Post-feminism in Italy and the legacy of Berlusconism: an analysis of media representations of female subjectivity and sexuality in the age of Berlusconi.

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor in Philosophy. London, January 2017

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Declaration of Authorship

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

In this research project, I address critical questions about Italian post-feminism, by exploring the way the peculiarities of Italian media and culture have contributed in producing a specifically Italian form of post-feminism. While a post-feminist subjectivity, in terms of neoliberal, individualist, narcissist standards among young women, has been observed and commented on by a few Italian authors, the important relation between post-feminist sexuality and subjectivity, Berlusconi's political and cultural project, and the media has not yet been analysed in depth. To investigate this, I employ a feminist poststructuralist approach to the study of media and society, and explore the way the media produces and reproduces discourses of gender and sexuality that have circulated in Berlusconism. The thesis highlights how young femininity has emerged in the national popular imagination as barometer of social change, at the same time becoming subjected to increased scrutiny and policing. In the first two chapters I discuss the theoretical framework and methodology of the thesis. I then explore Berlusconi's influence on media and politics (Chapter 3). I define Berlusconi's cultural and political hegemony in terms of a neoliberal authoritarian populism, in which the media played a fundamental role by articulating representations of femininity and female sexuality that work to secure the status quo and existing relations of power. Following this, is the analysis of the case studies, in which the connection between the legal system and the media provides a surface of emergence for the figuration of post-feminist femininity. This is articulated through cultural discourses about commercial sexuality (Chapter 4), phallicism (Chapter 5) and mental health (Chapter 6). Ultimately, this research project sheds light on the way media representations of femininity and female sexuality relate to Berlusconism, where longstanding sexist and misogynist discourses have been accompanied by new ones, integral to neoliberal governmentality.

Contents

Introduction

Italian culture is often perceived to be highly sexist and misogynistic, even more so in the past couple of decades (see for example *The Guardian* [20/09/2009, 30/04/2012]; *The Telegraph* [04/04/2013]; and *The New York Times* [18/02/11]). Recently, Giorgia Meloni, one of the centre-right candidates for the mayoral elections in Rome in June 2016, was told by other, male politicians to stick to motherhood, suggesting the impossibility of being a first-time mother and mayor at the same time (*Il Giornale* 14/03/16; *Repubblica* 15/03/16). Similarly, male presenters on television and radio can freely make misogynistic, sexist and homophobic comments with impunity: in July 2016, on the radio program *Morning Show* broadcast on *Radio Globo,* the two male presenters attacked a woman who had called in complaining about the sexism of the program, by telling her '*torna in cucina* [go back to the kitchen]' and '*facci parlare con tuo marito* [let us talk to your husband]'.[1] At the same time, women's bodies continue to be subjected to scrutiny and policing, extending to women politicians, whose bodies and attractiveness are commented upon by male colleagues as well as by the media. Panorama, the weekly current affairs' magazine published by *Mondadori*, published a list of female politicians based on their attractiveness and beauty (*Panorama* 25/11/16), while most newspapers and magazines in Italy appear to consider it newsworthy publishing photos of female politicians in bikinis or topless (*Libero* 27/08/14; *Corriere* 24/08/14; *Il Mattino 19/08/16* 12/08/14; *TGcom24* 16/07/16).

These incidents are symptomatic of the profound gender inequality that characterises Italian culture. The European *Gender Equality Index*'s report (EIGE 2015) that monitored gender equality in the European Union between 2005 and 2012 ranks Italy amongst the countries with the lowest gender equality. According to the report, women's entrance in

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[1]   Translations from Italian are mine (unless otherwise stated). Henceforth, the original text for shorter quotations will be included - italicised - in the body, while for longer quotations the original text will be included in the form of a footnote.

the labour market is very low, especially in the South of Italy, and women are vastly over-represented in atypical and precarious jobs; despite the implementation of legislation about quotas in 2011 and 2013, the percentage of women in top decision-making positions continues to be low in both the public and the private sectors; women are still responsible for most of the domestic work, whilst being better educated than their male counterparts. Furthermore, violence against women continues being an important issue. According to the data collected by *ISTAT - Istituto Nazionale di Statistica* [National Institution of Statistics] (2015) in 2014 alone 7.688.000 women suffered violence and abuse, mostly perpetuated by partners or ex-partners, although the number has been declining since 2009.

This thesis is grounded in the belief that it is not possible to make sense of the current situation in Italy in regards to gender inequality without taking into account the 'cultural hegemony' of Berlusconism. Berlusconism is understood here in terms of a cultural process that included not only political governance, but also the media and civil society, resulting in a complex network in which politics, public and private institutions, the media, cultural discourses, systems of knowledge, regulatory decisions, laws, and processes of subjectification all contributed. Thus, I understand Berlusconism to be characterised by what Foucault (2010) described as 'neoliberal governmentality' - a system of governance that relies not on repression or punishment, but on the control and regulation of life, as well as the self-disciplining of individuals. However, fundamental in the establishment and perpetuation of Berlusconism has been a particularly sexist, misogynistic and chauvinistic way of conceptualising gender and gender relations.

This is of importance in the wake of the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America. For many years Italy appeared as a peculiar exception in the developed world, Berlusconi making Italy a laughing stock on the international political sphere. However, the election of Trump accords legitimacy to the thesis that the Italian case should not be understood as an oddity, neither in Italy nor abroad. The new president of the United States is very similar to Berlusconi in many respects: both are successful entrepreneurs, have little respect for the law, have strong links with the media, employ a

nationalist populist rhetoric, have little respect for women and consistently sexualise and/or vilify them. Thus, the Italian situation does not represent an isolated case of a particularly corrupted and deplorable parenthesis in Italian history, but represents a wider process occurring on a global scale.

Hence, this thesis investigates the relationship between the peculiarities of Italian culture and media, and the new 'gender regime' (McRobbie 2009, p. 59) that has characterised Berlusconism, focusing in particular on issues related to female subjectivity and sexuality. Media representations of female subjectivity and sexuality are understood as central to Berlusconism, and thus analysed in terms of discursive practices that are enmeshed with power relations, and that often work to maintain the status quo. Therefore, the critical questions that drove this project have been about the role of Berlusconi and the media in shaping a specific cultural climate in Italy, focussing in particular on issues of gender and sexuality; the lines of continuity between Berlusconi's rhetoric and media representations in producing and reproducing hegemonic femininity and sexuality; and lastly whether a feminist viewpoint is included in these representations, and if this is the case, in what way it is articulated (whether it would 'classify' as liberal feminism, difference feminism, queer feminism, or other).

Since the 1970s feminist scholars have been tackling critical questions about the profound gender inequality that characterises Italian culture. However, while Italian feminist thought and practice was of incredible value in the 1970s, and continues producing interesting theories in regards to gender and gender relations, it presents some important limitations, among which is a limited understanding of the way media representations of gender and sexuality participates in the production and reproduction of post-feminism in Italy. This thesis aims to contribute to Italian feminist debates, by arguing for the importance of moving beyond the dichotomy between neo- and post- patriarchy that characterises contemporary Italian feminism (explored at length below). To do so, it is necessary to consider the insights of the Cultural Studies tradition, and in particular post-feminism, in order to make sense of Italian media culture and its role within Berlusconism.

Italian feminist thought: sexual difference and sexual liberation

To circumscribe Italian feminism within national boundaries is undoubtedly reductive, especially considering that Italian feminist thought has, from its very beginning, constantly engaged with developments within European and North American feminist theory. This proves to be true also in relation to theories on post-feminism, which have only very recently developed, drawing for the most part on work produced abroad, especially from American and British cultural and media studies. Nevertheless, throughout current Italian feminist theory and critique, the legacy of the Italian second-wave is still detectable in method and focus of analysis, such that 'one can indeed argue that there is such a thing as an "Italian style" in gender studies' (Pradavelli 2010, p. 61).

In the 1970s the Italian women's movement was one of the strongest in the world and it produced a vast quantity of work in the fields of philosophy, literature, pedagogy, and social and political thought (Anderlini – D'Onofrio 1994). Since the 1970s it has been composed of numerous autonomous groups built around libraries, book stores, publishing houses and cultural centres, the most important being the ones in Naples, Milan, Verona and Rome (Pravadelli 2010). Among the groups there is considerable intellectual exchange, in fact collaboration and teamwork are common practice in Italian feminism. Nonetheless, the groups mostly work independently and often differ in opinion, debating and even conflicting at times, so that feminist thought in Italy is characterised by diversity and plurality (Kemp & Bono 1993). They take a separatist stance in relation to social, political and cultural institutions, claiming the need for separate women's spaces and being wary of some women's double-militancy (as feminists and as part of wider political institutions).

Because of its separatist stance, feminist thought was not institutionalised in Italian academia until very recently, lecturers carving out a space in the curriculum to deal with women's issues rather than trying to build gender or women's studies courses (Pravadelli 2010). This is not a totally self-determined choice, as the Italian academic organisation becomes very rigid when threatened with structural change (Kemp & Bono 1993).

Nonetheless, many feminists do not resent this, as they feel that the establishment of a women's studies department in the academia would represent just a sop, a confined space where women would be allowed to speak, while the system overall remains unchallenged (ibid.). However, since 2000, following a reform of the Italian Higher Education System, enacted in the context of policies of equal opportunities promoted by the European Union, a few master and doctoral courses have emerged (Pravadelli 2010), prevalently in the fields of Literature and History, but also in Sociology, Languages, and Political Science.

Despite the heterogeneity of the Italian feminist thought, it is still possible to detect some of its general characteristics, also because of the leading role of two important centres, *La Libreria delle Donne* in Milan and the *Diotima* group in Verona, in the development of its theoretical foundation. Having borne out of opposition to the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI)'s conception of *la questione femminile*, Italian feminists refused the emancipationist agenda put forward by the party (Hellman 1987).[2] The PCI saw *la questione femminile* as women's problem with society, to which the solution was the full integration of women in the workforce, thinking that once women achieved emancipation and economic independence in the public sphere, the same in the private sphere would have followed (Bock & James 1992). Italian feminists rejected this interpretation and argued that it was the opposite: it was society which had a problem with women and it was not women's role to be changed, but society itself.

They therefore rejected the PCI's division of the private and public sphere, arguing that women's oppression does not originate in the workplace, 'but in the sheltered places of reproduction' (Rasy in Bono & Kemp 1991, p. 80), fully embracing the famous slogan 'the personal is political'. Furthermore, they critiqued the juridical principle of equality,

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[2] The PCI, along with DC and PSI, was one of the biggest political parties from immediately after World War 2 to the political scandal Tangentopoli in 1992, in English Bribesville, a scandal which involved several high-profile politicians of the DC and PSI, who were accused to have accepted illegal financing to support their parties. The movement for women's liberation in Italy had its beginning within the communist and socialist organisations, but detached itself from these in the 1960s and 1970s.

claiming that the emancipation of women had done little to change the oppression of women in society (Re 2002). Indeed, even if the women's movement had achieved great results in the 1960s and 1970s on political and legal levels, such as the legalisation on abortion and divorce, there was a growing feeling among women that institutions were unresponsive to women's needs and that the politics of equal rights and female emancipation would not have been sufficient to realise the social and symbolic change which women demanded (Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1986). Thus, in opposition to formal equality and emancipation, the Italian feminist movement advanced the notions of sexual difference and liberation as grounding the quest for social equality.

Italian feminist thought draws heavily on French feminist theory on sexual difference, especially the work by Luce Irigaray (Parati & West 2002). Irigaray (1974, 1977, 1993, 2002) has been a seminal figure in the development of what has come to be known as difference feminism. She draws on the poststructuralist psychoanalytical theory of Lacan to argue that the Symbolic Order, the language-mediated world which we experience and which gives us our subjectivity, is fundamentally man-made, and therefore only provides a partial representation of the world. Hence, following this body of work, historically, Italian feminism has argued that behind the apparent neutrality of language lies a male bias which does not allow the expression of women's subjectivity, their desires, their experiences and their sexuality (Libreria della Donne di Milano 1986).

Two of the leading feminist theorists and philosophers in Italy, Cavarero and Muraro, engage in a subversion of Plato's initial gesture of eliding sexuality and excluding women, which has been central to Western philosophical tradition and consequently Western political thought (Re 2002). They argue that the consequence of this gesture is that of not only effacing sexual difference among people, but of all differences, postulating a universal subject, which is as a matter of fact modelled on the masculine. Therefore, for Italian feminist thought the creation of a female symbolic is fundamental not only for revaluing sexual difference, but for the acceptance of any differences in people (Libreria delle Donne di Milano 1986). However, all other differences are secondary to the original one which is sexual difference (Cavarero, 1985). The ultimate task for Italian feminism is

to reshape the world to accommodate duality, through the modification of its structures at all levels: symbolic, institutional and economic (Kemp & Bono 1991).

The effacement of sexual difference from language has important consequences for women, since the thought system and language of neutrality posit woman as both part of the symbolic and as that which is excluded, the Other (Cavarero 1985). However, the only way woman can speak of her subjectivity is through the symbolic terms that are alien for her, as she has not participated in their construction. Women thus occupy a liminal position in regards to the symbolic and cannot fully recognise themselves in the identity categories provided by it (ibid.). Cavarero (ibid.) claims that it is the feeling of alienation and incompleteness that is shared by women and constitutes their essential experience. The recognition of the shared experience is the first step in women's quest for subjectivity: the project of speaking herself, thinking herself and representing herself as a subject starting from her own self (*partire da sè*) *(*Muraro 1996).

Italian feminism, Berlusconism and gender inequality

More recently, after the sexual scandals in which the ex-prime Minister was involved,[3] Italian feminist scholarship has been divided on whether the current cultural climate in Italy should be defined as 'post-patriarchy' or 'neo-patriarchy' (Casalini 2011a). The first position claims that we are living in a new phase of the '*conflitto tra i sessi*' [battle between the sexes]; the advocates of this thesis do not to argue that patriarchy has been overcome, yet, but that it is agonising nonetheless (Boccia et al. 2009; Strazzeri 2014; Deiana 2012). The second position claims instead that we are witnessing a new form of patriarchy, a neo-patriarchy, which exercises its power indirectly through the specific forms of the capitalist system (Melchori 2008; Campani 2009).

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[3] Berlusconi has been at the centre of several sexual scandals from 2007 to 2011, which culminated in Berlusconi's indictment for favouring underage prostitution in 2011. The ex-Prime Minister frequently hosted parties in his villas, in which international politicians, models, showgirls and escort equally participated. These scandals are the subject of chapter 4.

According to theories of post-patriarchy, the Law of the Father is no longer central to the social order and male power is increasingly being weakened, as demonstrated by the crisis of masculinity, the loss of recognition of the political system (a masculine institution), as well as the feminisation of labour (Strazzeri 2014). Feminism is believed to have played a major role in the destabilisation of male power, having actively participated in the deconstruction of the modern subject through processes of female subjectification and emancipation (Boccia et al. 2009). However, these changes create disturbances, unease and 'small' comebacks, examples being the perceived increment of violence against women in Italy or the return to machist and sexist behaviours, as exemplified by Berlusconi's recent sexual scandals (Dominijanni 2014b; Strazzeri 2014). This is not to say that male power has disappeared, but that this is a 'power without authority', as exemplified by the ex-Prime Minister himself, the '*re nudo*' [naked emperor] (Dominijanni 2014b).[4]

The second position, which claims that Italy is facing a form of neo-patriarchy, states that elements of traditional patriarchy merge with a modern, liberal and enlightened one, portraying feminism as outdated and stating that all remaining inequalities will be eliminated by the workings of neoliberal democracy (Melchiori 2008). Hence, the entrance of women in paid labour and in the public sphere should be interpreted as another, although different, way to exploit women's assets by a renewed patriarchal system now able to use the feminist movement's achievements and lexicon for its own ends (Casalini 2011a; 2011b). Unfortunately, this position has not been developed much by Italian feminist scholarship, as well as not considering the important role of the media in establishing and reproducing the sexist hegemony of Berlusconi. This thesis expands and enriches this framework via its employment of the insights of the Cultural Studies discipline as developed in the UK.

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[4] This is a reference to the popular tale by Andersen *The Emperor Wears No Clothes.* In the tale, two weavers fool the emperor by promising a new set of clothes that are invisible only to those who are stupid or undeserving. The court and the subjects all pretend to see the new clothes, as they too do not want to appear stupid or undeserving. Eventually, a child screams that the emperor is, in fact, naked.

In response to the debate between neo- and post-patriarchy, I argue for the need to develop a third position, which references scholarship developed abroad (namely the Cultural Studies tradition, poststructuralist theories of subjectivity and gender identity, and theories about post-feminism). Through the empolyment of these frameworks, this thesis can account for the flexibility of gender identity, its social construction, the way it interacts with other axis of identity and, most importantly, for the way media representations are involved in the production of the gender definitions which circulate in society at one time. This body of work is fundamental to make better sense of not only the Italian situation, but other countries that seem to be heading in a similar direction.

Hence, while Italian feminist thought and practice was of incredible value in the 1970s, and continues producing interesting theories in regards to gender and gender relations, it presents some important weaknesses. Firstly, the perpetuation of the dichotomy between male/female by the postulation of a world encompassing two sexed, symbolic orders is a significant limitation of Italian feminist thought. Secondly, although legitimate in the 1970s, a focus on the quest for female subjectivity, relies on the idea of gender as oppression, rather than focusing of what subjectivities women are encouraged to embody and what they are encouraged to do. Thirdly, the inability of the established feminist groups to include younger women's voices has led to a generational disjunction. Lastly, the lack of engagement with the media and media representations by Italian feminist scholarship, and especially by media and communication experts, represents an important drawback. These weaknesses inevitably lead to theoretical and analytical issues when engaging with media representations of gender and gender relations. These issues and limitations are further explored below.

The weaknesses of Italian feminist thought: the reliance on gender binaries and the little attention to media representations

Although theoretically women's difference is conceptualised as material and discursive, and therefore not 'essential', in practice this 'strategic essentialism', by which Cavarero &

Bertolino (2008) describe the position of speaking about sexual difference without the imposition of a dogmatic definition of what constitutes that difference, has had the effect of excluding some experiences as essentially 'masculine' and therefore not feminist (such as those of women who directly compete with men in managerial, political and institutional jobs). This has been extended, in the aftermath of the Berlusconi scandals, to describe the employment of one's body in terms of a commodity to be exchanged, either symbolically on the television screen or physically as in prostitution, as a masculine behaviour (Zanardo 2010).

Furthermore, the dichotomisation of the genders becomes problematic for the inclusion of those subjectivities that do not fit into a clear man/woman divide, thus excluding those members of the LGBTQI community who feel unepresented in either of the two categories. Furthermore, sexual difference is considered the primary and original difference, so that 'the essential differing between a man and a woman makes the meaning of every other differing superfluous' (Cavarero 1985, p. 215). To foreground sexual difference, at the expense of any other differences such as race, class and sexuality is dangerous, as it may participate in hiding the way gender interacts with other important social inequalities, while at the same time obstructing any cross-gender political alliance.

Italian feminism's reading of feminine subjectivity and the quest for its expression, starting from the self, is also problematic as it implies the possibility of female liberation from an oppressive patriarchy. However, although the theory and practice of sexual difference can be seen as accurate at the time they emerged, as they helped women moving from the position of objects to the one of subjects (Pravadelli 2010), the current historical moment needs more of an analysis of what women are encouraged to do, rather than what they need to be liberated from. The quest for one's own subjectivity and liberation has the potential of becoming an individualist form of self-exploration, not necessarily directed towards an active effort to change the status quo, as exemplified in post-feminist culture, which I will be detailing in the last part of this introduction.

A final, more practical, limitation has been the strong hierarchy within the historical

feminist organisations. This appears to be one of the reasons for the little appeal of established feminist groups to the younger generations. Indeed, there appears to be an ideological gap between those feminists who Di Cori (2007) calls 'young women' and 'not so young women' (the former being women born after the 1970s and the latter those born before). Di Cori (ibid.), who belongs to the first group, complains about the lack of open confrontation and debate within feminism in Italy: the family network structure, the hierarchy based on age and, most importantly, on social status, and the authoritarian and hermetic character of the renowned feminist groups, impedes the 'young women' to openly express themselves and contest the 'matriarchs'.

This division has appeared also in feminist debates and critiques following the Berlusconi scandals, where a generational gap and an inability of the older generation to take seriously, and engage with, the arguments of a younger one have been clearly visible. Dominijanni (2014a) for example harshly criticises the SNOQ (Se Non Ora Quando [*If Not Now When*]) movement that took to the streets in the aftermath of the Berlusconi scandals, arguing that their emancipationist agenda and focus on the self are misplaced, whilst ignoring the legacy of Italian feminist thought. While aspects of her critique are insightful and convincing, the way this is articulated shows an antagonism and unwillingness to confront these new feminist voices, protectively serrating herself within the tradition of Italian difference feminism without questioning why this might result unattractive to the younger generations.

Last, but not least, Italian feminist thought has been slow in recognising the role of the media in establishing and supporting the sexist hegemony of Berlusconi via its representations of gender and of gender relations. When looking at Italian scholarship on gender and media, it is striking to notice the scarcity of literature on these themes, especially by media and communications experts (Giomi 2012). Scholars have underlined the minor role women play in Italian media institutions, both at the levels of executive positions and of performance, while being accompanied by an over-exposure and -visibility (Zanardo 2010; Capecchi 2007; Buonanno 2005), such that Buonanno (2005) has devised the phrase '*visibilità senza potere*' [visibility without power]. Consequently, a

large part of the scholarship on gender and the media has focussed on the female body, its representation and exposure in mainstream media (especially television), and the effects that such exposure has on the female public, largely ignoring other media and issues.

According to Benini (2013) 'the Italian media is primarily focused on the hegemony of the culture of beauty in the representation of women … and in the sexualization of culture, saturating the mediascape with a mainstreamed sexual and pornographic discourse' (p. 89). This is undoubtedly true, and indeed one of the areas most developed in scholarship on women and media in Italy has been the critique of representations of women's bodies, increasingly hyper-sexualised and complying with ever-narrowing beauty canons and ideals. Scholars generally focus on the unrealistic representation of women's bodies, arguing that they reflect canons of beauty grounded on male desire. The 'male gaze' becomes internalised, women unconsciously judging themselves and other women in terms of male desire (Giomi 2012; Verza 2009; Marzano 2010; Zanardo 2010).

Among the work that has been produced in Italy on the media representation of women in Italy, it is important to mention the documentary by Lorella Zanardo (Zanardo et al. 2009), *Il Corpo Delle Donne* [The Body of Women]. The documentary must be credited for giving visibility to the problematic representation of women and their bodies in national television. Lorella Zanardo, whose experience in communication comes from having been on the production side, has managed to enter mainstream debate and become relatively well known in Italy through her documentary/critique, in which she takes issue with the commodification of the female body on the television medium. The documentary has since been broadcast on numerous television programmes, as well as been freely available online.[5] She has since been active in an education project, called *Nuovi Occhi per la TV e i media* [New Eyes for TV and media] directed to younger generations in order to provide them with the skills and knowledge to decode media images, without being affected by those considered detrimental (Nuovi Occhi Per la TV/Formazione 2011).

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[5] http://www.ilcorpodelledonne.net/lorella-zanardo/

Zanardo also published a book based on the research conducted for the documentary, also called *Il Corpo delle Donne* (2010), in which she refers media and sociology scholarship to support her arguments. Zanardo (ibid.) argues that television presents a narrow, unrealistic and counterfeited kind of beauty, and calls for a more authentic portrayal of 'real' women. Ultimately, the documentary (2009) and the following book (2010) represents a call to arms, Zanardo invoking 'a strong reaction against the use of women as decoration, incompetent entertainers, mere sexual objects or fetishes in their 'to-be-looked-at-ness' for the male gaze, which is internalized by female audiences as the 'objective' normative gaze on female beauty' (Benini 2013, p. 95).

However, there are several problems with Zanardo's (2010) work. Zanardo (ibid.) uses a somewhat essentialist language, imposing a difference between the bodies on television 'made by men' and the bodies of 'authentic' women outside of the screen, suggesting that there is such a thing as a 'real' woman identity. The dichotomisation of the 'fake' women in the media against the *'donne che lavorano, s'impegnano e hanno uno scopo nella vita* [women who work, apply themselves and have a meaningful life]' (Zanardo in Garibaldo & Zapperi 2012, p. 27), results in a homogenisation and alienation of the women who work in television, while imposing a normative femininity that relates to Zanardo's own social positioning: white, heterosexual, educated, middle-class, professional (Garibaldo & Zapperi 2012). Consequently, the analysis lacks a focus on other axis of identity which participate not only in women's lives and self-definition, but also heavily influences the representation of their bodies in mainstream media.

