of the articles. They also invite comparison: the unfinished sentence could be 'Why is *Italy* (Them) still so racist when *we* (Us) have managed to overcome such barbaric practices and ideologies?' The adverbs 'still' and 'so' emphasise the attitude of the articles – incredulity that in a 'modern' nation like Italy some people might still harbour racist attitudes and behaviour. Jones observes:

> The verbal attacks on Cécile Kyenge are shocking, even in a country where racism is part of everyday life.
>   Despite many Italians' love of all things foreign, *racism is common.* (my emphasis)

Such generalisations and stereotypes serve, it would seem, only to bolster the notion that 'Italians are racist' in what could be read as a form of inverted racism. Through the use of hypotaxis, which Fairclough (1995) associates with explanatory logic, the syntactical structure of the first statement subordinates the proposition that racism is normal in Italy to convey the idea that, although we expect racist attitudes there, because, after all, Italy is racist, we do not expect the magnitude of insults to which Kyenge has been subjected. In the second, the main proposition 'racism is common' overrides the token defence in the subordinate: 'Despite some Italians' love of all things foreign'. We are left, once again, with the impression that most Italians are hopelessly xenophobic.

   Foot's accusation that 'Calderoli's is the latest in a long line of revolting racist comments from politicians and others *from right across the political spectrum*' (my emphasis) is another sweeping statement. While 'revolting racist comments' from the extreme right might be expected – Calderoli has a history of voicing his views in no uncertain terms on a range of contentious issues – no evidence emerges of racist comments from other political factions. The journalist continues: 'The Lega's founder and former leader, Umberto Bossi, referred to somewhere called "Bongo Bongo land"'. At best we could accuse Bossi of plagiarism. In 1985, Conservative Alan Clark, then the Under Secretary at the Department of Employment responsible for race relations issues, used the phrase 'bongo bongo land' in a derogatory statement against the black community (*Guardian*, 7 February 1985). He denied this and said it was a reference to the then President Bongo of Gabon. More recently, UKIP MEP Godfrey Bloom said that the UK should not send aid to 'bongo bongo' land (*Guardian*, 7 August 2017). He subsequently apologised for his remarks. Finally, it is worth quoting some readers' comments from *The Mail* (27 July 2013) in response to the article regarding Calderoli's insults to Kyenge. As irate discursive replies to an article just read, they are not sufficient to be considered reliable data. They do suggest, however, that *The Mail*'s construction of Italian racism through certain lexical cues has had some influence on readers' opinion (all emphasis mine):

> It is only 80 years ago that miscegenation (mixed race relationships) was made illegal by Italy [...] it appears that they are still as *culturally backward* as they were then.
> Wasp in the South, London, United Kingdom

> What a *backward country*? i wonder how they perceive Obama? Disgusting behaviour.
> Surrey, United Kingdom

> How *backwards and behind the times* is this country regarding race?
> Jake14

> Orangutan?!!! What decade do we live in? Wasn't Mussolini thrown out of power nearly 70 years ago? And Italy still elect horrifically racist bigots? Both Southern and Eastern Europe are taking huge *leaps backwards*, those countries need more people like Kyenge!!
> Dan UK

Closing remarks

This contribution has attempted to trace the reverberations of Berlusconi's language in the cultural representation of Italy in British news discourse in the year 2013–14. By analysing a qualitative dataset created around three thematic strands in media chains – anti-gay, sexist,

racist Italy – the evidence suggests that the worst ideological legacies of the Berlusconi era continue to fuel stereotypes of Italians as culturally backward within newspaper discourse. In the texts analysed, translated information and embedded quotes appear to undergo ideological manipulations in order to reinforce the British normative perspective, thus problematising the assumption that British newspapers are the beacon of truth and objectivity (Hampton 2008). In answer to the research question 'to what extent do current British news narratives on Italianness reproduce and coincide with established cultural stereotypes?', the corpus observed and the data collected is too small scale to yield widely generalisable findings. Nevertheless, the tentative hypotheses advanced here could well be tested with a more in-depth study combining qualitative approaches with computer-aided corpus studies. The sample study discussed here indicates that both popular and quality newspapers' construal of newsworthiness and evaluative parameters give rise to selection criteria of news that perpetuates preconceived ideas of the Italian people as a whole. The first dataset analysed how a relatively unimportant discursive event – Guido Barilla's comments on the (non)use of homosexuals in Barilla advertising – becomes 'news' for the British press. Accusations of homophobia are framed by a strategic use of translation, omission and skewed representation in the context of the larger debate on recognising civil rights for same sex couples, an issue that occupied much column space in the UK and Italy. The second dataset showed that Italian sexism is denounced through a series of trite stereotypes of Italian women. For example, The *Daily Mail*'s legitimising discourse on 'Miss Italia' exploits its existence by illustrating the article with several gratuitous photographs of semi-naked 'Miss Italia' contestants, while denouncing the televised broadcast of the beauty pageant as sexist. Sexism in the media is not exclusively an Italian issue. It is equally relevant to the UK, the land that exonerates Page Three, as to many other Western cultures. The final dataset focused on the image of 'racist Italy'. British news narratives on verbal abuse regarding the former minister for integration, Cecile Kyenge, and footballer Mario Balotelli, fail to situate the incidents within the context of Italy's relatively recent multiculturality. Attitudes of British cultural superiority emerge thinly disguised in a condemnation of 'Italian racism', which are in fact a form of inverted racism. The trope of 'backwards Italy' is implicit in the news texts but has clearly been picked up by readers, as evinced by the reader's online comments to the articles analysed here.

Regarding our theoretical framework, Banfield's (1958) theory of 'amoral familism' can be glimpsed in Guido Barilla's defence of the 'traditional family', while in denial of the burgeoning trends towards alternative paradigms for family life. Yet, by the same token, the inveterate critiques of Barilla's comments in the British press leave little space for tolerance and the rights of the individual to voice an opinion against current social mores. While the echoes of Berlusconismo, or what Pasquino has claimed are inherent traits of Italian cultural identity, make news in the British news media, it cannot be ignored that the construction of news narratives regarding Italy are often permeated with prejudice and national stereotypes.

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