Ultimately, in Zanardo's (2010) work, and in that of several feminist intellectuals (Boccia et al. 2009; Melandri 2009; Rangeri 2007; Marzano 2010; Campani 2009; Pallotta 2000), the media is problematically framed as a distortion of the real world, young people as helpless victims who passively absorb televised images, and women who feel empowered in their post-feminist subjectivity as suffering a kind of from false consciousness. Nonetheless, she acutely argues, along with several Italian scholars (Benini 2013; Capecchi 2009; Giomi 2012; Casalini 2011a; Dominijanni 2014a), that the care of the body

participates in a narcissistic and individualist project grounded on personal 'choice', participating in wider discourses that she calls post-feminist (even though she does not reference literature developed abroad) which emphasise individuality, self-sufficiency and freedom of choice.

The literature outlined above is thus in line with the customary attention of Italian feminism on sexual difference, which implies a structural difference between women and men, and the need to find the woman underneath the impositions of the patriarchy (embodied in the figure of the dumb, inauthentic and fabricated television showgirl). Moreover, 'difference' between the genders takes precedence over other markers of identity, the literature largely neglecting how many media representations are not just gendered, but are products of intersecting discourses about gender, race, sexuality and class. Furthermore, to distinguish between the body '*fatto da donne*' [women-made] and the televised body '*fatto da uomini*' [man-made] (Verza 2009, p. 66) establishes womanhood as something that exists outside of and untouched by media representations. Hence, by focusing on stereotypes and 'unrealistic representations' of women's roles and bodies, these authors neglect the role of the media in creating the gender definitions of our time.

A different approach to these images is suggested in Dominijanni's (2014a) latest work. Dominijanni is not a media scholar, but a philosopher and journalist. Consequently, her work on media representations appears to be more an intellectual commentary than a rigorous investigation. Nonetheless, this work is important because of the dominance of Dominijanni among the feminist voices that have emerged in the past 5 years, and because of the employment of bodies of theory on which I draw as well, although we reach different conclusions. Indeed, Dominjianni references Foucault's work on biopower and Butler's gender theory to argue that media representations of femininity are not necessarily 'fake', but that they are performances (in the sense that Butler intends) of an imagined 'original' femininity: submissive to and compliant with male power. According to the author, this manifests the fact that patriarchy has been undermined by feminist

achievements, images such as these simply being the attempt to cling onto an illusion of male power

To support her post-patriarchy theory she argues: 'Italian women "like themselves, they don't need others' validation, they feel free and autonomous" and they think they are wrong when they imitate male behaviours; work "is personal realisation, independence, freedom", "each one feels capable of doing whatever she believes right" and she strives forward, despite the stereotypes and the double, even triple, bourden that falls on her shoulders; none, or almost none, would give up motherhood neither for work nor for a man' (Dominijanni 2014a, p. 214).[6] Via this list of evidence, taken from an article published on *Repubblica* (17/01/2001), Dominijanni wishes to show how Italian women have moved beyond patriarchy – they are self-assured, independent, free and autonomous; they do not need male validation, approval or even their presence; they are driven and dedicated, in equal parts to work and/or motherhood - despite the attempt of the post-patriarchal system to depict them as subservient to male power.

Hence, while Dominijanni's (2014a) aims to be a critique of the emergence of a neoliberal subjectivity for women in Berlusconism, her focus on subjectivity reproduces the customary attention of Italian feminist thought on '*partire da sè* [starting from the self]'. The focus on subjectivity and '*libertà femminile* [feminine freedom]' comes at the cost of analysing the social inequalities that still tarnish women's lives every day, which are not only related to gender, but also to race, immigrant status, sexuality, and so on. Indeed, to undermine issues of labour, domestic work, education, etc., as she explicitly does, while claiming that women are liberated and satisfied, is not only naive in the face of previous arguments about processes of neoliberal subjectivation, but contributes to an individualisation of experience that shies away from wider issues of social inequality.

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6 *le donne italiane "si piacciono, non hanno bisogno di avere da altri il riconoscimento del loro valore, si sentono libere e autonome" e pensano di sbagliare quando imitano i comportamenti maschili; il lavoro "è realizzazione personale, indipendenza, libertà", "ognuna si sente in grado di poter fare quello che crede" e va avanti malgrado gli stereotipi e la fatica doppia e tripla che le cadono addosso; nessuna, o quasi, rinuncerebbe alla maternità né per il lavoro né per un uomo.*

Furthermore, the fact that she uncritically references a newspaper article that takes its data from a study by the women's magazine *Elle* is very problematic, since women's magazines are among the strongest upholders of neoliberal values and subjectivities (McRobbie 1991; Blackman 2005; Gill 2007a; Favaro 2017).

Furthermore, while this work mentions in passing the fact that the representation of femininity in the media is heterogeneous, the focus is still on the *velina* - the television show girl - and her participation in the power-sex-money nexus established by Berlusconi,[7] the critique not being informed by other axis of subjectivity, such as race, nationality, sexuality, and so on. Moreover, while there is a recognition of the power of interpellation of media images, the author indirectly places herself and her feminist colleagues outside of this frame, supporting a separation between '*libertà femminile* [feminine freedom]' and '*libertà neoliberale* [neoliberal freedom]', which is however little theorised. Hence, while Dominijanni (2014a) is critical of the binary true/fake femininity and acknowledges the fact that media images have a productive force, she nonetheless continues to imply an 'us *vs* them' contraposition, neglecting to acknowledge the way processes of subjectivation (and media images) affect each one of us.

In this research project, I wish to detach myself from most of the literature produced in Italy, in order to understand how media representations of female bodies, subjectivities and sexualities participate in reproducing normative gender identities and bodies, as well as reproducing unequal power relations which permeate different spheres of Italian culture and society. Indeed, although Berlusconi is frequently considered the source and cause of the sexism of Italian media, little work has been produced on the interlinking of his political practice, media representations and culturally intelligible forms of femininity. This project aims at doing exactly this and provide an overview of the gender discourses

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7   The name *velina* originated within the popular comedy/news show *Striscia la Notizia* [News slide] in the early 1990s, in which scantly dressed and voluptuous 20-something women would emerge, often in skates, to deliver the news (called *Veline*) to the older male presenters. Since then, the term has become common place to refer to any young woman who participates in television shows without really contributing to the delivery of the program.

that float across political and social institutions, and media representations of femininity and female sexuality, in order to expose how Italian culture is not just simply sexist and misogynist, but is more ambivalent, contradictory and multifaceted when analysing femininity and female sexuality.

Hence, I need to borrow from literature that has been produced in the UK and claim that Italian culture is neither a neo-patriarchy, nor a post-patriarchy, but is instead a post-feminist culture, with Berlusconi playing a central role in its implementation and dissemination. The theory on post-feminism developed in the field of UK Cultural Studies is introduced below, in order to fully situate this research project within this tradition.

Understanding post-feminist media and culture

Since the 80s the term 'post-feminism' has begun to circulate in mainstream as well as in academic culture. The concept was coined within mainstream media to describe a new phase for women, now liberated not only from male domination, but also from the constricting and dogmatic demands of a feminism considered to be too radical, too moralistic and too exclusive (Casalini 2011b). Since post-feminism has become of academic interest, it has been given several different interpretations, some positive, such as the work by Genz (2006) and some extremely negative, such as the work by Faludi (1991) and Levy (2006). Within these debates the works of McRobbie (2004; 2009) and Gill (2007a; 2007b, 2008) stand out because they were the first to critically explore the bound relationship between post-feminism and the media, and have argued that there is a need to complicate backlash theories to better understand post-feminist culture and its grip on young women today (Gill 2007a; McRobbie 2004; McRobbie, 2009).

McRobbie (2009) argues that a form of gender awareness has come to characterise many Western cultures. Feminist values (mainly liberal) are endorsed in a variety of institutions such as education, law, and to some extent media, employment and medicine (McRobbie 2004). Furthermore, feminine successes in the workplace, in education and in society are paraded as markers of equality and of meritocracy (McRobbie 2009). This is representative

of the way in which feminist discourses have been appropriated by the mainstream, where a feminist ethic has been substituted by a form of personal liberation, grounded on the tropes of 'empowerment', 'choice', 'agency', 'lifestyle' and an entitlement to sexual pleasure (McRobbie 2009). While such liberal tropes have been integrated in popular discourses, the movement as a whole is often vilified and attacked, made to look aged, redundant and passé. Therefore, McRobbie (2009) claims, women are cast in a 'double entanglement' (p. 13), they are allowed a 'notional form of equality' (p. 2), in terms of participation in the public spheres of work, education, leisure and consumer culture, as long as they abandon any attachment to an active feminist agenda.

The government and the media thus appear to be working side by side in the promotion of post-feminism, especially in relation to young women, who become 'subjects *par excellence,* and also subjects of excellence' (McRobbie 2009, p. 15)*.* Hence, women are called forth in what McRobbie (2009) call 'spaces of luminosity' (p. 54), which give them visibility and casts them as symbols of gender equality and meritocracy. She prefers the Deleuzian term 'luminosity' as opposed to Foucault's 'panopticon', since this 'theatrical effect [...] softens, dramatises and disguises the regulative dynamics' (ibid.). Thus, these luminosities work to emphasise women's equality on the public sphere, while concealing the longstanding inequalities which still burden women's lives in both the private and the public sphere. Women are encouraged to enter a new gender regime, in which they are allowed a degree of freedom, carrying with it the impression of a distance from tradition, while at the same time being subjected to a new form of control. In other words, media and neoliberal politics have worked together, creating a new form of governmentality for young women, while at the same time 'undoing' feminism, the space most fitting to threaten the status quo.

Another important contribution to the study of post-feminist culture is Gill's work (2007a; 2007b; 2008) in which post-feminism is framed in terms of a 'sensibility', where feminist and anti-feminist themes cohabit, often in contradictory ways. Although McRobbie and Gill come from very different backgrounds and build their arguments on different objects of enquiry and through different theoretical perspectives, their work nonetheless presents

some overlap. Gill (2007b) argues that, in its contradictory nature, post-feminism is a clear response to feminism, being marked by an assimilation and rejection, expression and disavowal of feminist ideas. Women are hailed through discourses of agency, empowerment and choice, while at the same time they must exercise strict self-surveillance and -discipline, as well as presenting themselves in terms of heterosexual desirability.

Furthemore, similarly to McRobbie (2009), Gill (2008) draws a connection between post-feminism and neoliberal ideology and argues that post-feminism is a new discoursive phenomenon closely linked to neoliberalism. She argues that neoliberalism, with its emphasis on the rational, calculating and self-regulating individual, has become a form of governmentality which participates in the construction of modern subjectivity. Post-feminist subjectivity, being framed in the mainstream as active, freely chosen and self-reinventing, bears a very strong resemblance to the ideal subject of neoliberalism, such that Gill (2008) is moved to ask: 'could it be that neoliberalism is *always already gendered,* and that women are constructed as its ideal subjects?' (p. 443).

Developing a Post-feminist critique for understanding gendered subjects and the media in Italy

Through the employment of theories on post-feminism such as McRobbie's (2004; 2005; 2008; 2009; 2013) and Gill's (2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2008) this thesis can engage in an analysis of post-feminist subjectivity and sexuality not in terms of a return to a time before feminism or as a backlash against it, but as a novel permutation of gender relations closely interconnected with processes of neoliberalisation. Thus, these theories allow for an engagement with new forms of subjectivity that circulate in Italian culture today, and portrayed in the media, not as 'fake' or subjugated to male power, as many Italian feminists claim, but as intrinsic to and fundamental for neoliberal governmentality in Italy, in that they support a personal ethic that is centred upon individualism, empowerment, 'choice' and lifestyle, rather than active political engagement.

Hence, by relying on this body of work, I argue that the current situation in Italy cannot be described as either neo-patriarchy nor post-patriarchy, but needs to be understood in terms of a post-feminist culture that has been implemented and strengthened under the cultural and political hegemony of Berlusconi. I also argue that the media has had, and continues to have, a fundamental role in reproducing the culture of Berlusconism and its discourses of genders and gender relations. The effect is that women are placed in an ambivalent position: on the one hand, they come to embody the free, autonomous and entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism; while, on the other hand, they are subjected to old and new forms of sexism and misogyny.

Thus, this research project analyses how the political and cultural climate of Berlusconism has been built on a specific configuration of gender and sexuality, and the way the media participates in its definition and regulation. To do so, I have combined a Foucauldian analysis of the cultural hegemony of Belusconism, by looking at the interlacing of media networks with networks of power, with the analysis of three case studies. Ultimately, through this thesis I uncover the way media representations participate in the culture of Berlusconism by producing and reproducing discourses about female subjectivity and sexuality, normalising a post-feminist culture that outlives Berlusconi's active presence in Italian politics.

Through the analysis of the cases I show how the media takes an active role in policing the boundaries of normative femininity and sexuality, reproducing the misogyny and sexism that characterises the culture of Berlusconism. The case studies have been chosen on the grounds that women's subjectivity and sexuality have played a major role within them: the case study on Ruby Rubacuori concerns the portrayal of commercial sexuality, the one on Amanda Knox is about violent eroticism, and the case study on Sara Tommasi is about the media's association of an expressive and open sexuality with mental health issues. These cases also entail a court case; indeed, it is the connection between the juridical system and the media that creates a space of subjectification of femininity, these cases contributing in the definition and policing of the boundaries of intelligible femininity. Hence, the case studies expose the complex layers of meaning that are

constructed to provide some map of intelligibility for emergent forms of post-feminist femininity and sexuality.

Throughout this research project, I wish to demonstrate how women have entered what McRobbie (2009) calls 'spaces of luminosity', through which women are accorded visibility and social importance, while at the same time becoming subjected to an increasingly restricting gender regime. The case studies that I present are fundamental for the understanding of post-feminism in Italy, as they portray the tensions around the figuration of young femininity in Berlusconism. I borrow the term 'figuration' from Haraway (1997), for whom 'figurations emerge out of discursive and material semiotic assemblages that condense diffuse imaginaries about the world into specific forms or images that bring specific worlds into being' (Weber 2016, p. 15). The phallic girl Amanda Knox, the young prostitute Ruby Rubacuori and the mentally ill Sara Tommasi, represent different facets of the figuration of post-feminist young femininity in Berlusconism.

The centrality of these women's subjectivities, bodies and sexuality in the cases and their framing as sites of fascination and titillation provide evidence to the claim that women's bodies, subjectivities and sexualities have taken a central role in Berlusconism. At the same time, they also show the way women's bodies, subjectivity and sexuality continue to be policed and scrutinised, at a time in which their equality to men is supposedly common sense, while feminist interventions on most of these case studies appear to be virtually absent. Ultimately, these cases show that the sphere of female sexuality is characterised by a profound ambivalence, on the one hand women are allowed an individualised sexual freedom, whilst on the other hand an active female sexuality continues being an object of fright, fear, disgust and incredulity.

Outline of the thesis

The first chapter of the thesis responds to the limitations of Italian scholarship on gender and the media through the employment of the post-Marxist work of Stuart Hall, the poststructuralist framework of Michel Foucault on power and the subject, Butler's

conceptualisation of gendered subjectivation, and the work on post-feminist sexuality by Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill, among others. In this chapter, I argue that it is only through a combination of Foucault and Hall that I can fully account for the way institutionalised and non-institutionalised forces cooperate for the production and management of bodies, subjectivities and social reality. However, while gender and sexuality played a fundamental part in Foucault's earlier work, these themes were not as prominent in his analysis of neoliberalism, an area which this thesis aims to develop more fully. The work by McRobbie and Gill provide some important insight, however more work is to be done in order to fully explore the role gender and sexuality play within Italian neoliberalism.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the methodology of this research project. I describe how the thesis is based on the combination of a Foucauldian genealogical approach and a Cultural Studies-inspired case study method, in order to detect the discourses of gender and sexuality that circulate in Italian culture and media. The chapter also describes how a feminist poststructuralist position, in regards to the process of knowledge production, informs the methodology; this is built on feminist critiques to positivist values and objectives, namely 'universality', 'objectivity' and 'value neutrality'. Contrary to this scientific tradition, I argue that feminist self-reflexivity about the position of the researcher, and its impact on the process of knowledge production, is the best way to make 'good' research. I then continue by showing the connection between genealogy, the case study method that I have selected, and the kind of discourse analysis that I employ for the study of media texts.

Chapter 3 presents an analysis of Berlusconi's time in power, that documents what Foucault would call 'the conditions of possibility' (Foucault 1972, p. 161) for the representations of gender and sexuality that I analyse in later chapters. His political and cultural project is framed in terms of a neoliberal, authoritarian and populist political regime, highly mediated, in which discourses of gender and sexuality play a central role. Hence, the chapter first explores the neoliberal, authoritarian and populist character of Berlusconism. Secondly, the chapter analyses the fundamental role of Berlusconi's media

experience and power in his ascent to political leadership, employing it as a means to gather popular consent while using a mediatic populism. Lastly, the chapter analyses the ambivalent ways in which womanhood and female sexuality are instrumentally employed in Berlusconi's political project and rhetoric. Ultimately, the chapter's argument is that gender and sexuality have had a central role during Berlusconi's time in power, bringing about an array of discursive strategies which restrain and control women's subjectivities, sexualities and behaviours, at times taking the form of sexist, misogynistic, and aggressive hate speech.

The thesis then moves on to the analysis of the case studies. Chapter 4, 'Ruby Rubacuori: At risk girls vs post-femininist young woman', investigates the press coverage of the events involving Berlusconi, the Bunga Bunga parties he held in his villa, and the purchase of sexual favours from some of the female participants at these parties. The chapter focuses in particular on Karima El Mahroug, alias Ruby Rubacuori (Ruby Heartstealer), the young woman at the centre of the trial against Berlusconi for exploitation of underage prostitution. The analysis reveals a dichotomy in the representation of Ruby Rubacuori and her sexuality, that maps an understanding of women as either victims, and thus with a diminished agency, or as fully in control and solely responsible for their actions. Discourses about race and otherness also play a central role in the construction of Ruby, contributing in an exoticisation and eroticisation of otherness. Ultimately, the subject position which dominates is the one of an individualist, autonomous, rational, agentic sex worker, social inequalities playing no part in processes of subjectivation and life choices.

Chapter 5 focuses on Amanda Knox and analyses the press coverage of the trials of Amanda Knox, Raffaele Sollecito and Rudy Guede for the murder of the English student Meredith Kercher in Perugia on 2nd November 2007. The chapter investigates the discursive strategies that are employed to reinsert the disruptive figure of 'the woman who kills' within acceptable and normative forms of femininity and female sexuality. Similarly to the previous case study, the representation of Amanda's subjectivity and sexuality is along two very differing axes - one of the demonic phallic girl/femme fatale, the other as a victim of media's mis-representation. Differently from the Ruby Rubacuori

case however, an active sexuality for the woman involved results unintelligible, being associated with deviance and homicidal instinct (and linked with her white American femininity). The victim status and its association with a docile and domestic sexuality becomes the only viable and 'live-able' subjectivity for the woman involved.

Chapter 6 concerns the case of a small celebrity, Sara Tommasi, and the media representation of her 'rise and fall' narrative - from exceptional and promising ideal post-feminist woman to suffering from mental health issues manifested in hyper-sexual statements and behaviours. Differently from the two previous case studies, this presents a more complex representation of femininity. However, this does not work to portray femininity in any less sexist and misogynistic terms, on the contrary, the media representation of the case fully participates in the sexist culture of Berlusconism by normalising madness as inherent to femininity. Furthermore, the association of sexuality with mental health issues works similarly to the previous case to 'other' an active female sexuality, in particular the notion that a woman might enjoy participating in pornography. As in the previous case studies, the redemption of the 'fallen' woman consists in the return to a heterosexual, docile, domestic and reproductive sexuality.

In the concluding chapter I argue for the importance of exploring the figuration of femininity under Berlusconism in the face of recent national events and changes. Thus, I respond to the questions on the relationship between the peculiarities of Italian culture and media, and the new gender regime that has characterised Berlusconism, that have structured the investigation: the role of Berlusconi and the media in shaping a particular cultural climate in Italy; the lines of continuity between Berlusconi's rhetoric and media representations in producing, reproducing and policing normative forms of femininity and female sexuality; and questioning the virtual absence of post-feminist interventions in the gender discourses that circulate in the media. I describe how young femininity has emerged as a barometer of social change in the national popular imagination, and the way the media produces a map on intelligibility of the figuration of post-feminist femininity, reproducing the sexism and misogyny that has characterised Berlusconism, and that continue to be manifest in Italian media and culture today.

Chapter 1: Employing poststructuralist theory and the Cultural Studies tradition to overcome the limitations of Italian scholarship on gender and the media

As I have argued in the introduction to this thesis, the main issue with media scholarship produced in Italy is the important gender blindness which characterises it. Indeed, introductory texts to the study of media rarely, if ever, mention gender as an important category of analysis, or feminist critiques bringing important contributions to the study of media (examples of this gender blindness are Abruzzese & Borrelli's [2000], Mancini & Abruzzese [2008], Sorice [2009]). Furthermore, when gender is addressed the frameworks for its analysis ultimately conceptualise media as misrepresenting society, women and their bodies (Pallotta 2000; Verza 2009; Zanardo 2010).

This chapter aims to address the limitations of Italian feminist thought by showing how Foucault's (1976, 1980, 1991a, 1991b, 2010) work on power and subjectivation, Hall's (1988, 1992, 1996a, 1996b, 2007) Gramscian work on hegemony and articulation, and McRobbie (2004, 2005, 2008, 2009) and Gill's (2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008, 2009) work on post-feminism are fundamental for my analysis of both Italian culture at large and media culture in particular. These insights allow me to conceptualise Berlusconism as a hegemonic project, in which the media played a fundamental role by articulating representations of femininity and female sexuality, which are not imaginary or 'fake' as Italian feminism has so far described, but work to secure the status quo and existing relations of power.

Hence, the undertaking of the chapter is to present the theory that allows me to move beyond the issues of Italian scholarship, and which provides the basic theoretical framework for this research project. This involves introducing the poststructuralist work of Michel Foucault, that allows this study to analyse not only non-institutionalised forms of power, but also how power forces interact in specific networks which produce social reality, subjectivity and bodies; the chapter then moves on to explore some of the terminology and theory by Stuart Hall, which has come to describe British Cultural Studies

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for many years; then, I introduce some of the main concepts which characterise Butler's gender theory, which draws on the work of Foucault to argue that gender identity is constructed and performative.

In the last section of the chapter, I introduce the body of work that has spurred this research project and consists of its backbone: the scholarship on post-feminist sexuality developed by two British scholars, Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill. These theories are fundamental for the understanding of the emergence of a more agentic sexuality for women, and the way it participates in a wider neoliberal ethos that celebrates individualism, self-management and choice, at the expense of political engagement in feminist and other causes. However, I argue that this scholarship has neglected the way this novel subjectivity coexists with a more traditional one - the one of the agency-less victim - and that this dichotomisation needs to be further investigated.

Berlusconism and the Media: Reconceptualising Power and Subjectivity in Italy

The Problem of political economic approaches in Italian media scholarship

Italian media scholarship has focused for the most part on issues related to the political economy of the media, because of the longstanding and intricate relationship between Italian politics and Italian media (Ortoleva 1996; Hallin & Mancini 2004; Hibberd 2008). Furthermore, because of Berlusconi's great media empire, scholarship on the relationship between Berlusconi, the media and political power has mostly concentrated on issues of media ownership and control (D'Arma 2009; Balbi & Prario 2010; Mastellarini 2004; Mazzoleni 2004; Roncarolo 2004). Whereas, in the field of sociology of the media, it has been argued that Berlusconi's private television led to a revolution in the broadcasting system: Eco (1983) famously claimed that the end of State monopoly marked a shift from a 'paleo' to a 'neo' media system. Among the most important changes this shift brought, was the way commercial television began catering for groups such as housewives and pensioners, by broadcasting during times not traditionally covered by the public television, as well as the increment of regional and local output.

What is missing from many of these accounts is a more complex understanding of the relationship between political power, media and society, one that considers the interlacing and overlapping networks that connect and produce symbolic systems, discourses, subjectivities, social formations and institutions. For example, Hallin & Mancini (2004) and Balbi & Prario (2010) claim that Berlusconi's private network was so successful in the 1970s because it responded to the fast changes Italy was undergoing, such as the increasing distancing of citizens from religious and ideological faiths, changes in public morality, the development of a consumer culture, and even the rise of the feminist movement. Lacking from this perspective is an analysis of the way Berlusconi's media participated in these trends, rather than just 'riding the wave'. A more complex understanding of the way the media is involved in the production and reproduction of power and of society is only possible through the combination of the Gramscian work of Hall and Foucault's elaboration of the productive force of power and of discourse.

Reconceptualising power and subjectivity: the work of Foucault

Foucault (1976) contrasts a notion of power as repressive, limiting and constricting, with one in which power not only regulates but also creates institutions, forms of social organisation, and even subjectivities. He argues that since the 17th century the West has experienced a shift from forms of sovereign power, or power over life and death, to what Foucault calls 'bio-power'. In contrast to sovereign power, which works by means of deduction (of wealth, of goods and services, of labour and even of life), bio-power works by production: '[i]t exerts a positive influence on life, endeavours to administer, optimise, and multiply it' (Foucault 1976, p. 137). Furthermore, power is not possessed by a particular person or group and forced upon the many, but is diffused, multiple and fragmented, constituted by a network of non-centralised forces. Hence, instead of being exercised through restraint, coercion and violence, bio-power employs normalisation, by means of biological, psychological and social technologies.

Indeed, according to Foucault knowledge and power are closely interconnected, power producing, and at the same time being produced, by knowledge. Power has a role in

determining domains of 'truth', which become instrumental in founding, justifying and providing reasons and principles for regulating forms of social living and human bodies (Foucault 1991a). However, knowledge for Foucault is not just scientific knowledge, but any discourse that circulates in society and that is considered meaningful and true. Therefore, power is located within a multitude of discursive practices, which, if on the one hand create the possibilities of human action, thought and desire, on the other hand, they also set the norms through which individuals come to be subjects (are 'subjectified'). Hence, bio-power can be described as the multiplicity of discourses which take the body as their target and as their vehicle of expression (Gatens 1999).

Discourse is one of the fundamental concepts in Foucault's theory of power. He argues:

> in a society such as ours, but basically any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse (Foucault 1980, p. 93).

Hence, discourse takes a prominent role in the ways in which power is exercised and manifested in society and with the production and effects of 'truth' (Foucault 1980). As a matter of fact, discourse cannot be separated from power, being produced and producing those 'truths' which regulate society at one specific historical moment.

One of the examples that Foucault (1976) produces is the discourse around homosexuality, which from the 19th century came to define the identity of those who preferred same-sex sexual relations. Consequently, people's homosexual tendencies became identifiable within the category of homosexuality, which gave it existence as a knowledgeable sphere of human behaviour (intelligibility) (p. 44). The discourse of homosexuality had material effects on the organisation of society: medical discourses categorised homosexuality as 'deviant' and several practices, institutions and therapies emerged to contain, control and restrict the deviant behaviour. This example goes to illustrate how discourse participates in establishing and legitimising the power-knowledge networks, where the production of knowledge becomes an instrument for the regulation

and control of subjects and their bodies. This inaugurates a new understanding of the connection between power, embodiment and knowledge: the body becomes representation, medicine a political practice and disease a language. In such a way the dualistic opposition of nature/culture of modernism is dropped for the notion of a bio-power that acts on the subject as an embodied organism, a bio-cultural entity (Braidotti 1994).

Governmentality is a concept Foucault developed later in his life and which can be seen as bridging his previous work on political rationalities and the 'genealogy of the state' and the aforementioned focus on the genealogy of the subject (Lemke 2002). In the lectures printed as *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010), Foucault presents a connection between technologies of the self (which indicate the mechanisms through which individuals act upon their bodies, mind, thoughts, conduct, lifestyle), and the technologies of power (the ways in which power submits the subject to certain forms of domination). He argues that technologies of the self are not separate and independent from the technologies of power, but may work in combination with these in what Foucault defines as 'governmentality', a system of governance that relies not on repression and punishment, but on the control and regulation of life, as well as the self-disciplining of individuals (Foucault 1991b; Foucault 2010).

By employing a Foucauldian framework, this research project can move away from an analysis of Berlusconism, and its connections with neoliberalism and post-feminism, as a political endeavour by one man, and regard it instead as what Foucault (1980) calls a *dispositif*, which is:

> a thoroughly heterogenous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions–in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus [dispositif]. The apparatus [dispositif] itself is the system of relations that can be

established between these elements (p. 194).[8]

This means understanding Berlusconism as a net-like formation, including discursive as well as non-discursive practices, which has relied on a new configuration of gender relations (post-feminism) and in which the media has played a fundamental role.

Furthermore, the concept of governmentality will be immensely useful in my project for the understanding of the workings of neoliberalism and the connected emergence of post-feminist subjectivity. To understand neoliberalism in terms of governmentality allows this thesis to conceptualise post-feminist subjectivity not as an ideological subject position, which feminists in Italy think can avoid, but as the fundamental mechanism that makes the whole system function. Hence, the *veline*, as well as Berlusconi's escorts, do not represent unliberated and subjugated women to post-patriarchy or neo-patriarchy, but the product of and ideal subjects for the working of Berlusconism, with the media acting as a major discursive practice for the production and reproduction of post-feminist gender roles and gender relations.

However, Foucault's de-centered and dis-embodied power makes it difficult to grasp how specific actors and institutions, such as Berlusconi and his media, play a significant role in the construction of reality. Furthermore, the issue with 'orthodox Foucauldianism' is to place too much emphasis on the micro-dominations of subjects via the discourses of power, isolating them from the wider question of exploitation. The result is that these two areas are pitted against each other, even thought of as contradictory, while we need to create a theoretical perspective that thinks through the relations between them. This is why this thesis brings together two apparently very different approaches such as Hall's work and Foucault's: could it be that bio-power and a more traditional conceptualisation of power coexist and intersect, without always complying with one another? Indeed, it is

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[8]   Bussolini (2010) makes a case for distinguishing between 'apparatus' and *dispositif* in Foucalt's work, terms that have often been translated as the same in English versions of his work. According to him Foucault uses apparatus in a similar guise to Althusser (1971) (such as Ideological State Apparatus), while *dispositif* is more relevant to the quotation above. Hence, I have added the term in square brackets every time this appears to be more appropriate.

only via Hall's take on Gramsci's work that this thesis can argue that Berlusconi and his media were fundamental for the establishment of neoliberal governmentality in Italy and for the emergence of specifically post-feminist forms of femininity and sexuality. This approach is explored in more detail below.

Media and power: the post-Marxist work of Hall

Stuart Hall was a prolific intellectual, whose contribution to the scholarship produced in the CCCS and in the Cultural Studies discipline at large cannot be stressed enough.[9] Hall was interested in engaging in a conversation with Marxism, but with a focus on overcoming 'its orthodoxy, its doctrinal character, its determinism, its reductionism, its immutable law of history, its status as a metanarrative' (Hall 2007, p. 36). In particular, he criticised the determinism and reductionism of the relationship between the economic base and ideological superstructure found in traditional understandings of classical Marxism, finding problematic its Eurocentrism and restrictive focus on class, while ignoring issues related to race, ethnicity, racism and imperialism (Hall 2007).

Ultimately, he found the base-superstructure model of orthodox Marxism to be simplistic and reductive, and in need of further development and elaboration. Under Hall's directorship, the CCCS developed those areas that orthodox Marxism deemed secondary, such as the concepts of culture, ideology, language and the symbolic (ibid). Hall (1996b) addressed specifically the limitations of classic Marxism through engagement with French structuralism, such as the work of Althusser, but most importantly through the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's work provided an useful framework to overcome the over-simplified and deterministic relation between society, economy and culture.

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[9]   CCCS stands for Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies, from which the discipline known as British Cultural Studies originated. The Centre was founded in 1964 by Richard Hoggart. The directorship was then passed onto Stuart Hall in 1968, who remained there until 1979.

Gramsci has been one of the most influential intellectuals on Hall's thought, his development of the concept of 'hegemony' allowed Hall to conceptualise culture and ideology as relatively independent from the economic base, but nonetheless connected to existing power relations. According to Gramsci the ruling classes do not maintain their dominance through physical force or ideological indoctrination, but by securing the consent of subordinate groups through cultural leadership (Hall 1996b). Hence, culture takes a centre stage as the means through which a dominant class alliance 'extends and expands its mastery over society in such a way that it can transform and re-fashion its ways of life, its *mores* and conceptualization […] in a direction which […] favours the development and expansion of the dominant social and productive system of life as a whole' (Hall 1996b, p. 81).

The crucial point is that the leadership of the dominant alliance or 'ruling bloc' is not enforced, but is accomplished principally by winning the consent of the subordinate groups, through a process of negotiation, incorporation and concession of elements of subordinate culture, viewpoints and demands (Procter 2004). With the concept of hegemony, Hall was able to overcome the limitations of earlier Marxist positions which were unable to explain why subordinated groups not only did not revolt against the capitalist class, but also gave their free consent to their leadership. This conceptualisation introduced the notion that the battle for power is fought not at the level of the economy or the political, but at the level of ideas, with the media and other signifying institutions playing a major role in manufacturing consent.

Hence, an important contribution of Hall to the study of the media has been the understanding of the role they play in generating the frameworks through which we come to understand the world, thus re-presenting the world to us in specific ways (Hall 1992). This is profoundly different from the positions of some Italian authors such as Zanardo (2009) and Verza (2009), and the vast majority of feminist intellectuals (Boccia et al. 2009; Melandri 2009; Rangeri 2007; Marzano 2010; Campani 2009; Dominijanni 2009) who have conceptualised media images as mis-representing society, and as neglecting the bodies and subjectivities of 'real' women. Using a Hall-inspired framework can help understand

the role of the media in Berlusconi's hegemonic project - how the media participated in creating a culture which was beneficial to Berlusconi's entrance in politics. This was accomplished through 'articulating' media images in particular ways, in order to produce consent for the ideas of the powerful (Hall 1988).

The concept of 'articulation' is common to scholarship which employs Marxist theory, such as the work by Althusser, Gramsci and Laclau (Procter 2004). Hall (1996a) takes inspiration from Laclau's (1977) use of the term and describes the concept by referencing the double meaning of the term in English, indicating both the action of uttering, of speaking, as well as a specific form of connection between elements of an 'articulated' lorry, where the front and the back can, but need not, be connected to one another. Hence, he argues:

> An articulation is thus the form of connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is the linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all the time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? The so called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness'. The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily be connected (Hall 1996a, p. 141).

The role of the media from this perspective is that of articulating disparate elements in representations and narratives that support dominant relations of power in society. However, while media messages have this 'intent', consent for hegemonic forces is not necessarily achieved at all times.

The complicated matter of combining the neo-marxist work of Hall and the postructuralist work of Foucault

The work of Hall and Foucault may appear very different. The former, coming from a Marxist background and employing the work of Gramsci, identified in the powerful political and economic elite the driving forces in the establishment of cultural hegemony. Foucault, however, placed his work as a critique to the prevailing Marxist influences in the French academy, postulating instead a multiple and multi-directional power that works

more subtly and pervasively through all spheres of social, political and cultural life. Furthermore, when the work of Foucault was introduced in the Cultural Studies discipline, Hall welcomed the concept of discourse, but could not come to terms with Foucault's conceptualisation of power, claiming that the abandonment of the 'ideological' leads to a disavowal of a systematic analysis of power as a structuring force (Hall 1996a). Lastly, Foucault was almost celebratory of neoliberalism towards the end of his life (Veyne with Zamora 2014), while Hall continued to be critical of neoliberalism all through to its incarnation in Blair's 'third way' (Hall 2011).

However, there are also many similarities between the scholars. Hall and Foucault are both committed to producing historical and anti-essentialist theorisations: Foucault's radical contextualism is built on similar presumptions to Hall's conjuncturalism (Fiske 2005). Both authors are less concerned with issues of origins and causality, than with questions of conditions of possibility and overdetermination. Both recognise the non-unity of the subject, but equally reject a postmodern dismissal of identity, arguing instead that identity and difference are historically and contextually determined. Hall and Foucault are similarly interested in the relationship between truth and power, and how regimes of truth are employed in the service of existing power relations. Neither assumes the 'masses' to be passively manipulated, but sees in the subject the active struggle of power and politics.

Furthermore, in his chapter 'The Meaning of New Times' (1989) Hall came to express himself in a very Foucauldian way, claiming:

> Of course, 'civil society' is no ideal realm of pure freedom. Its micro-worlds include the multiplication of points of power and conflict - and thus exploitation, oppression and marginalisation… What we lack is any overall map of how these power relations connect and their resistances. Perhaps there isn't, in that sense, one 'power game' at all, more a network of strategies and powers and their articulations (p. 130).

Thus, there are many overlappings between these two seemingly different theoretical perspectives.

By combining the scholarship of Hall and Foucault, this thesis aims to re-introduce elements of post-Marxism within poststructuralist analyses of power, claiming that embodied and disembodied forms of power can coexist, without always complying with one another. This approach accounts for the presence of micro-processes of domination alongside wider systems of exploitation within the same social formation. Hence, while the work of Foucault allows an understanding of the way different forms of power interact, and their very material effects at the level of the subject, Hall's focus on embodied forms of power takes into account the way certain subjects and institutions play an important role in the networks of power, especially in authoritarian forms of governmentality, such as Berlusconi's.

However, to be able to theorise the embodiment of gender as part of the process of subjectivation, I need to refer to the work of Judith Butler, which is the topic of the next section. Indeed, through the Foucauldian work of this author, a critique of Italian feminist thought and its dependency on 'difference' can be built. Ultimately, the quest to find the 'real' woman behind the constructions of patriarchy (such as media images) is a useless endeavour; it is important instead to understand the way cultural discourses of gender produce and police the boundaries of intelligible femininity at a specific historical moment.

Employing Butler to understand gender subjectivation

As the introduction clearly outlined, Italian scholarship on gender and the media presents some issues in relation to its conceptualisation of media representations of gender. By writing about 'stereotypes' and 'unrealistic representations' it assumes that the relationship that these images have to 'real' women is one of mis-representation. Media culture is understood to be a masculine creation, with women needing to dispose of man-made categories and to find their own subjectivity. By employing the work of Judith Butler, I argue that images and representations of femininity participate in the production and reproduction of culturally intelligible bodies, subjectivities and sexualities for women, as well as producing the norms that dictate sanctioned forms of being and behaving. Thus, I

insist that despite our best intentions, nobody is ever untouched by the discourses that circulate and inform media representations of gender and sexuality.

Butler (1990) draws from Foucault's work on power/discourse and marks identity as a discursive effect, meaning that identity is not pre-social, unified and coherent, but it is constructed as such through the working of discourse. Hence, she claims that individuals do not exist prior to or outside of discourse; instead their subjectivity is created through it. This process is called subjectivation (Foucault 2010), in the sense that the individual acquires its status as subject whilst being subjugated to power (Butler 1997a). Thus, Butler claims that there is 'no doer behind the deed' (Butler 1990, p. 142), no agent before the action. In other words, Butler rejects the modernist 'subject' in order to affirm a constructed, fragmented and multiple subjectivity.

In her book *Excitable Speech* (1997a), Butler combines Althusser's notion of 'subjection' (1971) with Foucault's process of 'subjectivation' and develops a nuanced theory of subject formation and constraint. According to Althusser, ideology constitutes the subject, such that the subject and its consciousness emerge from a process of ideological 'interpellation'. Althusser (1971) famously defines ideology as 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (p. 153), by which he means that ideology works as a medium between the individual and the reality of living in a capitalist society, smoothing over the contradictions and problems of living in such a system. According to Althusser (1971) ideology is spread mainly through the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), where this category includes most of the institutions which are in a way or another connected to the State, such as the educational system, the media, but also the trade unions and the church.

At the same time, Althusser believed that ideology, transmitted through the ISA, provides specific subject positions, which people come to inhabit in a process of 'subjection'. Hence, he argues that 'all ideology has the function (which defines it) of "constructing" concrete individuals as subjects' (Althusser 1971, p. 171). 'Interpellation' is the term that he employs to describe this process of subjection, proposing the example of a police

officer hailing an individual with the call 'Hey, you there!'. By the very act of responding to the call, the individual becomes the subject to which the call was intended. He is therefore interpellated into the subject position constituted by and within that ideology, subjected to its specific patterns of thought and modes of behaviour, while at the same time misrecognising itself to be autonomous and free.

Butler (1997a; 1997b) takes this conceptualisation, and combining it with Foucault's theory of the productive power of discourse, conceptualises ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses as discursive. Hence, she argues:

> The term "subjectivation" carries the paradox in itself: *assugetissement* denotes both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection – one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power, a subjection which implies a radical dependency. […] Subjection is, literally, the making of a subject, the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. […] Hence subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject not its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction in production, a restriction without which the production of the subject cannot take place, a restriction through which that production takes place (Butler 1997b, pp. 84-84).

Therefore, Butler stresses the dependence of the subject to power, as being subjected to power is a condition of becoming a subject in the first place.

Butler (1997a; 1997b) emphasises the affective dimension of subject formation, stressing the subject's dependence and vulnerability to the terms of their subjectivation, the speech acts which produce us as subjects. In her work *Excitable Speech* (1997a) Butler specifically focuses on injurious speech acts and hate speech, explaining how the subject's dependence on speech acts for its own very existence also means the subject's vulnerability to forms of hate speech. She argues:

> There is no way to protect against that primary vulnerability and susceptibility to the call of recognition that solicits existence, to that primary dependency on a language we never made in order to acquire a tentative ontological status. Thus we sometimes cling to the terms that pain us because, at a minimum, they offer us some form of social and discursive existence (Butler 1997a, p. 26).

The 'radical dependency' (Butler 1997b, p. 83) of the subject to power-discourse translates into the vulnerability of the subject to 'speech acts' or, in the same measure, to their absence. Indeed, 'not being named may be just as hurtful and being named, such that one may prefer acknowledgement, even if through hate speech, rather than complete erasure' (Butler 1997a, p. 41).

Butler also draws on Foucault to expose the social construction of gendered bodies and the inequalities which are generated from the binary male/female. Butler (1990) critiques the modernist notion that the individual is born with a fixed, pre-social and coherent identity. Butler (1990) claims that one way in which identity is embodied is through the category of gender, which is believed to be immutable, natural and essential. She argues instead that, just as identity, gender is too a fiction, and one which creates the gender characteristics and behaviours that are said to be natural and universal. However, this does not imply a 'self' which exists prior to the assumption of gender, and which then internalises gendered characteristics: for Butler 'there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1990, p. 25). Hence, according to Butler, gender is not at the origin of the subject, nor after/outside of it, but constitutes some of the terms of its subjectivation.

The term 'performativity', borrowed from Speech Act theory, implies the creative force of discourse (Austin 1962). A child is born into discourse, and when she is hailed with the sentence 'it's a girl!', this does not explain a state of affairs, but initiates a string of interpellations which will lead the child into her gendered self (Butler 1993). For power to endure, its regulatory mechanisms must be reiterated; therefore, gender norms produce unreachable idealisations of gender identity and need constant repetition in order to persist (Butler 1993). Thus, gender is 'an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualised and reproduced in reality once again' (Butler 1988, p. 410). Media images and representations provide some of these gender scripts, since they produce and

reproduce gender discourses which create the gender definitions, meanings and identities they allegedly describe.

In Butler's theory heterosexuality has a fundamental role in the construction of two separate genders. For Butler (1990) a 'stable' and 'coherent' sense of gender is the result of the assumption of those characteristics, habits and gestures which make an individual intelligible to society, where intelligibility is understood in terms of the coherence of gender (masculinity or femininity), sex (male or female) and desire (heterosexuality). She understands the gender binary and the continuity between the categories of sex, gender and desire to result from and concur in the heterosexual matrix of Western societies, which instates normative heterosexuality as the only intelligible option.

Therefore, Butler (1994) claims, '[a]n analysis of sexual relations apart from an analysis of gender relations is impossible. Their interrelation may have a necessity that is neither causal nor fixed for all the time' (p. 9). Indeed, gender and sexuality are systematically intertwined, especially in such a time where femininity is invested with a variety of sexual possibilities, as I outline below. However, this should not be interpreted as a deterministic view of subject formation. Indeed, for power to endure, its regulatory mechanisms must be reiterated, but are also allowed to fail. The subject is the locus of such reiteration, so that agency resides in the possibility of repeating power's regulatory schemas in novel, unexpected ways (Butler 1993). Consequently, for Butler, the deregulatory play of gender attributes would have the effect of exposing both the fiction of gender identity and the mechanisms of the heterosexual matrix.

Poststructuralist theories that celebrate movement, transformation and becoming have been criticised for neglecting the physical body, consequently falling into the traditional Western patriarchal philosophical dichotomy body/mind, favouring the latter (and masculine) term of the binary (Bordo 1990). However, in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler states that 'the claim that a discourse "forms" the body is no simple one, and from the start we must distinguish how such "forming" is not the same as "causing" or "determining", still less is it a notion that bodies are somehow made of discourse pure and

simple' (p. 84). Therefore, Butler (1993; 1997a) is careful to redress the misunderstanding by claiming that the body is not solely a discursive effect, but is also what exceeds signification.

Butler (1993) does not rule out the influence of genetics, biology and neurology on the way individuals feel, behave or even think, but insists that our understanding of our bodies is necessarily mediated by language/discourse. Therefore, what to some looks like a disregard for the materiality of the body has to be understood in terms of the irreducible interplay of text and physicality, so that separating the two is impossible. Such a theorisation of the body is consistent with Butler's rejection of normativity and her stress on difference: the displacement of the boundary between body and mind denies any claim to the 'naturality' of any particular characteristic, so that no norm can be established and no deviance can be stigmatised.

Butler's theory has also attracted the critique that it appears to celebrate a disembodied self which is able to change gender with the same facility as one changes clothes. Bordo (1990) has pointed out how similar poststructuralist discourses of subjectivity still endorse a philosophical fantasy of transcendence, where the Cartesian split between body and mind has been reworked as a poststructuralist dream of disembodiment, the fantasy of being everywhere. She further claims that a conceptualisation of identity as multiple, fluid and flexible, risks slipping into the fantasy of becoming a multiplicity, where the individual can adopt endless embodiments and continuously shift from self to self (ibid.). Thus, by transcending the body once more, poststructuralist discourses of subjectivity refuse to recognise the fact that one is always located in space and time (Pritchard 2000).

Butler (1993) dismisses such 'bad reading', which legitimises transgressive cultural and sexual practices as uncomplicated forms of recreational resistance, by stating that a person cannot wake up in the morning and decide which gender he/she wants to be. Butler (2004) does not underestimate the importance of the material conditions in which one is born to the construction of subjectivity, always considering differences such as gender, race, sexuality, class and (dis)ability, and claims: 'not only does one need the social

world to be a certain way in order to lay claim to what is one's own, but it turns out that what is one's own is always from the start dependent upon what is not one's own, the social conditions by which autonomy is, strangely, dispossessed and undone' (p. 100).

Butler's gender identity is fundamentally different from the feminist theory that has been produced in Italy, because since subjectivity and gender identity are discursively produced, the idea of finding one's own subjectivity underneath the impositions of the Symbolic Order is an empty endeavour. According to Butler there is nothing before power's call to subjectivation, therefore there is no authentic self to which we can get to through the Italian practice of *partire da sè* [starting from one's own self], which Italian feminist thought continues to endorse. Hence, Butler's work allows this research project to distance itself from a critique of Italian media and society which dichotomises between true, authentic and liberated women against fake, man-made and/or masculinised ones, to argue that all women are subjected to and subjectified through the discourses which circulate at one specific historical moment and in one specific place. Furthermore, it allows an analysis of gender representations which takes into account other axes of identity that participate in the process of subjectivation along with gender.

Foucault and Butler in Italian scholarship on gender and the media

As outlined in the introduction, positions that engage with the work of Butler and Foucault are virtually absent in Italian feminist media scholarship, although there are exceptions. One of these is Garibaldo & Zapperi's book *Lo Schermo del Potere* [The Screen of Power] (2012). The authors, instead of claiming that television mis-represents the reality of women's lives and occupations, argue that the medium contributes to constructing reality and, hence, has also a role in defining gender and gender relations. By referencing Butler, Foucualt and de Lauretis, Garibaldo & Zapperi (ibid.) see television images in terms of 'technologies of gender' (de Lauretis 1987) that create gender identity rather than just producing an image of it. The dichotomisation between 'good reality' and 'false representations', they continue, only participates in strengthening gender stereotypes and

moralistic attitudes to gender and sexuality, producing an essentialising dichotomisation of 'good' and 'bad' women.

These authors capsize this widespread position and instead of 'othering' the *velina* (TV showgirl), or equally the showgirls who participated in Berlusconi's scandals, they acutely argue that she is the embodiment of the human condition under neoliberal capitalism, where the body, desire and youth become assets to be used, exploited and capitalised on to make a living, or even just the promise of a salary. They claim '*la velina e la "ragazza-immagine" sono in un certo senso l'incarnazione spettacolare di un corpo-macchina su cui i soggetti investono ambizioni e desideri [dove] l'investimento va inteso alla stregua di un'operazione finanziaria capace di produrre reddito* [to some extents the velina or the image-girl[10] are the spectacular embodiment of a body-machine onto which the subject's desires and ambitions are invested, where investments must be understood in terms of a financial operation capable of producing income]' (Garibaldo & Zapperi 2012, p. 52).

However, one of the issues of this work is its reliance on visual material, focusing only on the television medium. The use of 'sight', and of theoretical paradigms which develop around it, takes centre stage in the development of concepts and frameworks for understanding the role images have in the process of subject formation, neglecting how other media equally participate in the gender definitions of our time. Furthermore, the focus of the analysis is on the lines of continuity between the figure of the *velina* and what the authors call '*lo scambio sessuo-economico*' [the sexual-economic exchange] (p. 71) that has characterised Berlusconismo. While this is of great importance for the analysis of some aspects of Italian culture and of female subjectivity, this is only one side of Italian post-feminism. Indeed, women in Italy must negotiate the 'double entanglement' (McRobbie 2009, p. 13) in which they find themselves in a variety of different areas of

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[10]   Ragazza immagine is a type of occupation for young and beautiful girls that is peculiar to Italy. These women are paid to attend popular clubs and bars for the night, or to participate to private events and parties. This occupation is not limited to the female gender, young attractive men being ragazzi immagine too.

their lives (one of which is sexuality), and in a variety of different ways, as it is explored throughout this thesis.

Another exception is Capecchi's book chapter *Il Corpo Perfetto. Genere, media e processi identitari* [The Perfect Body. Gender, media and Processes of Identification] (2009). This work focuses on the mediated body, investigating the way the body has taken central place in the production of identity and the way media representations participate in its social construction. By drawing on Foucualt, Butler, McRobbie and Gill, among others, she argues that a young, beautiful and lean body has become the norm in cultural representations of both female and male genders, with the media encouraging people to work hard and improve, the body becoming a project, and this being enhanced by dieting, fitness, plastic surgery, tattoos, piercings, and so on. This focus on the self, and the message of autonomous choice that is implied, contributes to the mystification of gender inequality.

This work by Capecchi (2009) is undoubtedly an important contribution to Italian scholarship on gender and the media, introducing a number of crucial authors and perspectives for the understanding of the relationship between media images and processes of embodiment and subjectification. However, this can only be a starting point, as the body, and the increasingly stricter constraints placed on it, is only one aspect of post-feminist culture. This research wishes to expand to encapsulate how media representations of female bodies, subjectivities and sexualities work with neoliberal governmentality, with a specific focus on Italian culture. This macro-level of analysis is missing from Capecchi's (2009) insight, but is fundamental for the understanding of post-feminism as a set of cultural discourses of power. The role of post-feminist sexuality within post-feminism and neoliberalism is explored in detail below.

Reintroducing sexuality to the analysis of neoliberalism

While *in History of Sexuality Vol I* (1976) sexuality, and to a minor extent gender, was of fundamental importance in Foucault's theorisation of the emergence of biopolitics in Europe, precisely because sexuality is found 'at the juncture of the body and the

population' (p. 147), this topic area is not given any attention in his analysis of neoliberalism in *The Birth Of Biopolitics* (2010). However, gender and sexuality are of fundamental importance in the study of neoliberal govenmentality and post-feminism, especially in Italy.

Discourses about sex and sexual agency abound in contemporary media, where the post-feminist woman has become increasingly sexual or, in Gill's terms (2008), she is no longer a sexual object, but is now a 'sexual subject'. Women are depicted as practising sexual agency, being consumers of products and services of the sex industry and deliberately playing with sexism and sexist symbols associated with male desire. Attwood (2006) claims that 'a whole series of signifiers are linked to connote a new, liberated contemporary sexuality for women; sex is stylish, a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of body work, self-expression, a quest for individual fulfilment' (p. 86).

McNair (2002) sees the sexualisation of women as a positive move towards a 'democratisation of desire', claiming that the positive representation of women in control of their own sexuality has broken off the tradition of silencing female desire and has subverted societal assumptions about a passive and gentle female sexuality. However, Gill (2008) and McRobbie (2009) are not as convinced by the democratisation thesis and claim that post-feminist sexual agency, instead of liberating women from constrictions, has the effect of disciplining and constraining women's sexuality once more. Gill (2008) borrows Radner's term 'technology of sexiness' to describe this new regulatory regime, and claims that it accords women sexual agency as long as they concur in constructing themselves as the embodiment of heterosexual male fantasy.

However, Attwood (2006) accurately points out that this and similar critiques may hinder debates about how active female sexuality may be constructed in culture, adding that there is a tendency between some feminist critics to see any change in the construction of femininity as part of the 'same old' sexist discourse, thus dismissing any possible progressive element. Therefore, she argues that 'we need to move beyond the simple assumption that sexualisation is in the interest of boys and men' (Attwood 2009, p. xxii). I

agree with Attwood on this point: one cannot overlook the fact that the attention to female sexual pleasure, the relaxation of constraints around women's sexuality and the consequent possibility of exploring different sexual practices has had some positive effects on the quality of women's sexual lives and on their sexual satisfaction.

Nonetheless, the new female sexual agency of post-feminism cannot be isolated from the neoliberal rhetoric of agency, choice and self-determination, but also accountability and self-blame. As Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue, 'the ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be author of his or her own life, the creator of individual identity, is the central character of our time' (p. 22-23). Giddens (1991) and Lull (2006) similarly argue that modernity is linked with a self-reflexive 'project of the self', which is played in the field of capitalist consumption. In this context the subject is endowed with free choice, the self being freed from bodily determination such as gender, race, class and sexuality. However, individualisation also involves a heightened level of self-monitoring, individuals becoming fully responsible for their choices (Giddens 1991).

However, the accounts by Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, Lull and Giddens fail to adequately critique the trend towards individualisation, over-stressing individual agency, while ignoring the structural inequalities that continue limiting and narrowing people's choices. Feminist critics have objected to these almost celebratory narrations of agency and choice, highlighting the crucial role of gender, class, race and sexuality in determining the life chances of girls and women. For example, Scharff's (2012) and Bay-Cheng (2015) both argue that the neoliberal rhetoric of individuality, self-transformation and agency, despite its alleged inclusivity, ultimately reproduces classed and racialised exclusions. McRobbie (2009) also comments on issues of race in post-feminism, claiming that 'other' women are allowed participation in post-feminist culture, but on the condition that they abandon any markers of their 'otherness' (McRobbie 2009), as the case study in chapter 4 will further investigate.

Moreover, McRobbie (2009) has argued that the 'aggressive individualism' (p. 5) of post-feminism and the consequent responsibilisation of the individual works towards the mystification of social inequality, as failures and set backs are attributed to personal deficiencies and faults, rather than recognising the interlacing patterns of inequality and disadvantage that continue to exist in society. Hence, the result is that it is women themselves who become solely responsible for the production of the self, as well as becoming their harshest judges (see also Scharff 2011, 2012, 2015; and Budgeon 2003, 2011, 2015). This contributes to the depoliticisation of the individual and to what McRobbie (2009) describes as the 'undoing of feminism' which characterises modern Western countries.

Furthermore, in relation to sexuality, McRobbie (2009) introduces a particular 'space of luminosity', that she calls the 'phallic girl' (p. 83). She argues that in recent years women have been allowed to enter some male domains in the form of mimicry of male behaviour, by smoking, drinking, swearing, engaging in casual sex, being involved in fights, getting arrested, going to strip clubs, and so forth. McRobbie (2005; 2009) has analysed the emergence of such subjectivities and called them 'phallic' following Butler's exploration of the 'phallic lesbian', or the 'ladette'. Butler claims that the phallic lesbian may disturb the gender system by appropriating the phallus, and suggests that it may be useful for heterosexual women to do so themselves (in McRobbie 2009). McRobbie (2005; 2009) understands young women to claim equality to their male peers by engaging in traditionally masculine behaviours, and thus appropriating symbols of male power.

Sometimes the relations between the genders are reversed, as in the case with recreational sex, where young women treat their sexual escapades as a game and their conquests as trophies. The phallic girl demonstrates her equality to men by participating in the same activities, hobbies and vices. However, she is allowed to do so as long as she presents herself as clearly feminine, so not to incur in the allegation of being either a feminist or a lesbian. Her desirability is therefore not compromised as she fully presents herself in terms of heterosexual desirability (McRobbie 2009). Furthermore, young men enjoy the phallic girl's company and the consequent feeling of comradeship as she

participates in their 'laddishness'. This 'space of luminosity' is relevant to the Amanda Knox case, and is further elaborated in Chapter 5.

However, while most of the literature on post-feminism has focused on discourses of agency, choice and entrepreneurship, less work has been developed on a more traditional role for women: the agency-less victim. Indeed, while a number of scholars have remarked how 'other' women, especially muslim women, are brought in as examples of victims of a backward, patriarchal and oppressive culture (Trappolin 2005; Finlay 2006; McRobbie 2009; Farris 2012), most of this literature neglects the way Western women continue to be interpellated in terms of victims of others or of the events, such that the self-reliant, -sufficient and -advancing post-feminist woman coexists with the one of the agency-less victim, but in a way that denies the possibility of having individual agency as well as systematic vulnerability.

This thesis aims to establish the relationship between these two subjectivities, and the role they play within Italian neoliberal governmentality. Indeed, as it will be argued throughout this thesis, women and their sexuality have played a fundamental role in the establishment of Berlusconism and of a neoliberal governmentality, by being placed in the position of both empowered and agentic subjects and of victims. The dichotomous representation of women as either fully in control of their lives and choices, or as victims of the events, of others, and even of their own post-feminist subjectivity, contributes to an individualisation of experience that neglects structural inequalities and systemic disadvantage and which limit and constrain women's lives and everyday choices, as I explore in the case studies that follow.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I have claimed that the focus on sexual difference of Italian feminism is not only problematic for the analysis of media representations, which in this body of work are considered to be inauthentic and ideological, but that it is also detrimental for the feminist movement itself, which becomes exclusionary, inward looking and self-

referential. In this chapter, I have responded to the limitations of Italian feminist thought, which, I have argued, has been limited in its theorisation of the way Berlusconism has relied on a new configuration of gender relations, largely supported by media representations of femininity and female sexuality.

I have therefore argued that in order to better understand the hegemonic implementation of Berlusconism, its reliance on particular discourses of gender and female sexuality, and the role of the the media in the dissemination of these discourses, I need to employ theoretical frameworks that have been developed abroad; namely: the poststructuralist work of Michel Foucualt (1976; 1980; 1991a; 1991b; 2010), the Cultural Studies' work of Stuart Hall (1988; 1989; 1992; 1996a; 1996b; 2007), the gender theory of Judith Butler (1990; 1993; 1994; 1997a; 1997b; 2004), and the scholarship developed on post-feminist sexuality by Angela McRobbie (2004; 2005; 2008; 2009) and Rosalind Gill (2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2009). The combination of these frameworks allows this research project to better theorise how networks of power/knowledge, which run through and find expression in the media, participate in the construction of institutions, forms of social organisation and subjectivities.

In Italy, the constricted field of media analysis relating to gender has had a tendency to understand media representations of femininity and female sexuality, and the women who perform in the media, as man-made, fake, inauthentic and even 'masculine' at times (Boccia et al. 2009; Zanardo 2009; 2011; Campani 2009). With the aid of the work developed in the Cultural Studies tradition and postructuralism, I argue instead that the media does not misrepresent reality, but that it re-presents it in particular ways which often work to produce and reproduce existing power relations. As a matter of fact, I argue that the media has been one of the fundamental apparatuses of power, producing and reproducing gender discourses of femininity and female sexuality, which have been fundamental for the effective working of Berlusconism as a sexist, neoliberal and racist hegemony.

Hence, after having outlined the theoretical framework which grounds this research project, the next chapter will expose how these theoretical paradigms have affected the methodological choices I have made for the analysis of media representations of femininity and female sexuality, and the role they play in Berlusconism.

Chapter 2: Applying a feminist postructuralist method: detecting the discourses of gender in media and society.

As argued in the previous chapter, this research project employed a feminist postructuralist perspective to analyse the construction of female subjectivity in Italy. By doing so, I wished to detach myself from most of the literature produced in Italy, that generally frames media as producing a monolithic and unrealistic representation of femininity, mainly in terms of bodies and roles, which constitute a 'gender ideology', which is at best detached from 'real' women's lives, and at worst manipulates and oppresses young, vulnerable women (Zanardo 2009; Pallotta 2000; Boccia et al. 2009; Melandri 2009; Rangeri 2007; Marzano 2010; Campani 2009).

In contrast to this body of literature, this research project has been informed by the understanding that media representations of female bodies, subjectivities and sexualities participate in producing and reproducing normative gender identities and bodies, as well as reproducing unequal power relations which permeate different spheres of Italian culture and society. Hence, following this approach, there are no 'real' women untouched by media representations, nor women abiding by the 'false consciousness' sold by the media, but only subjects that come into being gendered and perform gender via (but not only) mediated representations of femininity. For this reason, and as this chapter will show, this project was designed following the insights and influence of two different yet interconnected scholars Foucault (1972; 1975; 1976; 1980; 1991; 2010) and Butler (1990; 1993; 1997a; 1997b).

In this chapter, I will show that both Foucault and Butler's works have been central in the methodological development of this research project, because the first interrogated the concept of knowledge and deconstructed the processes of knowledge production, while the latter developed an understanding of gendered subjectivity as non-essential, historical and socially constituted. Hence, I will first establish the ontological position of the research study by focusing on Foucault's theorisation of power (1976) and

subjectivation (2010), and subsequently on Butler's interpretation of Foucault's work for her conceptualisation of gendered subjectivity. However, feminist critiques to positivist values such as 'universality', 'objectivity' and 'value-neutrality' in research process provide equally important insight about this project's claims to knowledge. Thus, after the discussion of Foucault and Butler's work, this chapter will engage with some of the feminist critiques to positivist values in knowledge production, to outline the epistemological stance of this thesis and to sustain the validity of the claims made throughout its execution.

By employing the work of Foucault, Butler and feminist critiques to positivist epistemologies, I discuss how I designed this research project by focussing on discourses of gender and female sexuality which circulate in society and media texts. I have done this by combining a genealogical approach to the understanding of discourse with the case study method, influenced by the work of early feminist Cultural Studies scholars. The chapter, therefore, dwells in a description of the project: how and why I engage with Berlusconi's political and media power; the rationale behind the choice of case studies; the sources selected and why I chose these; the sampling of material to be analysed; and the methods for textual analysis.

Power, discourse and gendered subjectivation

Foucault (1976; 1977; 1980; 2010) takes issue with the notion of power as repressive, limiting and constricting, claiming instead that power not only regulates but also creates attitudes, behaviours and desires. Furthermore, according to Foucault (1980), power needs to be understood in terms of a net-like formation, which circulates in society connecting bodies, institutions, signifying systems, artefacts, and so on. Knowledge is closely interconnected with the working of power, power producing while at the same time being sustained by systems of knowledge. And ultimately, knowledge plays a fundamental role in the construction of social reality, of human bodies and their management.

As part of Foucault's theory of power, he introduces the concept of discourse. This is one of the most important terms in the whole of Foucault's work (Carabine 2001). Foucault (1972) recognises that he himself has employed the term discourse in different guises: as 'the general domain of all statements'; as 'an individualizable groups of statements'; and as 'a regulated practice which accounts for a number of statements' (p. 80). However, in the development of the methodology of this project I conclude that it is useful to think of discourse as an identifiable group of statements, which seem to create a grouping, such as the discourse of gender or the discourse of race (Carabine 2001). As Hall (1992) eloquently describes, discourse is 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment' (p. 291). At the same time, as Hall (1997) has argued, it is important to stress that Foucault's discourse does not solely encapsulate language, but is to be understood as a wider system of representation which makes the world intelligible to us.

In approaching the study of discourse, we need to be aware of the fact that discourse does not simply describe things, concepts and groups of people, but it constructs them in a certain way, normalising certain representations as *the* way reality is. Therefore, discourses have a normative force: they establish clear boundaries between what is culturally intelligible and what is not (Butler 1993). Furthermore, discourses do not simply produce meaning, but have outcomes and effects which are material and tangible. Hence, power/knowledge takes also the form of bio-power, by which Foucault describes all the techniques and mechanisms that are aimed at controlling the basic biological features of humanity.

Foucault was interested in unravelling the entanglement of knowledge, power and discourse and the way bodies, subjectivities, social relationships, ideas and truth claims are created by the interrelation of these forces. Genealogy is the name Foucault (1977) gave to the methodological approach he employed to reveal the power/knowledge networks that create and are sustained through discourses. Foucault (1980) was interested in interrogating 'the discourses of true and false, by which [he] means the

correlative formation of domains and objects and of the verifiable, falsifiable discourse that bear on them, and [...] the effects in the real world to which they are linked' (p. 116). Foucault's genealogical approach has been essential for the development of this research project, as doing discourse analysis through a Foucauldian lenses means to start from an analysis of culture rather than an analysis of language. Hence, discourse is not understood as a linguistic unit, but consisting of groups of statements which cohere in such a way as to show some regularity, and which produce both meaning and concrete and material effects.

Foucault's genealogical approach has provided one element of the theoretical grounding for the methodological choices of this research project, as I will explore in detail in the second part of the chapter. However, Butler's work on gender subjectivity has been equally important. Indeed, Foucault's genealogical approach combined with Butler's conceptualisation of gendered subjectivation have been fundamental in the development of this research project, as well as grounding its methodology.

Butler has employed Foucault's work to develop a theory of gender as non-essential, socially constituted, historical and in flux. As I have outlined in detail in the previous chapter, the Foucauldian work of Butler understands gender not as an essential characteristic of an individual, but in terms of a performance (1990). Therefore, there is no such thing as 'womanhood': it is a historical category which constructs that which it is believed to describe. The notion of gender in terms of a discursive and regulatory practice allows this thesis to investigate what discourses of femininity are normalised in Italian culture, in what way media representations participate in the construction of normative femininity, and how they regulate the boundaries of intelligible femininity and female sexuality.

Furthermore, it allows an analysis of media representations of gendered bodies and subjectivities which takes into account how different axes of identity inform and modify normative gender categories and gender relations, as well as how they participate in interrelated patterns of discrimination. This understanding, as future chapters will show,

has been important in the analysis of discourses in political and media representations of racialised and classed femininities, as well as for the analysis of inter-racial and inter-class gender relations. Therefore, while gender issues are central to this research project, Butler's poststructuralist gender theory allowed me to carry out a discourse analysis focussing not only on gender, but considering also questions of class, race, nationality, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

Although the work of Foucault and Butler were central to the development of the theoretical and methodological approach of this research, I was also largely influenced by feminist epistemology. Hence, after having introduced Foucault's approach to knowledge and its connection with power and power relations, in this section I endeavour to continue the critique of a conceptualisation of knowledge as neutral and objective through the employment of feminist approaches to epistemology and their critiques to positivism.

Feminist epistemology as critique: the researcher as subject

Epistemology is the area of philosophy that concerns itself with the study of knowledge and processes of knowledge production. More particularly, it is the study of what can be regarded as acceptable knowledge, and is defined by Alcoff (1998) as 'a philosophical enquiry into the nature of knowledge, what justifies a belief, and what we mean when we say that a claim is true' (p. vii). While it is impossible to define what constitutes a distinctive feminist epistemology, due to this field being incredibly varied and complex, it can be argued that principally feminist epistemology holds that knowledge has a social character and questions the belief in the existence of a clear-cut boundary between what is internal and what is external to science, situating it within its cultural context and stressing the many ways in which social and political elements are enmeshed with knowledge and knowledge production (Tanesini 1999).

The areas of feminist critique that have had an effect on the epistemology of this research project are those that address the limitations of positivism in both the empirical and social sciences. In short, positivism rests on the belief that 'truth' exists in the world outside of

people's minds and can be discovered on the grounds that scientists lead 'objective' and 'value-free' research (Hesse-Biber 2012). As Harding (1987) eloquently puts it:

> scientific knowledge-seeking is supposed to be value-neutral, objective, dispassionate, disinterested, and so forth. It is supposed to be protected from political interests, goals and desires (such as feminist ones) by the norms of science. In particular, science's 'method' is supposed to protect the results of research from the social values of the researchers (p. 182).

While not all feminist researchers fully reject the values of the positivist tradition (see for example Farley 1978; Martin 1999; Spalter-Roth & Hartmann 1999), many of its tenets have been criticised at length (see Haraway 1988; Harding 1987, 1991; Jaggar 1996; Code 1991; Tanesini 1999), especially with the emergence of postructuralist and postmodern theories and approaches (see Flax 1990; Haraway 1991; Heckman 1990; Sawicki 1991). The epistemology that informs this thesis is grounded on the latter body of critiques to traditional epistemology, which takes issue with the modernist belief of being able to uncover a single, absolute and objective truth.

Many of the criticisms that inform the methodology of this research project arise from questioning postivism's ontological conceptualisation of the relationship between ideas, experience and reality. Indeed, this research paradigm assumes that a real world exists outside of subjective experience and that knowledge can provide an adequate representation of it (Hesse-Biber 2012). Postructuralist theories, such as the work by Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari, had a fundamental role in shaking the one-to-one correspondence between experience and reality. The employment of poststructuralist theories, such as Foucault's, have led some feminist epistemologists to question the direct relation between social reality and knowledge (Haraway 1991; Heckman 1990; Tanesini 1999).

Tanesini's (1999) comprehensive overview of feminist critiques to analytical epistemology not only provides a good introduction to these debates, but also proposes an epistemology grounded on the conception of knowledge as essentially social and relational. She objects to the idea of knowledge as being something which is possessed,

hence being inextricably connected with an individualist conceptualisation that implies the autonomy of the researcher. She is particularly critical of an understanding of knowledge in terms of representations, seeing it instead as an activity rather than a frame of mind. Hence, by employing the insights of feminist theorists and epistemologists, as well as the poststructuralist work of Foucault, Tanesini (1999) questions the positivist reliance on knowledge as truthful representation of what is 'out there', framing instead knowledge production in terms of a 'practice' that has material and political effects.

Furthermore, the clear-cut distinction between subject and object has been contested by feminist researchers, who have asserted the impossibility of removing the researcher from the research process. Feminism has always been vocal of the processes of exclusion inherent in knowledge production (Hesse-Biber 2012). Feminist scientists such as Gilligan (1977) Keller (1985) and Lloyd (1983) have criticised the androcentric bias of traditional research across the disciplines, which has had the effect of neglecting gender as an important category for research, ignoring whole areas of research (such as the private sphere), essentialising gender roles, and employing 'masculine' concepts and frameworks. This critique gathered more strength during the 1980s, with the challenges to the Second Wave by women of colour. The work by bell hooks (1989, 1991, 1996) is important in this respect, as it shifts attention from the centre (white, male, middle-class, able-bodied) to the margin, conceptualised as 'a space of radical possibility, a space of resistance' (hooks 1996, p. 52), from which a more accurate observation of social reality might arise.

While I am critical of the idea of certain standpoints being more accurate than others for the development of knowledge, the work by hooks (1996), Harding (1991) and other standpoint feminists point out how experience necessarily colours knowledge and the need to acknowledge it as a valid starting point. However, this can only be a starting point, as it must be constantly subjected to a process of critical revision. As Tanesini (1999) very eloquently summarises:

> Starting from experience is a sound starting point of enquiry if it is understood as a matter of starting from a perspective which is inevitably partial and subject to revision [...] We can, thus, admit the existence of multiple standpoints, which can

perhaps be unified [...]. Even if this unification is impossible, the multiplicity of viewpoints need not lead to relativism. We can admit the legitimacy of more than one perspective without claiming that all perspectives are as good as any other (p. 157).

Claiming the partiality of the research findings is to take responsibility for producing a partial view on social reality that can, and should be, integrated and enriched by other situated knowledges. Hence, I acknowledge how my experience influenced the research process, from the research questions I asked at the outset of the project, to the theoretical frameworks and tools I have decided to employ, and finally to the items I decide to focus on for my analysis. This inevitably leads to a partial outlook of the research material; however, I suggest this does not weaken the project, but enriches it by allowing other perspectives to disagree and differ, hence opening new avenues for further research and debate.

However, it is important to stress that by the term 'experience' I do not mean life experience as an individual, but I consider the constructed nature of experience, 'how subjects are constituted as different in the first place' (Scott 1992, p. 25). Scott (1992) constructs a very effective critique of the way experience has been used as the starting point of knowledge by several historical analyses. She argues that these accounts tend to understand subjects as pre-existing experience, failing to examine the relationship between discourse, cognition and reality, the importance of one's positioning to the knowledge which is produced, and the effects of difference on this knowledge.

Differently to the authors she critiques, Scott wishes to historicise experience by taking into account the productive force of discourse and how this is implicated in experience. She convincingly argues:

> [s]ubjects are constituted discursively, experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside of established meanings), but neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning. Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual. (Scott 1992, p. 34).

This formulation enables an understanding of experience not as an unmediated relationship between subject and object, words and things, but as intrinsically connected

to categories and identities that circulate in culture. At the same time, it is important to remember that these are never fixed and immutable, but are contextual, contested and contingent.

A final critique to positivist accounts is the one concerning positivism's criteria of objectivity as value-neutrality. Tanesini (1999) argues that '[o]bjectivism is to be understood as value-neutral objectivity, which is the objectivity achieved by the use of reason alone, unaffected by emotions and human interests' (p. 20). Hence, according to positivism it is vital that any possible influence of the subject on those representations be screened out, which translates into the concept of value-neutrality. Indeed, to take a political stance in relation to the material studied has been regarded with suspicion by scholars committed to value-free research and objective knowledge, arguing that the results of such research would be biased, only confirming the hypothesis of the researcher, hence failing to produce generally valid and authoritative knowledge (Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002). Feminists, on the other hand, have shown that there is no value-free science and that some values are actually desirable in science (Bleier 1985; Harding 1987; Haraway 1991). Hence, 'the task is to show how knowledge is possible, not despite value and political engagement, but in part because of them' (Tanesini 1999, p. 92).

As a consequence of these critiques, the positivist criteria of 'objectivity' and 'universality' not only become impossible to achieve, but might also be undesirable, producing what Haraway (1988) calls 'the gaze from nowhere': the 'gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim to the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked position of Man and White' (Haraway 1988, p. 581). Indeed, writers such as Code (1991), Haraway (1991), hooks (1996) and Collins (1990) have questioned what kind of knowledge has historically been given a privileged position to the detriment of other forms of knowledge or 'subjugated knowledges' (Collins 1990). They have shown how the modernist epistemic position which values objectivity and value-neutrality is not, as a matter of fact, either objective or value-neutral, but constitutes the perspective of those

already powerful in society, resulting in ethnocentric, Eurocentric, gender-blind, class-blind and/or race-blind accounts. Therefore, a positivist approach not only is unable to provide an 'objective' representation of society and of social relations, but actually has the effect of erasing existing power relations.

However, Haraway (1988; 1991) does not deny completely the concept of 'objectivity', but claims instead that 'good research' is produced when researchers acknowledge their social and historical situatedness. Hence, diametrically opposite to the 'gaze from nowhere' she posits the idea of 'embodied' accounts of truth, or 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1988): the acknowledgement and disclosure that our social positioning influences the research process. From this point of view, the ethical position of the researcher is not in seeking the impossible task of providing value-free and objective knowledge, but in stating self-reflexively her/his own social and political positioning. Recognising one's own social positioning is fundamental for attending to the conditions and limitations of any research project: the partiality of the research findings; the impossibility of detaching oneself from emotion, values and beliefs; accounting for the power relations which influence the research process; and the relational character of knowledge production.

Hence, this research project turns away from positivist modes of enquiry and the master narratives of theory, objecting to any claims to neutral, objective and unconditioned truth. Any claims to knowledge are grounded on the acknowledgement of my social positioning, as a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class woman. Therefore, it is inevitable that the outcome of this research project is only a partial view of the topic under examination and that this view is affected by my subjectivity and the experience connected to my social positioning.

Furthermore, I have a particular emotional and political investment in uncovering and unravelling the relations of power/knowledge which circulate in Italian culture and which have produced, and still are producing, individualist, pseudo-libertarian, consumeristic, post-feminist subjectivities. This personal and emotional investment in the research topic

is not alien to feminist researchers, let alone considered a drawback for feminist epistemologists (Jaggar 1996), who have shown how interests and desires are relevant to human knowledge (Tanesini 1999). This is in line with feminist critiques of traditional conceptualisations of reason that are grounded on the Cartesian separation of body and mind, that have shown how the notion of a masterful self, autonomous from desires and emotions, is merely an illusion (Braidotti 1994, Grosz 1994).

Understanding Berlusconism and post-feminism in Italy: a genealogical approach

The genealogical approach as the study of networks of power

According to Carabine (2001) genealogy is concerned with describing procedures, practices, apparatuses and institutions involved in the production of discourses and knowledges, and their power effects (p. 276). This research project consists in a genealogical exploration of the way a particular set of discourses about women and their sexuality, namely post-feminism, has become ingrained in Italian culture, and its connection with a neoliberal rationality that has become pervasive in many developed countries of the West. A genealogical approach to cultural analysis involves a desire to investigate how particular discourses become hegemonic, what knowledge they produce, and which relations of power they sustain.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) Foucault describes his analysis in terms of a 'history of the present', the project being one of analysing discourse as an ongoing process in order to answer questions about the present (Kendall & Wickham 1999). More precisely, Foucault (1972) wants to investigate the conditions of possibility for the emergence of particular 'truth regimes' and their implication in institutional practices, scientific disciplines, artefacts, and in the constitution of subjectivities and the regulation of bodies. However, this approach does not focus on finding the lines of continuity between the past and the present or causal relations between events, but is interested instead in the 'breaking or turning points in the history of social constitutions of subjectivities or particular orders of practice' (Keller 2011, p. 46).

I argue that the appearance of Berlusconi in media and politics represents such turning point in Italian culture through Berlusconi being the major actor in instituting neoliberalism and post-feminism as dominant in contemporary Italian culture. Hence, for this research project I have carried out a historical analysis of the rise and establishment of Berlusconi's political, media and cultural power and have looked at how this was accompanied by the diffusion of a neoliberal rationality and of post-feminism in Italy. My choice was influenced not only by the understanding that any aspect of the media must always be placed within the wider social, political and cultural context in which they are found (Scannell 2002), but also by the conviction that Berlusconi himself consists in one of the nodal points in the networks of power/knowledge in 21st century Italy, establishing the conditions of possibility for the emergence of post-feminist subjectivities and sexualities that are explored in the chapters that follow. Therefore, the emergence of Berlusconi as a political figure, the rhetoric of his political message, the connections with the media industry and his politics in regards to women were investigated in an effort directed towards unravelling the networks of power that intersect and run throughout assemblages of discourses, institutional practices, processes of subjectification, orders of knowledge and so on.

In order to provide an extensive account of the *dispositif* (Foucault 1980) of which Berlusconi was a driving force, for the first part of my research I focused on gathering historical material on the rise and establishment of Berlusconi's political and media power.[11] During this first stage of my research, I focused on an analysis of current scholarship on the rise of Berlusconism, and brought this material together with the one collected through online archive research of publicly available governmental and non-governmental documents and newspaper articles. The historical analysis of the rise and establishment of Berlusconi's power was aimed at exploring the way in which the emergence of Berlusconi as a political figure, the rhetoric of his political message, the

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[11] In order to do so, I spent two months in Milan as a visiting student at the *Università Statale* in 2012, under the supervision of Prof. Roberta Sassatelli. Having access to the University library and other libraries in the city was fundamental for researching the literature produced in Italy on the topic, some of which was not available in the UK.

connections with the media industry, and his politics in regards to women, have created a situation whereby specific discourses of femininity have become institutionalised and normalised.

After analysing Berlusconism and the institutionalisation and normalisation of specific discourses of femininity, I shifted the focus of my analysis to the investigation of the way in which the media have participate in the *dispositif*, spreading specific discourses of gender through their representations of women, and participating in the construction of a specifically Italian post-feminist subjectivity and sexuality. For this reason, I have decided to focus on the case study method, and selected three case studies on the grounds that female subjectivity and sexuality play an important part in the media representation of the events. These case studies provide an exploration into the figuration of femininity and its tensions in Berlusconism, and condense more widely diffused thematics that circulate in Italian society. Here below I will first explain the relationship between the genealogical approach and the case study method, and then will provide details on the specific methodological choices and undertakings.

Genealogy and Case Study Method

This thesis combines a genealogical method for the analysis of Italian media and society with a case study method inspired by the Cultural Studies tradition, and in particular the early work of feminist Cultural Studies scholars. Foucault himself often employed the case study method to illustrate his genealogical approach (examples are the employment of the legal system and the prison to show the shift from sovereign to disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish* [1977], the use of psychoanalysis in *History of Sexuality Vol. I* [1976], and the employment of neoliberalism to illustrate the concept of governmentality in the lectures collected in *The Birth of Biopolitics* [2010]). Furthermore, this thesis takes inspiration from the scholarship produced by early feminist Cultural Studies authors, who often relied on the case study method in their works, such as Janice Radway (1984) who studied audiences and the Romance novel genre, Charlotte Brunsdon & David Morley (1978) who studied the TV show *Nationwide*, Ien Ang (1985) who investigated the popular

1980s show *Dallas*, and Angela McRobbie (1978; 1991) whose early work focused on girl's magazines.

Very relevant to the structure of my work is also the study conducted by Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (1987), in which she explored the appeal of the magazine formula, whilst at the same time assessing its limitations and potential for change. At the centre of the book are three chapters, each being a case study on a specific publication: the individual and family values of *Woman's Own*, female sexual liberation in *Cosmopolitan*, and the feminist politics of *Spare Rib*. My thesis is structured in a similar way to *Inside Women's Magazines,* but differs from it, and from the texts mentioned above, as its focus shifts from 'genre' to the 'figuration' of femininity in Berlusconism, the three case studies concentrating within themselves social anxieties about womanhood that have spread in Italian culture with the emergence of post-feminism and post-feminist subjectivities as inherent to Berlusconism.

The term figuration is employed by two important feminist theorists: Haraway (1997) and Braidotti (1994). Both authors employ the term as a conceptual tool to critique modernist understandings of selfhood as stable, fixed, self-contained, authentic, defined by difference, and so on. Counter to these, they create their own figurations of subjectivity, for Haraway (1997) the 'cyborg' and for Braidotti (1994) the 'nomadic subject'. These are non-linear, in-process subjectivities that cross between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological. Henry, Jusová and Westerman (2014) borrow the term from Braidotti and understand it as both a literary genre and as a feminist methodology of self-reflexivity. The exploration of the figuration of femininity in this thesis leads the project not to look for specific subject positions, but to 'map emergent subjects' (ibid., p. 151), taking into account the language of and subjectivity of the researcher. Ultimately, rather than have a clear cut classification of subjectivities (such as the exotic phallic girl, the Orientalist prostitute, the damaged post-feminist woman), the case studies have as their topic figurations of cross-cultural encounters, subjects in process, and of mutual transformations.

There are a number of ways in which the 'case study' has been defined: as a qualitative method that employs a small number of cases (Eckstein 1975; George & Bennett 2005; Van Evera 1997); research that is holistic, and provides a comprehensive examination of a phenomenon (Ragin 1987, 1997; Stoecker 1991); research that utilises specific types of evidence (such as ethnographic, clinical, non-survey-based, participant-observation, historical, textual, or field research) (George & Bennett 2005; Hamel 1993; Hammersley & Gomm 2000; Yin 1994); a method that follows naturalistic gathering techniques 'real life context' rather than artificially created environments (Yin 2003); research that focuses on topics that are difficult to distinguish from their context (Yin 1994); a method that employs multiple sources of evidence, which need to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin 1994; Yin 2003); research that investigates single phenomena, instances or examples (George & Bennett 2005; Odell 2001; Thies 2002); or research that focuses on a relatively bounded phenomenon (Gerring 2007).

For this research project the definition of case study that was employed did not relate to the method of analysis (qualitative or quantitative), the type of evidence, the gathering techniques, or the boundedness of the phenomenon. But what made it suitable as a method for this research is Yin's (2003) definition of the case study as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real life context (p. 13). This definition is in line with a genealogical approach that analyses not only media texts, but also wider institutional practices, discourses, accepted systems of knowledge, and so on. Hence, case study methodology allows to develop what Michel Foucault (1991) has called 'a polyhedron of intelligibility' (p. 77), looking at a particular case from different points of view, providing a more rounded, richer, more balanced picture of the object of study (Thomas 2011).

One of the advantages in the use of case study research is the relative openness of the method to unexpected findings, provided that once this happens the researcher makes an effort in going back and restructuring the initial research design (Gillham 2000; Yin 2003; Gerring 2007; Hanckock & Algozzine 2006; Vissak 2010). Indeed, revelations in the research course 'can be enormously important, leading to your altering or modifying your

original design' (Yin 2003, p. 55). Hence, case study research implies a continuous movement between findings, research questions and theoretical background, flexibility which is useful if a phenomenon is particularly complex, broad or changing at a fast pace (Vissak 2010). The flexibility and openness of case study research was extremely important for the analysis of the case studies, since the trials were ongoing as the research proceeded, new material becoming available throughout the research process.

Case study research can be structured very differently: from single case to multiple embedded case studies, where a case study involves more than one unit of analysis. Yin (2003) argues that the evidence from multiple cases is generally considered more compelling than studies of single cases. Yin, however, is driven by a positivist approach, associating multiple case studies with wider possibility of generalisation, therefore privileging this design over single case study. This research project does not follow a positivist approach: it does not seek to provide universal generalisations, but attempts to provide as much information as possible and, at the same time, allow for relevant heterogeneity. Single case, multiple case or embedded case study are all valid options, whether to engage in one or the other depends on the research questions posed at the outset of the project and on its aims and objectives (Thomas 2011; Gerring 2007). Hence, to respond to the research questions a number of cases across a spectrum needed to be analysed in order to be able to theorise about the larger framework of post-feminism in Italian media and culture.

The selection of the case studies follows a 'collective' design, in which several instrumental cases are selected on the grounds that they enhance the ability to theorise about a larger framework (Hancock & Algozzine 2006, p. 37). Indeed, employing a case study method means that the selection of the cases is not on the basis that they are representative, but because they represent either the extremes of the possibilities and/or critical incidents: while the *extreme case* is well suited for stating a point in an especially dramatic way, the *critical case* has a strategic role in relation to the general problem (Flyvberg 2006). This research project contains three case studies, two of which are considered to be extreme cases and one a critical case. By selecting cases in which different femininities are

represented, while their subjectivity, sexuality and behaviour fall across different degrees of intelligibility and/or 'acceptability', I wished to address an issue, while at the same time adding to the existing literature, in order to better conceptualise the theory of post-feminism in the Italian context.

Hence, two 'spectacular' events are analysed in terms of being at the extreme ends of the research topic, where the Amanda Knox case represents a media spectacle in which an active and agentic sexuality is strongly rejected and condemned, while on the other side of the spectrum stands the Ruby Rubacuori case, where an agentic sexuality is allowed a degree of acceptance and justification. Kellner (2003) defines media spectacles as media representations that are out of the ordinary and habitual daily routinised media practices. They are highly public social events, often heavily dramatised and having an aesthetic dimension. Kellner (2003) argues that media spectacles are valuable source of information about culture and society because they embody contemporary society's basic values. At the same time, however, media spectacles do not convey a unified and coherent ideology, but also represent important arenas of political contestation. Nonetheless, the study of media spectacles can provide an important insight into the way media represents a field of struggle over the power to fix the meaning of social reality.

Some might argue that extreme cases such as the two spectacles above call for extreme reactions, and that stronger, stricter and more resolute positions in regards to women's subjectivity and sexuality are to be expected. Furthermore, one might question what is the added value of having a third 'spectacular' case study that simply reiterates the findings of the other two. Hence, the third case study, which focusses on the same newspapers' representation of Sara Tommasi, a young showgirl whose narrative can be described as the upward and downward fluctuation of celebrity, represents a *critical* case study that integrates the previous two by including a less spectacular and more ordinary example of media's regulation of women's bodies and sexuality. I define this case as critical because it clearly illustrates the ideal post-feminist subject, as well at its abject 'other'.

From extreme and spectacular cases to a critical one: the three case studies

Because of my specific interest on female subjectivity and sexuality, I decided to focus on three different representations of agentic sexuality, by which I mean forms of female sexuality that depart from more traditional representations as docile, passive and for reproductive purposes. These cases condense more widely apparent concerns across Italian society in regards to current forms of femininity and sexuality, and are held together by the figuration of young womanhood and its tensions in Berlusconism. The cases portray a form of agentic sexuality which is allowed a degree of acceptance and justification (the commercial sexuality of Ruby Rubacuori), a form of agentic sexuality strongly rejected and condemned by public opinion and media representations (the phallic subjectivity and sexuality of Amanda Knox), and a critical case that fully expresses the ambivalence towards post-feminist sexual agency (the hyper-sexualised disorder of Sara Tommasi).

Very important in the selection of the cases is the way the legal system intersects with the media in the creation of a 'surface of emergence' (Foucault 1972, p. 41) of gender discourses around the figuration of post-feminist subjectivity and sexuality. Foucault (ibid.) describes surfaces of emergence as those places and spaces in which certain elements emerge as objects of discourse. Playing a role in the constitution of objects are 'authorities of delimitations', such as individuals, disciplines, groups that are awarded the authority for the identification and classification of these objects. Finally, 'grids of specification' are produced to divide, contrast, relate and classify the kinds of object of study. The court/media connection of each case study produced a space of emergence for the figuration of young femininity in Berlusconism, lawyers, legal experts, laws and regulations, psychiatric consultants, journalistic standards, journalists, commentators and editors acting as authorities of delimitations, and creating a grid of specification around the issues of phallicism, commercial sexuality and post-feminist disorder.

Furthermore, these case studies have been chosen because they are representative of the way women have entered the spaces of luminosity that McRobbie (2009) speaks of, becoming sites of excitement, worry, anxiety and titillation. Indeed, Amanda Knox, Ruby

Rubacuori and, to some extent, Sara Tommasi, held a central position in the representation of the events, the media itself indicating their centrality to the spectacles in which they were involved. Moreover, the choice to focus on these women, and not all women involved in the cases, spurs from a methodological commitment to understanding the way the media constructs individualised and individualising narratives of subjectivity, in line with a neoliberal focus on the self as choosing agent of one's life (Scharff 2011, 2012; Budgeon 2003, 2011, 2015).

These women differ in terms of 'race', nationality, religion, citizenship status and class. In this way, I wish to explore the way gender, 'race' and class discourses participate in the representation of these women's bodies, subjectivities and sexuality and which power relations they reproduce, reinforce or, perhaps, critique. Ruby Rubacuori, a young Moroccan woman, with a Muslim background and a troubled past, emerges as a journey from the victimisation of a non-Western culture to the empowerment and autonomy of post-feminism; Amanda Knox, a sexually active, white, middle-class, American citizen, is represented in terms of exotic 'phallic girl' (McRobbie 2009); and lastly the Sara Tommasi case, where an educated, lower-middle-class, white, Italian woman's descent into mental health disorder becomes a cautionary tale of the dark side of post-feminism. Thus, the case studies are held together by the way they contribute to an analysis of the 'figuration' of femininity and its tensions in Berlusconism.

The main sources collected for the analysis of the cases are online newspaper articles from three daily national Italian newspapers: *Il Giornale*, *Repubblica,* and *Corriere della Sera*. I have chosen to focus on newspapers because, despite the availability of a variety of different sources online, online news audiences continue to be concentrated on the same major outlets, many of which are news organisations already established offline (Hindman 2009). Evidence of this is the fact that *Repubblica* and *Corriere* are the leaders in the market of online publishing, with 1,6 million and 1,1 million daily views (Audiweb 2016). Furthermore, the past decade has seen a movement of audiences from print editions to online information, especially among younger generations. Thus, online information is growing in penetration among the Italian population, especially in terms of newspapers,

and this trend is likely to increase in the future.

The newspapers have been selected because they are aligned with different political positions: *Repubblica* is on the Left of the political spectrum, *Il Giornale* is owned by Berlusconi's brother and is sympathetic to the political Right, and *Corriere della Sera* is generally perceived to be politically neutral. By selecting three publications which differ in terms of political alliances, I wanted to investigate whether political leanings influence the endorsement of post-feminist values and representations, or whether post-feminist discourses have become so diffused in Italian culture that publications across the political spectrum share similar outlooks on issues regarding femininity and female sexuality.

The decision to focus the case studies on online newspapers may be surprising given Berlusconi's well known monopoly of and interest in television. However, this was a purposeful choice, given that most of the literature in Italy on gender and the media has focused on the representation of women's bodies in television, and has been especially critical of Berlusconi's television channels. If we are to consider post-feminism a set of discourses that circulate in society, and if the aim of the research study is to test how diffused it has become in media culture, then to focus on Berlusconi's media alone, and television especially, becomes superfluous. Furthermore, focusing on newspapers allows this research project to cover different political affiliations. Making a comparative study of RAI and Mediaset would not have resulted in substantial differences, given Berlusconi's direct and indirect influence on television in Italy.

The first case study concerns the media representation of the young woman, Karima El Mahroug (in art Ruby Rubacuori), who was central to the scandal involving Berlusconi, the ex Prime Minister, and the parties he held in his house, in which showgirls, paid escorts and television personalities participated. In this chapter I engaged mainly with the journalistic coverage of the scandal and of the trials which were held after the discovery that Karima/Ruby was underage. The articles analysed have been retrieved through the newspapers' online archives, via the employment of key-words relating to the case – mainly the names of the people involved in the events (such as 'Ruby', 'Ruby Rubacuori',

'Karima' 'El Mahroug', 'Minetti', and so on, and a combination of these). The articles to be analysed were then selected qualitatively, choosing only longer articles that included descriptions, evaluations, personal histories, and so on. The articles analysed as part of the case study are: *Il Giornale* - 478 articles, *Repubblica* – 516 articles, and *Corriere della Sera* – 570 articles. Furthermore, some more material relevant to the case was made available through newspaper websites, such as 'voluntary declarations' made in court and full-length interventions by some of the women involved in the cases.

The second case study focuses on the coverage of the murder of Meredith Kercher and of the subsequent trials of the suspected killers: Amanda Knox, Raffaele Sollecito and Rudy Guede. As with the first case study, I employed online archives to retrieve the articles to analyse, via searching key-words relating to the case, and between the year 2007 (discovery of Meredith Kercher's body) to 2015 (Raffaele and Amanda's last trial). The key words are the names of the people involved (for example 'Kercher', 'Amanda Knox', 'Sollecito', 'Raffaele Sollecito', and so on, and combinations of these), while for the early material words such as 'murder Perugia' were used. The articles were selected qualitatively choosing only those that provided longer, more extensive descriptions of the events, evaluations, narratives, and so on. Ultimately, the number of articles analysed were 353 from *Corriere della Sera*, 453 from *Repubblica* and 338 from *Il Giornale.*

Other sources which have complemented the media analysis are institutional documentation, specialised websites and non-fictional books reconstructing the events. Because of the international attention that the case has attracted, it has been possible for me to retrieve many public legal documents from online sources, newspapers' websites and other websites specialising on the case, making them available on their webpages. Two websites which have been particularly useful are *Injustice in Perugia* (2015) and *True Justice for Meredith Kercher* (2015).[12] Both websites are not impartial, the first one being

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[12]   *Injustice in Perugia: highlighting the wrongful conviction of Amanda Knox & Raffaele Sollecito* is a website that collects news, evidence, trial proceedings and expert opinion on the case, as well as a

partisan towards Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito, clearly stating their innocence, while the second condemning the accused. This fact does not constitute an issue however, because the aim of the project is not to uncover the truth behind partial reconstructions of the events, but to investigate the discourses which have been employed to legitimise or discredit forms of femininity and female sexuality. While the partisanship of the sources is always kept in mind while gathering material, this has little impact on the findings of the analysis.

The third case study concerns the newspapers' representation of the former *velina* Sara Tommasi.[13] As mentioned above, this case attracted less media attention than the former two. Thus, the articles from the three publications were considerably fewer, as well as being published in diverse 'genres' within the publications (such as political news, culture and the arts, showbiz, local news, and even featured under 'Weird News'). I consider this case critical because it illustrates clearly the investment in an ideal post-feminist subject, and the punishment reserved for those who cannot or will not conform to it. In comparison to the other cases in this thesis, the analysis is completely reliant on newspaper material, although other factual information about the events could be found in other publications' websites, such as *Panorama*, *Il Secolo XIX* and *Today*. Just as in the other case studies, I used mainly her name to retrieve from the publication's archives the articles written on the events concerning her, although at times is has been necessary to employ other terms and names that were directly involved. Because of the paucity of

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discussion area in which users can communicate. Founded by Bruce Fischer (Executive Director) and Sarah Snyder (Director of Operations), it is described on the website as 'a grassroots organization that worked to secure freedom for Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito, two innocent people wrongfully convicted for murder in Perugia, Italy' (Injustice Anywhere Forum 2015). It has now expanded and become *Injustice Anywhere,* an organisation that aims 'to correct wrongful convictions' and bring attention to 'the worldwide wrongful conviction epidemic' (ibid.). Conversely, *True Justice for Meredith Kercher* is a website that collects similar documentation as the above, but arguing that the Kercher case has been mishandled by the Italian justice system, generally implying that Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito had committed the crime. It is described on the website as a self-funded volunteer-run website, collecting material freely provided by lawyers, law enforcement, crime experts and general users

[13] As explored in more detail in the introduction and chapter 1, the *velina* is a type of TV showgirl specific to Italian culture. These figures have become pivotal in debates about the representation of women's bodies in television, as well as in feminist commentaries about the *scambio sessuo-economico* [the sexual-economic exchange]' (Garibaldo & Zapperi 2012, p. 71) that has characterised Berlusconism.

articles written on this case I analysed all articles I could find (*Il Giornale* - 56 articles; *Corriere della Sera* – 59 articles; and *Repubblica* – 44 articles).

Important differences between a qualitative and a quantitative method led me to choose a qualitative method for this project. The first one is that a quantitative method would have screened out the inconsistencies, contradictions and ambiguities within publications, which are themselves interesting phenomena that need to be analysed. Secondly, a quantitative method would not have permitted acknowledgement of the silences of the texts - the discourses that are disabled in media representations. Indeed, absence is just as important as presence for understanding which power relations are served by the textual instances of discourse. Finally, quantitative methods have a tendency of conflating recurrence with significance, where that which is repeated is considered to be salient for the research, while 'the most significant moment of media texts – a particularly powerful image, phrase, or turn in a narrative – are often those that occur only once' (Baym 2012, p. 327). Hence, because of the limitations of employing a quantitative method for the selection of the articles, a qualitative method appeared the most suitable for building a more insightful, detailed and comprehensive picture of the cases.

Foucauldian discourse analysis: from context to text

The single case studies are approached through close and detailed investigation, contextualising them within wider societal and cultural dynamics, in order to interrogate what they tell us about the figuration of femininity in Berlusconism. The single media texts are analysed through a Foucault-influenced discourse analytical method, that 'concentrates on the analysis of knowledge formations, which organise institutional practices and societal reality on a large scale' (Talja 1999, p. 460). Through such approach to the analysis, the single textual instances are understood in terms of practices of producing knowledge and meanings in concrete contexts and institutions.

While Foucault wrote extensively about particular institutions and practices, he never really indicated a systematic method for cultural and textual analysis. Nonetheless, his

influence on the practices and methodologies to conduct research has been great, with researchers developing their own methods, tools, processes and vocabulary (see for example: De Lauretis 1987; Potter & Wetherell 1987; Bordo 1993; Wetherell 1998; Kendall & Wickham 1999; Carabine 2001; Hook 2001, 2005; Keller 2011, 2013; Graham 2011; Hanna 2013). While not all of these authors give the same attention to Foucault's 'statement', this was a fundamental concept for the execution of discourse analysis in this research project. According to Foucault (1972) the statement constitutes 'the atom of discourse', which refers to discourse being made of scattered statements that are located in different places, which are arranged in a detectable pattern or follow a specific rule-system, and which can therefore be attributed to one discourse, while at the same time constituting its objects. The statement however, does not describe a linguistic unit, but it represents the 'typifiable and concrete core "content" of a concrete utterance, or individual linguistic sequences contained within it, which may be reconstructed in a large number of disseminated utterances' (Keller 2012, p. 73).

Remarking the difference between linguistic forms of discourse analysis and his own, Foucault (1972) writes:

> The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made? The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another? […] [W]e must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statements it excludes (p. 27-28).

Hence, Foucault understands discourse analysis as a method less concerned with the micro-analysis of linguistic structures and constructions, but more focussed on how meaning is articulated throughout texts in their entirety, as well as across texts. Hence, the single texts are analysed by detecting the statements on which the texts rely to formulate meaning, the endpoint being the task of linking descriptions, arguments and evaluations to the different discourses which are employed to represent certain events, phenomena or objects.

With these objectives in mind, I followed specific steps. I engaged in an online gathering of news items, and printed the news articles for analysis. I then organised the articles chronologically and proceeded to read them, to identify various themes, categories, representations and objects. While doing this work I detected the main themes that needed further investigation and research, engaging with the relevant literature, especially in terms of feminist debates surrounding the topics that arose from this reading. For the Amanda Knox case study I engaged with feminist criminology, for the Ruby Rubacuori case I explored feminist scholarship on sex work, while for the Sara Tommasi case I read literature about celebrity, as well as feminist scholarship on women and madness. These were important fields to explore in order to appreciate the different cultural discourses that circulate in society and to understand their relation to those I detect within my case studies.

I then went back to all the articles again; in this phase a generic and flexible process of sorting and coding has been useful to single out the different units which appear throughout the texts, noticing patterns of stability, discontinuity and variation. The following step was to investigate how these units connect in relatively coherent ways, organised around particular images, narratives, metaphors or figures of speech (statements). Thirdly, the focus of analysis moved on how the different statements are put together in order to create meaning, and identify significant patterns of consistency and variation. Finally, an analysis of these consistencies and variations, as well as the absences of certain statements and/or certain connections between them, was employed to reveal the wider cultural discourses about gender that are produced and reproduced through the texts, and that allow only certain representations of femininity and female sexuality to be culturally intelligible, while strongly negating others. At this point it was important to go back to the articles, marking with different coloured tags the articles that expressed most explicitly the findings of the analysis, isolating quotations that illustrated clearly the statements and discourses about female subjectivity and sexuality that emerged in the texts. The translations from Italian are mine (unless otherwise stated): for shorter quotations, the original text is included - italicised -in the body, while for longer ones the original text is included in the form of a footnote.

Hence, a more Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis holds a specific focus on how language works to engender certain truth-claims, and the way it works to secure dominant relations of power. Furthermore, a Foucault-inspired discourse analysis is able not only to detect which statements are drawn on, but also to investigate the silences and absences. Indeed, silences are just as important to what is made explicit in the text, revealing important information about what kinds of meanings are abled or disabled when approaching the topic from a particular position. Furthermore, attention should also be given to counter-discourses, contradictions and inconsistencies. While these would be generally screened out from more traditional methods of analysis, with the employment of a Foucauldian discourse analysis they become important resources for understanding how different statements may be present at the same time despite the fact that they seem to contradict one another. As Garret & Bell (1998) argue: '[w]e need to look carefully at what texts actually say and what they do not say, to identify the points where there is vagueness, ambiguity, lack of obvious coherence, etc.' (p. 8).

Addressing critiques to the case study method

The most common critiques to the case study method is that it lacks generalisability, validity and reliability, criteria which have been perceived as fundamental for the integrity of the research project (Cutler 2004). Generalisability in its more traditional sense has to do with providing universal 'truths' about the world, the knowledge produced being context-independent and directed towards prediction and control (Lincoln & Guba 2000). However, as postmodern, post-colonial and feminist critiques have shown, universal 'truth' and context-independent knowledge is not only impossible to achieve, but has been employed in the past to legitimise discriminatory and oppressive regimes of power. This, however, should not restrain the researcher from making any sort of generalisations, provided that the researcher accepts that generalisations are indeterminate, relative and time- and context-bound (ibid.). Hence, for example, when I analyse the Amanda Knox case my intentions are not to provide generalisations as how *all* women accused of murder are treated in Italian media, instead I am interested in how that one particular woman has

been represented within a specific time frame and within a specific context.

The second critique is about the 'validity' and 'reliability' of a project that relies on case studies (Cutler 2004). The criteria of validity are related to providing a 'realistic' picture of the case study and not a projection of the researcher's preconceived notions, while the criteria of reliability are related to the replicability of the project if the same procedures are followed (Yin 2003). These criticisms can be responded to by endorsing feminist critiques to traditional epistemology which have been explained at length above. Indeed, the social position of the researcher, and his/her politics and emotions, cannot be expunged from the research process, with the knowledge produced inevitably being coloured by the subjectivity of the researcher and her/his experience of the world. This fact necessarily goes to affect the 'reliability' of the project, since no two researchers will produce the same results using the same research material.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the project is invalid or unreliable. Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) argue that feminist research may match these criteria within the process of self-reflexivity, mapping out a number of ways in which knowledge claims can be contextualised, such as: stating the theoretical background onto which the project is built on; situating the social position of the researcher; locating the research project within the wider power structures that regulate the production of knowledge; stating the methods for collection and analysis of the research material; and the acknowledgement and assessment of discrepancies and counter-evidence. Hence, they argue that '[b]y making criteria explicit, and comparing them with those used by others, researchers and their readers can identify varying connections between ideas, experience and possible realities, and submit these connections to critical appraisal (p. 138). The role of this methodology chapter, with the disclosure of the epistemological basis of the research project, the acknowledgement of my social positioning, and the discussion of case study method and of discourse analysis techniques, responds to the criteria Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) outline.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have pursued several connected tasks. The first has been to outline the epistemological stance of this research project: combining the poststructuralist work of Foucault with critiques to positivism elaborated by feminist epistemologists, I have shown how this project does not subscribe to the modernist objective of uncovering a single, absolute and objective truth, but subscribes to an idea of knowledge as being contextual, situated, partial, fallible and productive. However, this does not lead to an 'anything goes' attitude to research practice, instead, in order to meet the criteria of objectivity, validity and reliability, other means need to be employed. I have therefore followed Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) directions: I have contextualised any claims to knowledge by stating the theoretical background onto which the project is built on; situated the social position of the researcher; located the research project within the wider power structures that regulate the production of knowledge; and stated the methods for collection and analysis of the research material.

The second task has been to link the theoretical and epistemological frames to the analysis, in particular to the strategies, methods and tools I have employed to study Italian culture and media. This thesis combines a genealogical method for the analysis of Italian media and society with a case study method inspired by the Cultural Studies tradition. Foucault's genealogical approach and Butler's gender theory are the basic methodological frames for the analysis of Italian post-feminism in this research project, understanding representations of femininity and female sexuality as belonging to wider discourses about gender which circulate in society at large. Hence, conducting a discourse analysis through a Foucauldian lenses has meant starting from an analysis of culture, and committing to an idea of discourse not as a linguistic unit of analysis but as a diffused way of speaking about a specific object, group of people or institution, which produces both meaning and material effects.

Following this, I have described how the case study method appears to be the best strategy to study how discourses about female subjectivity and sexuality are represented.

I am not wanting to describe how women's sexuality is represented *per se*, but to map how discourses about gender and sexuality shift, change and transform depending on a variety of factors. Indeed, the individual case studies have been selected not only because female subjectivity and sexuality play an important part in the media representation of the events, but also because they condense widely diffused issues and concerns about femininity and female sexuality in contemporary Italy. This, and the heterogeneity of the women discussed in terms of social positioning, works towards the exploration of the figuration of femininity in Italian post-feminist culture.

Finally, I have explained the way I have employed a Foucault-influenced form of discourse analysis, focusing on the concept of the 'statement': the 'core' of a concrete linguistic or visual symbolic form, which can be reconstructed throughout a large number of different sentences and/or images. Statements are the 'atoms' of discourse, the elements that are organised according to a pattern or rule-system that constitute different discourses. Therefore, the method of textual analysis that I have employed identifies the statements on which the texts rely to formulate meaning, with the endpoint being the task of linking descriptions, arguments and evaluations to the different discourses which are employed to represent certain events, phenomena or objects.

Ch. 3: The *dispositif* of Berlusconism: neoliberal authoritarian populism, legitimised by a mediated sexist discourse

In the previous chapter I have explored the way Foucault, Butler and poststructuralist feminist epistemology have affected the research methodology and design. This chapter is also informed by the same paradigms and frameworks, developing a genealogy of Berlusconism by untangling the networks of power that constitute it and that have intersected in the figure of Silvio Berlusconi, and the way gender discourses have participated in it. The ex-prime minister has had an enormous role in shaping Italian society in the past 30 years, through his vast media empire, his influence on the media system, and through his active involvement in politics. He differs from most of the world media tycoons in that he did not limit himself to lobbying political power, but since the 1990s he has decided to take upon himself the responsibility of leading the country, being democratically elected on three separate occasions (1994 - 1995; 2001 - 2006; 2008 - 2011) and becoming the longest serving politician in Italian post-war history.

If at first Berlusconi's involvement in politics may seem uniquely a self-interested, opportunistic and self-protecting move to flee law enforcement, maintain his monopoly on communications and aggrandise his wealth, this explanation does not describe entirely the strength of his cultural and political project. Undoubtedly, many of the laws, bills and acts formulated by his government throughout the years, which many have argued were made *ad personam* (for the sake of one person), seem to support this claim. However, a more convincing theory has been put forward by scholars such as Ginsborg (2004), Berardi et al. (2009) and Gibelli (2010), who have seen Berlusconi's project as a cultural and political operation where control of economic resources, communication, and the conquest of political power have become intertwined as never before. This thesis adds a more Foucauldian understanding of Berlusconism, by arguing that embodied and dis-embodied forms of power have contributed to its creation as a neoliberal hegemony, defined by post-feminist discourses of gender and sexuality.

Indeed, while scholars have analysed Berlusconi's neoliberalism (Ginsborg 2004; Prospero

2003; Ricci 2004), the populist aspect of his political project (Edwards 2005; Fella & Ruzza 2009; Jones 2009) and the despotic character of his government (Berardi et al. 2009; Fella & Ruzza 2009; Gibelli 2010), his problematic control of national media (Mazzoleni 1995; Roncarolo 2004; Poletti & Brants 2010) and the sexism of Italian culture (Marzano 2010; Simone 2012; Soffici 2010), what is missing from the majority of these accounts is an analysis of the importance that gender and sexuality have had in Berlusconi's political and cultural project, and the way this is connected to particular representations of gender and gender relations.

This chapter is a genealogical analysis of Berlusconism, from its emergence to its consolidation. Drawing on Foucault's notion of *dispotif* (Foucault 2010, p. 19), I will show that Berlusconism is found at the intersections of networks of power that run through assemblages of discourses, orders of knowledge, institutional practices, processes of subjectification, and so on. Berlusconi represents a nodal point of this web-like formation. Hence, this chapter argues that in Berlusconism populism, neoliberalism, authoritarianism, nationalism and sexism have come together in the creation of a specifically Italian form of neoliberal and post-feminist society, the media acting as the major discursive and institutional practice for its establishment.

The chapter begins by exploring neoliberalism and its history, focusing on national and international forces and agents that created a specifically Italian, neoliberal hegemony. Berlusconi is understood to be one of the major players in its establishment, via his ownership and control of the media since the late 1970s, and then because of his active participation in politics since 1994. The chapter then moves to explore how the media has taken a central role as an apparatus of power in terms of its instrumental use in Berlusconi's political campaigning, of the way Berlusconi's business-like attitude and success was fundamental to gain consent, and of how his influence on national media participated in creating a culture favourable to his political message. Ultimately, the concentration of political, media and cultural power in Berlusconi's hands has led to an intensification of state control, growing intolerance to 'otherness' and the erosion of many of the fundamental democratic institutions, while seeking justification and

legitimation through popular consent.

Fundamental for achieving consent has been Berlusconi's employment of gender and sexuality. Hence, the third and last part of the chapter explores the way women and their sexuality have been mobilised by Berlusconi's political and cultural project. Indeed, while Berlusconi's coalition has demonstrated a degree of acknowledgement of issues regarding women's participation in work and politics, this focus on gender equality has been characterised more by an opportunistic and instrumental use of gender issues by the ruling Right, than an actual concern about women in Italy.[14] At the same time, Berlusconi has continued to manifest extremely sexist and misogynist views and behaviours which find parallels in media representations of gender and gender relations.

Ultimately, the employment of a Foucauldian framework leads to the conclusion that the establishment of the *Italia Berlusconiana* [Belusconian Italy] was not an accident, but the strategic employment and manipulation of relations of power and knowledge, with the media apparatus acting as the most valuable institution in the production and reproduction of the culture of Berlusconism.

Berlusconi's penetration in and manipulation of Italy's networks of power

Silvio Berlusconi was born in 1936 in the outskirts of Milan, in a lower-middle-class family. Berlusconi was not only an excellent student, but showed from early on a business attitude: in secondary school he was the first to finish his homework and then proceeded to help others for a charge. After school Berlusconi enrolled at the *Università Statale* in Milan in a law degree course, funding his studies with several jobs and occupations. At university he achieved excellent grades, concluding his studies with a thesis on a topic

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[14]   It has to be mentioned that Stefania Prestagiacomo, elected member of parliament for Berlusconi's political party throughout his time in power, has shown a real concern and interest in gender issues. After having been dismissed by Berlusconi with '*non fare la bambina* [don't be a child]' when she insisted for the quote rosa, she kept fighting for their implementation. Furthermore, she engaged with a number of gender-related issues such as violence against women, pornography, abortion and in vitro fertilisation, at times even going against the party line.

which was to have particular relevance to his later career: the contractual aspects of advertising slots.

After graduating, Berlusconi began his business career in the construction industry, which represented a profitable enterprise in the rapidly expanding city of Milan (Froio 2003). This enterprise was a success and led to the construction of complexes of buildings to accommodate thousands of people, the most renowned being *Milano 2*. Completed in 1979, *Milano 2* was a small bounded space in the commune of Sagrate, designed for the prosperous middle-class, both the traditional bourgeoisie and the new dynamic entrepreneurial class which was developing due to the *miracolo economico* [economic miracle] (Ginsborg 2004). [15] Among the many services, such as a hotel, a conference centre, six schools, a church, a running track, swimming pools and underground parking, *Milano 2* provided the lodgers with a TV channel called *TeleMilano* that broadcast neighbourhood council meetings, information on available services, and the occasional movie (Berardi et al. 2009). This was to be the start of Berlusconi's media expansion.

In 1977, immediately after the Constitutional Court freed frequencies from state monopoly in 1976, *TeleMilano* started broadcasting to the entire city of Milan from a studio built in the Jolly Hotel in *Milano 2* (Berardi et al. 2009). The lack of regulation thereafter, the employment of loopholes and Berlusconi's close political ties, allowed Berlusconi's company, *Fininvest*, to gain unconstrained control of the commercial television market. *TeleMilano* became a quasi-national channel in 1980, taking the name of *Canale 5* (Hibberd 2007). In January 1983 Berlusconi acquired *Italia 1* and in August 1984 *Retequattro*, two competing networks owned by well-known publishing groups which found themselves in financial trouble, *Rusconi* and *Mondadori* (Mazzoleni 1995). Meanwhile, in 1979, he also set up a powerful machine for collecting advertising revenue,

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[15] The time period from the end of World War Two until the 1970s was characterised by the *miracolo economico* (the economic miracle, also known as the *boom economico*), in which the country underwent enormous changes at the cultural and economical level. The swift development of the industry in the north and international aid brought an unprecedented well-being for Italian families, leading to the development of a consumer culture.

the advertising agency *Pubitalia '80*, greatly boosting *Fininvest*'s advertising revenues (Hibberd 2007). Berlusconi also bought the football team *AC Milan* in 1986, becoming its president. This decision was driven by his passion for the local team and for the sport in general, but eventually provided a solid pillar of his political campaign in 1994.

 The years between 1987 and 1991 saw the legal battle between Berlusconi and De Benedetti over one of the major publishing groups in Italy, *Mondadori*.[16] The group was eventually split among the two competitors: De Benedetti acquired some national titles such as *Repubblica*, *L'Espresso* and the local newspaper titles, while Berlusconi secured the majority stake of *Mondadori*, and the national titles *Panorama* and *Epoca* (Hibberd 2008). Such acquisitions firmly placed Berlusconi as one of the main actors in the publishing industry in Italy, which had started as early as 1979, when he acquired the conservative national newspaper *Il Giornale* (Poli 2005). He was later forced to relinquish the newspaper following the Broadcasting Act in 1990, that introduced limits to cross-ownership, however he found a way to maintain control on the paper by handing it over to his brother Paolo (Mazzoleni 1995). Furthermore, in 1989 *Fininvest* entered the distribution business, combining efforts with the *Cecchi Gori* group and creating the company *Penta Film* (Wagstaff 2004).

It was in these years that Berlusconi developed his aversion towards 'interference', as he repetitively clashed with the 'political and bureaucratic machine perfectly designed to impede, to prohibit, to delay and hinder' (Berlusconi in Ginsborg 2004, p. 20). His troubles with the institutions first appeared during the construction of *Milano 2*, when Berlusconi had to fight the 'communist magistrates' controlling the regularity of the contracts, the trade unions bargaining workers' salaries and their working conditions, and the architecture professors and newspapers criticising his constructions (ibid.). His entrance in other industrial sectors and the media was also accompanied by legal and bureaucratic

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[16] Carlo De Benedetti is one of the major industrialists in Italy, competing with Berlusconi in the media business with the publishing group L'Espresso.

troubles, the trials multiplying and expanding. Ultimately, it was only through his connections with the leading political party, the *Democrazia Cristiana*, and his personal friendship with the leader of the *Partito Socialista Italiano*, Bettino Craxi, that he could acquire such an impressive economic empire.[17] Possibly, it was the decade before his entrance into politics which shaped his own political agenda, having understood that the moderate right, which was already heading in a neoliberal direction, was the place to achieve his best interests.

After the political scandal of *Tangentopoli* in the late 1980s and the related investigation *Mani Pulite*, which discovered that a great number of politicians from the DC and PSI had been involved in a circle of bribes and 'favours', and the following collapse of the First Republic,[18] Berlusconi entered the political arena in 1994 presenting himself and his brand-new party *Forza Italia* as a new political force for change, detached from the old corrupted political class and closer to the people. Despite his close (but unofficial) involvement in politics since the very beginning of his entrepreneurial career, he was successful in portraying himself as breaking from the past and, unexpectedly for the Left, won the 1994 elections by a large margin.[19] For his success, the alliance with two

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[17] *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC), *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) and *Partito Socialista Italiano* (PSI) were the biggest political parties from immediately after World War 2 to the beginning of the 1990s. This political period is known as *Prima Repubblica* [First Republic] and was largely dominated by the DC.

[18] *Tangentopoli*, in English *Bribesville*, was the nickname given to Milan by the press as a consequence of a corruption scandal which was revealed by the Milanese magistrates. The inquiry subsequently expanded, uncovering the implication of many Italian politicians from the Christian Democrat and Socialist parties at all levels of the political system, and marking the end of Italy's First Republic and of its mass parties. The *Mani Pulite* [Clean Hands] investigation saw the active involvement of the media: the media coverage was relentless, intense and clearly siding with the prosecution (this was interpreted as a sing of rebellion against its traditional subservience to political power, however this did not last for long). Within one year a third of Italian politicians were under indictment, Bettino Craxi himself having to flee Italy to avoid prison time (Albertazzi & Rothenberg 2009).

[19] The crumbling of the First Republic meant a reorganisation of the old political power system and opened the doors to new players, *Forza Italia* being one of them. In the 1994 campaign new political parties appeared: the DC, changing name and personnel, became the PPI (*Partito Popolare Italiano*); the neo-Fascist MSI underwent renovation, switching to AN-MSI (*Alleanza Nazionale-Movimento Sociale Italiano*); *Patto per L'Italia* and CCD (*Centro Cristiano Democratico*) were brand new, but comprised people and elements from the older system; PDS (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*), the LN (*Lega Nord*), Rifondazione Comunista and Rete had appeared within the previous two years. The new electoral system forced the new players to polarise around three major coalitions: on the Right side

previously marginalised parties proved fundamental: the *Lega Nord* (LN), a populist party led by Umberto Bossi which had most support in the northern regions of Piedmont, Lombardy and Veneto;[20] and *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) [National Aliance], the party led by Gianfranco Fini which had its origins in the neo-fascist party *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) [Italian Social Movement] and was popular in the southern regions (Shin & Agnew 2008).[21] However, the government stayed in power only 6 months, as the profound differences in political objectives among the parties composing the coalition led to the 'treason' of Bossi and the fall of the government in January 1995.

Berlusconi, however, was not discouraged by the failure of his first government and, not only run for Prime Minister again in the 1996 elections, but also placed himself firmly at the head of opposition once the *Ulivo*, the moderate coalition on the Left led by Romano Prodi, won the elections. Berlusconi won the 2001 and 2008 elections; however, he was forced to resign in 2011 due to the economic crisis in which Italy found itself, and probably also in relation to the personal/sexual scandals which started in 2009 and constituted an important blow to his image in Italy and abroad. Nonetheless, this makes Berlusconi the longest serving political leader in post-war Italy (Albertazzi & Rothenberg 2009). The neoliberal character of his politics and the way this was achieved are further investigated in the section that follows.

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there was the PdL (*Polo delle Libertà*), with eventually Silvio Berlusconi running for Prime Minister; on the Left the *Progressisti*, with Achille Occhetto as its candidate; and at the centre *Patto Per L'Italia*, with Mariotto Segni as its political leader. Other minor parties run as well, but did not reach the 4% threshold of the new electoral system.

[20] *Lega Nord* [Northern League] is a neo-populist right-wing party which emerged in northern Italy in the 1980s, the undiscussed leader until 2012 being Umberto Bossi. Most of its voters are found in the northern-eastern regions of Italy (Pidemont, Veneto and Lombardy). Its main political objectives have been increased regional autonomy and federalism. It strongly opposes immigration and has in several instances expressed contempt for the southern regions.

[21] *Allenaza Nazionale* [National Alliance] is the name the neo-fascist party MSI took in 1995, under the leadership of Gianfranco Fini. The MSI had played a part, although maginal, in the political life of the country since short after World War Two despite the horrors of Fascism. It retains little of fascist ideals, and has been the more serious face of conservative liberalism.

The establishment of neoliberal hegemony in Italy

Many domestic policies pushed forward by Berlusconi's governments are in line with neoliberal trends observed in the UK and USA. Indeed, Berlusconi's frames of reference are the conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher in the UK, and Ronald Reagan in the USA. Thatcher was especially inspiring for his own political program, Berlusconi going as far as stating to have studied her autobiography (Gundle & Parker 1996). While a number of think-tanks for the Right have been created since the early 2000s, these seem to have had very little impact on the development of policies and legislations in Berlusconi's governments. Thus, Ginsborg (2004) argues that 'Berlusconi is not an original thinker, nor does he have a powerful intellectual team supporting him' (p. 185). His main political objectives have been towards the privatisation of public enterprises, shrinking of the welfare system, devolution and deregulation, while using a somewhat conservative-catholic, populist, nationalist, family-business oriented rhetoric.

In *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010), Foucault explores the emergence of neoliberalism, as a set of theories and concepts, in both Germany and the United States, in the aftermath of World War II. According to him, these thesis and frameworks were then taken up and developed as an economic theory by the Chicago School in the United States, eventually becoming what is generally understood to be neoliberal economic theory. It was, however, only in the 1980s that neoliberal theory became so pervasive, being framed as a resolution to the Keynesian system's shortcomings which had become evident in the economic crisis in the late 1970s (Kiely 2005). Reaganism and Thatcherism promptly took on neoliberal economic theory and implemented it in their governments.

The hegemony of neoliberal economic theory which had developed in the United States became established internationally also through international institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Harvey 2005). These organisations fully endorsed neoliberal economic directives of trade, and through 'structural adjustment' programmes - for Curran (2000) a euphemism for 'externally imposed economic policies' (p. 177) - contributed to the

diffusion of a neoliberal rationality around the globe, having important political, social and economic consequences globally. Finally, more 'constricting' measures, have been applied for the convergence of European countries (among which Italy) towards neoliberal policies, such as the Maastricht agreement of 1991 and particular economic policy requirements for entrance in the European Union (Harvey 2005).

This is not to argue that Italian neoliberalism is the same as the British and American experiences. Indeed, neoliberalism is not a unified phenomenon, but there are unlimited variations, among which with the possibility of neoliberalism coexisting with other economies within the same historical formation. Hence, the process of neoliberalisation, which nowadays extends to a multitude of countries around the world, takes a different shape depending on the socio-economic-political reality in which it is been implemented (Ong 2006). Consequently, the definition of what neoliberalism is, has been object of intense theoretical and analytical discussion, some arguing that the term has been employed to describe such a vast and heterogeneous number of things that we would be better off disposing of it all together (Clarke 2008; Barnett 2010).

The more popular frameworks used to analyse neoliberalism have been: neo-marxist analyses which frame neoliberalism in terms of an ideology such as Harvey's (2005); Foucauldian conceptualisations of neoliberalism as governmentality (2010); the interpretation of neolibealism as a hegemonic system, such as Hall's (2011); the more recent understanding of neoliberalism in terms of a global assemblage (Collier & Ong 2005) or mobile technology (Ong 2006); and finally neoliberalism as an 'abstract machine' (Gilroy 2008). Although at times contradictory, I do not think that these positions are necessarily mutually exclusive, but I believe that we can get to a better understanding of the phenomenon of neoliberalism through a combination of them.

While the overarching framework of this thesis is inspired by Foucault (1976; 2010), I also take inspiration from both the neo-Marxist work of Harvey (2005) and the Gramscian work of Hall (1989; 2011) for the analysis of how neoliberalism works within Berlusconism. These approaches to the study of neoliberalism are often considered to be at odds with

each other, as Foucault was particularly critical of the Marxist tradition, distancing himself from top-down and economic explanations of power and the concept of 'ideology'. Very differently from Foucault, Harvey (2005) identifies in the global transnational élite the fulcrum of neoliberalisation, while Hall (1989) similarly focuses on Margaret Thatcher and her support of capital as central in the establishment of neoliberalism in the UK.

The way to overcome this impasse is to consider the lectures of *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010) and those in *Security, Territory, Population* (2004), in which Foucault adjusted his claims in regards to power. Rather than arguing that since the 18th century disciplinary and bio-power substituted sovereign power, he rectifies his position by claiming that it was not a complete shift, but a change in the balance between these different kinds of power (Collier 2009). This understanding means that more traditional forms of power, such as political power, would coexist with the more subtle, multifarious and de-centred forms of power that he investigates in *History of Sexuality: Volume I* (1976) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975). In this way, specific actors can be integrated within the *dispositif* and understood in terms of nodal points in the networks of power, having a role in shaping it. For the Italian context, Berlusconi was extremely important because of his position at the intersection of media, political and economic power, and thus is one of the most important forces that have shaped neoliberalism in Italy, especially in terms of its configuration of gender and gender relations.

Harvey (2005) argues that:

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (p. 2).

Harvey (2005) continues by stating that neoliberalism has become so pervasive as to affect all fabrics of modern living, from economics, to politics and institutions, and eventually in the way individuals make sense of the world and act accordingly.

However, Harvey's (2005) neo-Marxist analysis produces a model that is too focused on economic management at the level of the state, hence not taking into account the variety of institutions, programmes, processes of subjectification, and discourses that equally contribute to the establishment and reproduction of neoliberalism. Hence why I need to resort to Foucault's (2010) work, who departs from the materialism that characterises Harvey's work. Indeed, an understanding of neoliberalism as a top down project, controlled by the political and economic élite is not sufficient to explain the way power is manifested and runs through a multitude of institutional and non-institutional forces, the state itself being one of the institutions which allow the smooth running of neoliberalism, rather than an obstacle to its full realisation (Foucault 2010).

In the lectures published in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010) Foucault produces a historical account of what he calls 'governmentality', a system of governance which does not rely on repression and punishment, but on discipline and control. Developing the framework on the productive force of discourse he engaged with in his previous work (1976), Foucault goes on to analyse the very specific form power-discourse takes in neoliberal times, and the production of the neoliberal subject. Brown (2005) develops Foucault's concept of governmentality to describe the working of neoliberalisation, as 'a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the state, and one that produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and new organization of the social' (p. 37). Neoliberalism as a form of governmentality produces the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject, one who perceives him/herself and her/his relations with society at large and its institutions in economic terms, such as profitability, supply and demand, absolute advantage and so on. Ultimately, the subject becomes a h*omo œconomicus,* an entrepreneur of him/herself who can invest, capitalise and profit from her/his human capital (Foucault 2010).

State intervention is understood only in terms of the protection of private property, the creation of the appropriate market and the removal of any obstacles in the way of the individuals' participation. Therefore, the neoliberal state is characterised by a strive towards the privatisation of public enterprises and deregulation, implying that the rules

of the market (such as profitability, the relation between supply and demand, and costs and benefits, free competition, and so on) would inevitably deliver higher living standards for everybody (Harvey 2005). However, evidence suggests that instead of generating wealth and well-being through a trickle-down effect, in fact neoliberalisation is responsible for many of today's world problems, such as the exploitation of developing countries for resources and labour, the abuse and depletion of natural resources and the resulting destruction of the planet, the increasing economic gap between developed and developing countries, and the increasing wealth difference between the higher and lower classes (ibid.).

However, as previously noted, processes of neoliberalisation do not produce the same outcomes, but they are highly specific to the nations in which they occur. Indeed, Italian capitalism has been characterised by a paternalistic state, the scarce involvement of the financial complex (excluding bank loans), and institutional investors being virtually absent (Marseguerra 2005). Hence why Briziarielli (2011) claims that Italy has been characterised by a specific marriage between neoliberalism and neo-corporatism, a class project relying heavily on the state. Nonetheless, supranational pressures and hegemonic forces, such as the EU and American institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, mean that 'the viability of these local capitalisms may indeed depend on the degree to which they are concordant with US-inspired international norms, or the degree to which they successfully resist US hegemonic pressures' (Blim 2000, p. 32).

On this topic, McCann (2007) argues that Italy represents a 'test case for claims of externally constrained liberal adjustment' (p. 103), where the differences between the domestic regulatory framework and the liberal international order are so profound as to require stronger pressures for reforms. He goes on to argue that Italy's political economy has throughout the 20th century been much more state-centric than liberal, and Berlusconi's governments much less committed to liberal reforms than the centre-left (McCann 2007). However, such 'irregularities' in the application of neoliberal principles are not uncommon, since 'neoliberalism relies heavily on institutional/political forces much more than on an unregulated market to realize its objectives' (Briziarelli 2011, p. 7).

Indeed, Berlusconi's time in power has been defined by the employment of a neoliberal rhetoric, while promoting ambiguous policies with the prime objectives of securing re-election and of consolidating existing power relations which benefit a narrowly defined capitalist class (McCann 2007). Berlusconi's main political objectives have been towards the privatisation of public enterprises, shrinking of the welfare system, devolution and deregulation, while using a somewhat conservative-catholic, populist, nationalist, family-business oriented rhetoric, which has relied heavily on sexist discourses about gender and female sexuality. While these elements might seem contradictory at first, the employment of Hall's (1988; 1989) work in the next section untangles and explains how it has been possible for Berlusconi to articulate them in such a way as to produce consent for his cultural and political project.

Berlusconi's articulation of neoliberal authoritarian populism in Italy

The profoundly contradictory connection of 'progressive' liberal values and concepts with somewhat 'regressive' conservative ones has been observed in Thatcherism by Hall (1988), who identified it as a process of 'regressive modernisation', where a nostalgic, backward looking to an older 'golden age' grounds and legitimates a particular vision of the future (Procter 2004). Berlusconi's rhetoric, especially in the 1994 elections, relied heavily on the nostalgic reference to the *Miracolo Economico*, pushing the right buttons of a population which was facing economic crisis after having experienced the opulence and vitality of the 1980s. In such a way, values which belonged to the Italian conservative Right of the First Republic, such as the need for a strong State, the defence of the status quo and of class privilege, aversion towards the workers' movement, and antiparliamentary feelings, could be rejuvenated within a novel and 'modernising' political project.

The contradictory nature of 'regressive modernisation' does not represent a weakness or fallacy of the project, but has the power of 'articulat[ing] into a configuration different subjects, different identities, different projects, different aspirations. It does not reflect,

it *constructs* a "unity" out of difference' (Hall 1988, p. 166). Indeed, this is how Berlusconi's political agenda, one which ultimately sides with capital and economic privilege, has come to represent the interests of a variety of Italians across different socio-economic backgrounds. He did so through what Hall (1988) defines 'authoritarian populism': an intensification of state control and the gradual erosion of many of the fundamental institutions of democracy, while seeking justification and legitimation through popular consent.

Populism is arguably a very difficult concept to theorise: political theory engagement with populist movements have either concentrated in describing the peculiarities of a particular movement or attempted to provide a typology, eventually having to admit the exceptionality of many cases (Albertazzi & McDonnel 2008; Canovan 1981, 2002, 2005; Mény & Surel 2000, 2002; Mudde 2002, 2004, 2007; Taggart 1995, 2000, 2004). Another difficulty has been the negative status which the adjective 'populist' has achieved in scholarly and mainstream discourses, which has had the effect of marking populist movements as simplistic, emotional and extremist (Mudde 2004).

Laclau (1977; 2002; 2005) provides a more nuanced theory of populism which rejects negative connotations of the term, not only making the term available across the political spectrum, but framing it as the underlying 'logic of articulation' (2005, p. 32) of potentially all social and political movements. He argues that what defines populism is its ability to group different ideological positions and political demands along a chain of equivalence, which is then placed in opposition to forms of political power or authority in terms of a shared antagonism (ibid.). Thus, the concept of 'antagonism' is detached from its classic association with class and class consciousness, overcoming the economic determinism which characterises classical Marxism.

Hall (1989) takes the argument a step further: through a critique of Laclau's concept of the people/power bloc contradiction, concept which claims that populism can be so only if it sides with the people against the power bloc, Hall (1988) argues that the Right has been able to 'rework and neutralise the people/power bloc contradiction effectively in

the direction of an "authoritarian populism"' (p.140). Thus, while Laclau's theory would indicate that neoliberal reforms which aim at framing the state as simply an administrative device would mean the death of populist movements (Beasley-Murray 2006), it is only through Hall's (1989) elaboration of Laclau's theory that we come to understand how the New Right has been able to appropriate, and continues to use, a populist rhetoric.

Berlusconi's Right has managed to represent the power bloc in terms of statism, bureaucracy, the Left and the judiciary, while on the side of 'the people' is Berlusconi and all that he stands for: individualism, freedom, personal initiative, and so on. The omnipresence of the term *libertà* (freedom) in the names of his party and coalitions (*Casa delle Libertà*, *Popolo delle Libertà*, *Polo delle Libertà*, etc.) is a revealing fact. Ginsborg (2004) notes how one of the main tenets of Berlusconi's speeches during his campaigns was the constant reference to the concept of liberty, while mentions to democracy were almost totally absent. The type of liberty which is invoked is a negative one, in the classic sense of freedom from interference and obstruction. The state, with its 'oppressive chains' made of the 'weight of bureaucracy', 'suffocating procedures' and 'fiscal pressures', is interpreted as the main hindrance to the individual's rightful condition of freedom (ibid., p. 4).

The 'prosecution theory' and the 'communist conspiracy' are two themes from which, to this day, Berlusconi has drawn extensively. The neoliberal and anti-communist stances have become intertwined in his political rhetoric, which accuses the Left, the persecuting magistrates and most of the national cultural institutions of being communists wanting to limit people's freedoms by enforcing a controlling, rigorous and overbearing state. Competition is heralded as the means to increase liberty, such that every limitation to competition is framed as an attack to the freedom and rights of everyone (ibid.). Communism instead is framed in terms of 'regime' and 'ideology', thus as that which viciously attempts to mould, control and obfuscate people's consciousness and action. Therefore, a postmodern attack on grand-narratives is used to discredit Berlusconi's political and intellectual opponents (the foreign liberal press as well) and, at the same

time, to frame neoliberal rationality as the only non-ideological and 'free' position.[22]

Berlusconi has effectively employed populist discourses within his rhetoric, winning popular consent to new forms of authoritarianism. The main tenets of his populist rhetoric are, on the one hand, the emphasis on the commonalities and the proximity between him as a political leader and the 'everyman' (this aspect will be covered more extensively in the exploration of the connection between Berlusconi and the media later in the chapter), on the other hand, a more authoritarian side grounded on fear and on popular discontent (as it will appear also clear in relation to politics that have mobilised gender for conservative ends).

Indeed, Berlusconi and his associates have employed several moral panics in their political communication, which have had the effect of producing a climate of fear in Italian society and have worked to legitimise an authoritarian and forceful state, as clearly illustrated by the motto '*tolleranza zero* [zero tolerance]'.[23] This slogan was used in relation to several issues which the Centre-Right government felt needed strong intervention, such as issues of immigration, and its perceived dangers of delinquency, crime and violence, the eradication of prostitution in the streets, and the danger of the 'black blocs' at the G8 summit in Genoa.[24] On a cultural level, moral degeneration has also been addressed through the denunciation of '*la dittatura sfascista del relativismo* [the egotistical dictatorship of relativism]', which must be tackled through politics informed by Christian ethics grounded on '*valori, famiglia, identità, autorità, ordine, responsabilità, federalismo*

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[22] When in 2001 the *Economist* titled its front page 'Why Berlusconi is unfit to lead Italy'. Berlusconi filed a writ for defamation against the Economist in the Rome court, and claimed that he was victim of an international communist conspiracy (*Good Italy, Bad Italy: Girlfriend in a Coma* 2013).

[23] Blair introduced a somewhat similar concept when he espoused 'tough love' (Hall 2011).

[24] The events which occurred during the G8 summit in 2001 are especially indicative of the climate of fear and the tough coercive measures which have been employed by the Berlusconi government. The media and the politicians participated in constructing a climate of intense anxiety and fear among the population about the arrival of the infamous 'black blocs', the anarchist groups known to be violent, unruly and destructive. The repression of the protests by the law enforcement was extremely forceful, which resulted in the death of a young man, Carlo Giuliani. The episode not only demonstrated the undemocratic employment of the repressive apparatuses, but there has been suspicion that members of the police forces were disguised as 'black blocs' in order to legitimise the law enforcement's aggressive repression.

[values, the family, identity, authority, order, responsibility, federalism]' (Tremonti 2008 in Turi 2011, p. 45).

Nonetheless, it is important to stress that Berlusconi's neoliberal project differs from Thatcherism in several ways. The first one is its reliance on gender and female sexuality in his populist and nationalist rhetoric and politics. As it will be further explored below, femininity and sexuality have been employed ambivalently to support Berlusconi's political project, in a way that suggests that modern democracies cannot ignore women's needs and feminist demands, but can articulate them in ways to support conservative and even regressive policies and legislation, as it is explored in the third and last section of the chapter. The second fundamental element is that, despite its reliance on a forceful state and on the policing authorities, Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism has effectively undermined the authority and autonomy of those institutions which are in place to maintain democratic standards, such as the judiciary, the state and the law enforcement.

The third important element is the importance of Berlusconi's experience and ownership of the media in Italy, since, differently from Margaret Thatcher, during his time in power Berlusconi owned and controlled large part of the media. The media played a fundamental role in his populism, to the point that one can say that his was a media-generated consent. Hence, while the first part of this chapter has focused on outlining the major characteristics of Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism, the next section expands this framework to include the way the media participated in the *dispositif* of Berlusconism, the media being the most important apparatus of power, through its involvement in and contribution to the creation of a neoliberal governmentality and rationality in Italy, as it is explored below.

Media as an apparatus of power and the generation of consent

Curran & Couldry (2003) have criticised a traditional conceptualisation of media in terms of a vehicle (a medium) through which other players exercise power, such as the state,

big businesses or the political élite. Instead, they stress how the media should be analysed as a form of power in itself, claiming that 'media power (direct control over the means of media production) is an increasingly central dimension of power in contemporary societies' (p. 4). When looking at Italian politics since the 1980s the power that media industries are able to exercise appears self-evident: the leverage Berlusconi was able to exercise on political power in the 1980s, his friendship with Craxi and other important political figures, and eventually his ability to take political power in his own hands in the 1990s and 2000s.[25]

However, the Italian case shows how it is virtually impossible to detach politics and media, especially in a neoliberal economy that allows the disproportionate growth of a media mogul such as Berlusconi, as well as enabling him to take political power. As a matter of fact, Berlusconi was closely involved in politics since the very beginning of his entrepreneurial career, although behind-the-scenes. Ultimately, as Berardi et al. (2009) argue, what happened in Italy is not an isolated case, but 'represents a process that was already occurring on a global scale: the progressive occupation of the space of social communication by private holdings, and the progressive subordination of political power and the dynamics of democracy to the absolute power of the media-financial complex' (Berardi et al. 2009, p. 19).

However, it is Foucault's work on power, knowledge and subjectivity that allows one to understand the importance of the media in Italian culture in its role as a signifying institution. The media, as an institutional and discursive practice, works at the intersection of relations of power and knowledge, disseminating society's 'regime of truth', that is:

> the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the

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[25] In 1977, immediately after the Constitutional Court freed frequencies from state monopoly in 1976, Berlusconi began to build his media empire. Differently from public broadcasting, commercial television was until the 1990s almost completely unregulated, a period which has been called the 'Wild West' of all broadcasting systems, and which saw the rise and expansion of the capable industrialist Silvio Berlusconi (Hibberd 2008). Through political connections, aggressive business strategies and the astute exploitation of legal loopholes and weak implementation of the already limited regulation, Berlusconi managed to effectively broadcast on a national scale, owning as many television networks as public broadcasting; by 1984 Italy had in all effects a television duopoly.

mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault 1980, p. 131).

According to Foucault apparatuses represent those institutional settings through which discursive formations operate, making possible only certain kinds of representation and knowledge, which are inextricably linked with power. Hence, the media, as an instrument to produce knowledge about the social world, works as an apparatus of power, classifying certain claims to knowledge as 'true' while others as 'false'.

The media is only one apparatus through which knowledge is made available to individuals, as discourses appear across different linguistic and non-linguistic means and at more than one institutional setting. However, as the world becomes increasingly reliant on the fast circulation of information and images (Curran & Couldy 2003), the media becomes more and more prominent as an apparatus of power. Indeed, with the fragmentation of mass politics and the dissolution of family and community networks, people's reliance on the media as a primary source for knowing and understanding the world increases (ibid.). Furthermore, during his time in power, Berlusconi reached out to attack other symbolic apparatuses, such as education and cultural institutions, accused of being '*roccaforti della sinistra* [strongholds of the Left]' (Turi 2011, p. 38), which has resulted in a weakening of those institutions which could provide competing forms of knowledge not favourable to Berlusconi's neoliberal project.[26]

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[26] Throughout the years the centre-Right has implemented substantial cuts to an education system which was already wavering, and to cultural institutions in general. Furthermore, in the reforms of the education system promoted by the centre-Right governments, one can detect a clear shift in the direction of the labour market, in terms of the creation of a specialised labour force which follows existing patterns of social and economic power and privilege (Newell 2009). The reforms also provide private institutions (for the most part catholic) with public funding, for 'sostegno alle famiglie per una effettiva libertà di scelta educativa tra scuola pubblica e privata [the support to families for an effective freedom of choice in regards to education between public and private schools]' (Turi 2011, p. 37), as well as the semi-privatisation of Universities, through the possibility of contributions from regional and local governments, civic society and private enterprises (ibid.). Furthermore, since the early 2000s the Centre-Right has increasingly invested in the creation of specific cultural organisations in order to provide the party with an intellectual basis functional to its interests. Turi (2011) argues that the attack to the cultural institutions of the country and the creation of think-tanks and journals for the circulation of Centre-Right ideals represent the attempt of the centre-right to expand in other sectors of cultural life besides the media, in order to be more effective in its efforts to cultural homogenisation.

Media-generated consent to Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism

Many commentators have argued that Berlusconi's political success in 1994 was due for the most part to Berlusconi's monopoly of private television and the aggressive propaganda enacted by *Fininvest-Mediaset* channels and personnel. Indeed, political and social commentators, as well as television presenters and celebrities were mobilised to support Berlusconi and his message (Hibberd 2007). Three of these are worth mentioning: the first two, Mike Buongiorno and Raimondo Vianello, were two long-lasting figures of Italian entertainment television, whom Berlusconi had 'stolen' from *RAI* in the early days of *Fininvest*; the third was Ambra Angiolini, an extremely young showgirl (at the time aged 16) who presented a popular show on *Italia 1* called *Non è la RAI*, which has throughout the years become representative of the kind of television Berlusconi's channels would offer to the public (revealingly, the name of the show means 'This is not RAI') (Gundle & O'Sullivan 1996).

Furthermore, Mazzoleni (1995) argues that to bypass newly introduced legislation, which imposed a number of financial and communication restrictions during electoral campaign, among them the prohibition for television channels to broadcast spot-ads and for the press to publish advertisements for parties or candidates in the 30 days prior to elections, Berlusconi used his media and economic power to bombard the public with advertisement for him and his party on his channels in the weeks immediately before the start of the official campaign. Interestingly, one of the sections of society which counts for 44% of Berlusconi's electorate is that of housewives, a group that is substantial in Italy since women's participation in paid work is especially low in comparison to other European countries, and that tends to watch more television than other groups.[27] Research has found that among this group, women who watched more than 3 hours of television per day were more prone to vote for Berlusconi (Ginsborg 2004).

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[27] In 2013 female employment was 48% in comparison to 68% for male employment (OECD 2013).

However, there are a number of reasons why the media has been fundamental to Berlusconi's political success which are subtler than his own media's bias and propaganda. Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism relied heavily on Berlusconi's experience of the commercial domain and of the media, and on his expertise in commodity culture and marketing techniques. Brown (2003) argues that one of the chief characteristics of neoliberal rationality is the fact that the political sphere is itself conceptualised in economic terms, such that the government is itself evaluated in terms of costs and benefits, pros and cons, profitability, supply and demand, and so on. Berlusconi's campaign was itself framed in these terms, gaining consent by relating to the neoliberal rationality pervasive in Italian society.

Indeed, he proposed himself as good on the political market for the potential electors, and mobilised all his marketing resources to canvass the mood of the electorate for months (Mazzoleni 1995). Berlusconi's main pollster, Gianni Pilo, who was at the time the marketing manager of *Fininvest*, was asked to move to the Forza Italia headquarters 100 days before the 1994 elections to start Diakron, a polling institute. Officially, *Diakron* was an independent market research company, however, as a matter of fact, *Daikron*, *Fininvest* and *Forza Italia* were so intertwined as to be inseparable (Farrell 1995). The pollsters informed Berlusconi of the wishes, issues, preoccupations and preferences of the Italian people, such that he could draft a political project which would resonate with the widest number of voters.

After having discovered Italians' desires and concerns, Berlusconi designed a populist political message grounded on an anti-communist rhetoric, the promise of a new economic miracle and the boosting of Italy's international prestige (Mazzoleni 1995). Laclau (1977) stresses the importance of antagonistic relations which arise through the dichotomisation of the social space around an internal frontier. Indeed, one of the most recurrent features of populist rhetoric is the drawing of a division between a unified 'people' against the 'élite', generally the ruling élite (Albertazzi & McDonnel 2008; Canovan 2002; Mény & Surel 2002). As Canovan (2002) argues, 'the contrast between "us" and "them", between those who are and are not included in the notion of "the

people", is a crucial aspect of the ideological picture' (p. 34). Berlusconi presented himself as a new political actor, who intended to break off with the past and the ignominious political system of the First Republic, and inaugurate a new era of 'honest' and 'decent' politics.

Di Piramo (2009) also claims that the political leader of populist movements is nothing else than an extension of the will of the people, hence he does not represent, but embodies, the people. However, although the leader remains one of the people, he nonetheless stands out, as his unique qualities and vision mean that only him can be the rescuer of society. Ultimately, populism celebrates 'the ordinariness of its constituents and the extraordinariness of their leaders' (Taggart 2000, p. 102). One of the way in which Berlusconi stressed his novelty and his proximity to the Everyman has been by using a different language from the *politichese* of the old political class, a language which has been called *gentese* (its root is from *gente* which means 'people') (Croci 2001).[28] Such language was not only more comprehensible in comparison to *politichese*, but was also filled with extra-political formats and terminology which resounded with the majority of Italians. In particular, he borrowed from the two areas in which he had most expertise, football and advertisement (Gibelli 2010).

Football metaphors abounded in Berlusconi's speeches, the most notable being: 'I heard that the game was getting dangerous, and that it was all being played in the two penalty areas, with the midfield being left desolately empty', a situation which led him to famously 'enter the field' (Ginsborg 2004, p. 63). The association of politics with the game of football framed the elections as a contest between the two factions, participating in the spectacolarisation of politics, as well as campaigning 'against the "extremes" on behalf and in defence of the silent majority - the "moderates"' (Hall 1988, p. 32). The name of

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[28] Political communication, especially before the 1990s, was especially complex and was, for this reason, called *politichese*. Paoletti and Brants (2010) define *politichese* as 'a self-referential language and mutual understanding, detached from the public but shared by politicians and journalists who often spend time together in the corridors of power, discussing, commenting and interpreting the politics of the day (p. 333)'.

his party and the colour light blue of the logo were also references to football, 'Forza Italia' a typical football chant and *azzurri* [light-blues] being the nickname given to the Italian players. Furthermore, Croci (2001) argues that Berlusconi communicates through the subliminal and seductive language used by television and advertisers, the use of catchy slogans and sing-songs being also clearly an imitation of the jingles and catchphrases of advertisement.[29] Such a strategy has been called by Albertazzi & Rothenberg (2009) 'mediatic populism' of which, they argue, Berlusconi is the undiscussed inventor.

However, fundamental to Berlusconi's mediatic populism has also been the employment of his personal history and intimacy, in line with the growing focus of the media on the body and the private sphere (such as the fascination with reality TV, plastic surgery, human interest stories and spectacle). Asquer (2011) argues that the 'neo-television'(Eco 1983) of the 1980s was not only grounded on dreams and illusions of a better and wealthier life, but also on a certain accordance with people's lives, something which has become one of the leitmotifs of Berlusconi's political rhetoric. Through an analysis of the images, topics and narratives presented in Berlusconi's widely read magazine *Chi?*[30] Asquer (2011) finds a common thread which is not only representative of the ways the commercial media interprets and understands social reality, but of the culture of Berlusconism as a whole.

The narrative of the self-made man who came from nothing, his development within a world of wealth, prestige and power, while at the same time maintaining a connection with something outside of that world; the anti-intellectualistic pay-back and the employment of specific aesthetic codes (pop, kitch and trash) which are potentially in line with the anti-intellectualist 'ascent from nothing' narrative; and a strong proximity with the everyman and everywoman, with the 'people', all participate in creating a particularly 'populist' media environment, which Asquer calls (2011) a form of cultural populism. The

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[29] A very interesting example is a musical clip which was broadcasted on national television and included in Gandini's (2009) documentary Videocracy.

[30] *Chi?* is the most popular glossy magazine in Italy, covering celebrity gossip and human interest stories.

similarities of Berlusconi's construction of himself and the narratives presented in the magazine lead Asquer (ibid.) to argue that both the media and Berlusconi are '*popolare, popolaresco, populista* [popular, of the people and populist]', highlighting the interplay between the media and Berlusconi's political populism.

But potentially more important than all the above, is the fact that via his oligopoly, Berlusconi was able to disseminate the individualist, hedonistic and consumeristic values necessary to Italian society to accept his neoliberal political agenda. The advent of commercial television in the late 1970s, which fortuitously coincided with the introduction of colour television, has been considered as a true revolution not only in terms of the media itself, but also in terms of morality, ideology and affiliation of Italian society (Gibelli 2010). Berlusconi's media actively participated in the important changes which were occurring in Italian society in the late 1970s, such as the secularisation of society, the challenges to catholic morality, the feminist movement and the students' movements.

While black and white represented the old, traditional, dull, catholic, moralistic tones of state television, colour represented a new, freer, more fun and hedonistic world, where consumerism grounded the possibility of happiness and success (ibid.). Berlusconi was not only the leader of such revolution, but incarnated himself the ideals of happiness, success, prestige, fame and glamour, such that in the advertisements which accompanied his entrance in the political arena he compared himself to the colour television, and his adversaries to the black and white one. Ultimately, Berlusconi and the *ventennio a colori* (the 20 years of colour television from 1975 to 1995) were fundamental for the creation of a 'new sociopolitical configuration [...] based on superficial optimism and competitive individualism' (Berardi et al. 2009, p. 28).

The changes that the media underwent because of Berlusconi's oligopoly resulted in very particular representations of gender and of gender relations, which played a fundamental part in enabling Berlusconi to gain the consent he needed to be elected, as well as shaping his gender politics. Hence, the aim of the next section is to explore the representation of

gender and female sexuality in Italian media, showing how these participated in the *dispositif* of Berlusconism by sanctioning particular forms of masculinity and of male sexual prowess, while at the same time framing femininity only in terms of beauty and sexual availability.

Female visibility and beauty, and male sexual prowess, in mediated genders and gender relations

The media participated in Berlusconi's enterprise not only by supporting his neoliberal authoritarian populism, and acting as a vehicle to magnify the image of the leader, but also to establish and legitimise specific ways of conceiving masculinity, femininity and gender relations. Indeed, the ideology and iconography diffused by Berlusconi's channels are consistent with (and instrumental to) those found in Berlusconismo and its propaganda, especially in terms of women's subjectivity, their bodies and their relations with men (Giomi 2012).

Because of the limited role women play within the media industries, both at levels of executive position and performance, whilst being over-exposed and hyper-visible, Buonanno (2005) has devised the phrase *visibilità senza potere* (visibility without power). Similarly, a research conducted by Censis[31] (2006) reports that women's presence on television relies more on quantity than quality: their role is almost always secondary and very often it resembles *décor* rather than active participation. In its analysis of the 7 national channels, the report records that women participate in the media mostly as performers (actresses, singers and models); they are helpful, positive and collaborative, their role being the smooth running of the programs, mostly conducted by men; women are for the most part beautiful, well-kept and young, as well as middle-class; their area of expertise is largely fashion/show business and beauty; and the other fields in which women appear the most being those related to physical violence and the justice system.

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[31] Censis (Centro Studi Investimenti Sociali) is an independent socio-economic research institute that is subcontracted by both state institutions and private clients to investigate a vast variety of elements of Italian social life: from media, to work and welfare.

According to Benini (2013) 'the Italian media is primarily focused on the hegemony of the culture of beauty in the representation of women – identifying a sexy, attractive body with women's core identity tout court (Gill 2007: 255) – and in the sexualization of culture, saturating the mediascape with a mainstreamed sexual and pornographic discourse' (p. 89). This is undoubtedly true, and indeed one of the areas mostly developed in scholarship on women and media in Italy has been the critique of representations of women's bodies, increasingly hyper-sexualised and complying with ever narrowing beauty canons and ideals.

Lorella Zanardo, a woman who has managed to enter mainstream debate and has become relatively well known in Italy through her documentary/critique *Il Corpo Delle Donne* [The Body of Women] (2009), later published as a book in 2010, argues that television presents a narrow, unrealistic and counterfeited kind of beauty: a young body, generally characterised by alarming thinness and big-sized breasts, allegedly representing what men desire. The importance of having a beautiful body is reflected by discourses on cosmetic surgery, often presented by female hosts, which suggest this practice to be almost necessary for (re)gaining self-confidence and for having a successful social life. The fact that older women, particularly older feminine faces, are almost non-existent on television is given emphasis by Zanardo (ibid.), who condemns the ageism of representations of women's bodies.

In line with the critiques exposed above, Giomi (ibid.) also claims that in Berlusconi's channels women have been merely decorative, and at best objects of, or instruments of comicality. But she adds that the narratives produced do not limit themselves at satisfying the voyeurism of the male audience, but sanctions the figure of a middle-aged man, regularly married, who is besotted by the sexual appeal of young and voluptuous women, and constantly trying the sexual approach (Giomi 2012). These shows complete and generalise the tradition of the *filone* erotic-comedic, in which middle-aged, unattractive

and mediocre men chase younger and beautiful bodies.[32] Guaraldo (2011) argues that in the popular collective imagination brought about by the 'innocent' films of the *commedia all'italiana* [Comedy à la Italian] what appears perfectly normal is the idea that women's young bodies are always at disposal of men of any age or size. Berlusconi himself represents, to some extent, the men on the screen; but differently from them, he is successful.

Ultimately, Berlusconi's body, his personal history and his sexuality fully embody the promises of (male) happiness, gratification and success that Italian media has portrayed for the past three decades. Developing an argument where Berlusconi is identified with the Lacanian Father, Benini (2013) argues:

> The rest of the nation identified with the limitless enjoyment of the Father, because the new 'inner drives dimension' of the masses coincided with Berlusconi's drives, surrounding him with an impregnable consensus. The nation was supposed to enjoy the unleashed transgression of the leader: a transgression that mirrored unequal and pathologized gender relations […] (p. 93).

Especially for the Italian male electorate, Berlusconi represents the success of Italian masculinity and as such provides enjoyment for the male ego. Hence, the multitude of Berlusconi's followers who support him shouting: *'Bravo Silvio, scopale tutte!* [Well done Silvio, fuck them all!]' (Giomi 2012, p. 9).

Ultimately, the high visibility of women, their investment with little or no power, the focus on youth, beauty and sexual availability, the framing of women as victims, and rarely as active agents, elements that emerge from the investigation of the media representation of women in Italy, find parallels in the exploration of women's role in Berlusconi's politics. Indeed, women have played a crucial role in his political rhetoric and project. Ultimately, a post-feminist climate, characterised by a strong sexism, has played a central role in the *dispositif* of Berlusconism, as it is explored below.

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[32] A *filone* describes a genre of films which repeat an established formula, targeting a specific audience who know what to expect. The tradition of Italian *filoni* started in the 1940s and, although less popular, still continues with the equally sexist *filone* of *cinema panettone.*

Berlusconism, gendered nationalism and post-feminism in Italy

We cannot understand Berlusconism without appreciating the fact that its neoliberal authoritarianism was mostly shaped around a specific gender discourse. As McRobbie (2009) has already demonstrated in relation to the UK, several gender issues and feminist demands have entered political and institutional life also in Italy. However, this interest has been articulated in such a way as to support neoliberal, xenophobic and authoritarian policies and regulations. While some genuine efforts to tackle gender inequality have taken place (such as gender quotas illustrated below), ultimately Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism has mostly been characterised by an opportunistic and instrumental use of gender issues by the ruling Right, all the while Berlusconi has continued to manifest extremely sexist and misogynist views and behaviours. The end result is a post-feminist culture in which women are interpellated in a dichotomous fashion: as either empowered, smart and driven neoliberal subjects, or as 'victims' instrumental for the implementation of conservative and xenophobic policies and regulations.

Women in Berlusconi's politics: between gender equality and bio-power

As part of the movement towards gender mainstreaming mentioned above, Berlusconi's governments have, to some degree, advocated for women's equality in terms of their participation and status in work and politics. For example, Stefania Prestagiacomo, *Ministro per le Pari Opportunità* [Minister for Equal Opportunities] during Berlusconi's second term (2001-2006) and elected member of parliament throughout his time in office, strenuously fought for the *quote rosa* [pink quotas] for equal access to elected office for men and women, as well as for a 40% threshold on the proportion of men and women sitting on executive boards. However, the law was implemented only for European elections, leaving individual regions the choice of whether to adopt the law or not. Stefania Prestagiacomo was also responsible for the creation of three volumes called *Italiane* ['Italians' but in the feminine form] which was freely distributed by the government. The intention behind the books was to emphasise the important role of

women in Italian history, singling out the more prominent figures.

Furthermore, female members of Berlusconi's party have benefited from an enlarged visibility, more than ever before and more than the Left wing female politicians. Partially, their increased visibility has been because they themselves incarnate post-feminist qualities, such as a hyperfeminine appearance, matched with entrepreneurial spirit and neoliberal views. Nevertheless, when women did hold ministers, very few held positions of significant importance, and these were often the ones generally associated with supposedly feminine tasks and capabilities, such as Minister of Education and of the Environment. Furthermore, one of the most salient offices for women's rights, the minister of Equal Opportunities, which has often been awarded to women, is especially unimportant, as it does not hold legislative power and can only operate as an advisory board, devising social initiatives and monitoring those already existent.

Despite this alleged commitment to gender equality, several policies put in place as a result of the neoliberal hegemony which has characterised the past two decades have involved women differently than men. These laws, policies and regulations need to be placed within Foucault's (1976; 2010) analysis of bio-politics, in that their ultimate objective is the one of regulating and monitoring bodies - their movement, their activities and occupations, and the terms of these occupations - producing subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and forms of organisation of the social (Brown 2003).

The first field of political action which is worth mentioning is Berlusconi's governments' efforts to increase the flexibility of labour. Harvey (2005) claims that while in neoliberal economies labour market flexibility has been constructed as advantageous for both the labourers and for the employers, what has happened is that flexibility 'has been converted into a highly exploitative system of flexible accumulation (all the benefits accruing from increasing flexibility in labour allocations in both space and time go to capital)' (p. 53). What Harvey (2005) ignores is that the liberalisation of the labour market influences women's employment patterns more negatively than men's. This was especially true in relation to Law 30/2003, that aimed at improving flexibility in working conditions, creating

new jobs, tackling unemployment and improving opportunities especially for women, younger people and people attempting to return to work (Galetto et al. 2009). However, this has meant that for many women, employment has been characterised by higher degrees of income instability, unskilled and low-paid labour, temporary or part-time work (Fantone 2007). Furthermore, the shrinking of public funding to public services has involved the increase of short-term, project-based and flexible contracts, affecting women more than men, since women's employment rate within public institutions is generally of higher proportion than in non-public ones.

The important cuts to the welfare system have also affected women's lives more dramatically than men's, as in Italy care work is almost exclusively women's responsibility. In a country characterised by an ageing population, low fertility rate and a lack of social services, especially in regards to long-term care, issues of care work have fallen completely on women, reinforcing the assumption that their main role is the reproductive one (Fantone 2007). While the more fortunate families have been able to hire (female) domestic workers, the less affluent have had to rely on family networks, the family being restructured in order to respond to the new precarity by maintaining young adults and elderly members within the same household, thus conserving its importance in the structure of Italian society (ibid.). Issues of precarity have also shed light on the often-over-looked issue of class difference, with women from working class background having no other choice besides accepting an unskilled or low-paid job, while middle-class, educated women may either 'decide' to take a break from work or start their own businesses (Fantone 2007).

Moreover, Berlusconi's government, with the important contribution of Bossi,[33] has employed immigration policy to respond to the needs of Italian businesses, by significantly reducing access to permanent settlement, while at the same time allowing for a continued supply of migrant labourers (Pojman 2009). The law on immigration

[33] Umberto Bossi was until 2012 the undiscussed leader of the neo-populist right-wing party Lega Nord. The party demands increased regional autonomy and federalism, and strongly opposes immigration.

devised in 2002 which has taken the name of Bossi-Fini (Law 189/2002) is the most prohibitive immigration legislation ever implemented in Italy (Pojman 2009). However, the law also carried an amnesty towards care workers (who, in Italy, are mainly women), who can benefit of a privileged treatment on the condition that they do not leave their employment for a specific number of years (Trappolin 2005). Such amnesty has the effect of limiting the working possibilities of immigrant women, making them once more responsible for the reproductive work, as well as making them more susceptible to job insecurities, abuses and exploitations (Pojman 2009). The Bossi-Fini has the effect of framing immigrants in terms of their utility to the state, with immigrant women being encouraged to supply the services which the Berlusconi government has withdrawn (Trappolin 2005).

As well as domestic workers, the other category of female immigrants who are guaranteed preferential citizenship rights are prostitutes (Trappolin 2005). However, differently from the former category, prostitutes can benefit from immigration privileges in terms of a special resident permit on the condition that they abandon their employment. Foreign women who engage in prostitution are therefore framed in policy discourse as 'victims' of trafficking in need of state's support, while Italian women who similarly engage in prostitution are virtually ignored.[34] The association of immigration,

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[34] In 2008 the Minister for Equal Opportunities for the Berlusconi government, Mara Carfagna, submitted a proposal for changing the law on prostitution, criminalising street prostitution and soliciting (*Disegno di Legge Carfagna-Alfano-Maroni*). Mara Carfagna described prostitution in these terms: '*un fenomeno vergognoso che spesso è connesso alla riduzione in schiavitù, all'uso e all'abuso dei minori, che a volte sfocia anche in fenomeni di violenza come lo stupro, tutti fenomeni che sono strettamente collegati alla prostituzione in strada*' [a shameful phenomenon, often connected with slavery, with underage exploitation, which might also end in acts of violence such as rape, all situations strongly connected with street prostitution] (*Repubblica* 11/09/08). The irony of this statement did not pass unnoticed, since Mara Carfagna had made a career out of exposing and capitalising on her body on national media, as one of Mediaset

prostitution and trafficking has important reflections on the social representation of prostitution and of the women who are involved in this occupation. The first one is the separation of prostitution (especially street prostitution) from other forms of sanctioned forms of sex-work, such as pornography and strip-tease clubs. The second is the internal fragmentation within prostitution itself, Italian women being granted an agentic position as professionals, working in better and safer conditions, while immigrant women being denied agency and self-determination (ibid.).

Gendered nationalism: female youth and beauty representing the country

Furthermore, gender strongly participated in Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism in the way it has been mobilised as part of his nationalist rhetoric. Indeed, Berlusconi's populism is infused with nationalistic tropes, such that the two are almost inextricably intertwined. This is because both nationalist and populist rhetorics aim at creating an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983): nationalist discourses aim at creating a homogeneous nation, populist ones aim at creating a homogeneous 'people'. In his influential study of nationalism, Anderson (ibid.) claims that the homogeneity which is supposed to characterise the nation 'is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community' (p. 6). Rather than framing the 'imagined community' as a falsity he emphasises the creative force of nationalism, with its reliance on 'invented traditions', representations, stories, symbols and myths about the nation-state.

However, gender plays an important role within nationalism, and indeed Berlusconi's nationalism necessitates a particularly gendered perspective in order to understand the

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showgirls and posing nude for magazines and calendars. However, the proposal did not pass, the regulation of street prostitution remaining under local jurisdiction.

role of young and beautiful women in the creation of his Italy. Referring to the period of the rise of the nationalist movements, Anderson (1983) claims that '"young" an "youth" signified dynamism, progress, self-sacrificing idealism and revolutionary will' (p. 119). Despite his elderly age, Berlusconi has often been depicted as a man who enjoys being surrounded by youth, who takes the younger generation's future at heart, and has in many instances demonstrated his generosity towards his young friends. Tellingly, his generosity seems to have been directed for the most part towards young beautiful women, who have received several 'gifts', from employment on his channels and in the public broadcaster, to political positions, and in final instance money and jewelry. The examples of Mara Carfagna, Minister for Equal Opportunities in the 2006 and 2008 elections, and Nicole Minetti, a member of the regional council of Lombardy, two former showgirls with no political experience is quite telling.[35] As well as the candidacy for the European Parliament Election in 2009 of 20 young and beautiful women with previous experience in television and modelling.

These women have come to represent the new empowered, successful, smart and driven (but also hedonistic, self-interested and individualist) neoliberal post-feminist subject, one who can be at the same time beautiful, feminine and powerful, and with their candidacy and appointment Berlusconi has demonstrated his support for the renewal of the political class and of the nation. Indeed, in relation to the European elections he claimed '*voglio dare una nuova immagine del Popolo della Libertà. Voglio volti giovani, facce nuove* [I want to portray a new image for the Polo delle Libertà. I want young faces, new faces]' (*Il Sole 24 Ore* 29/04/09, par. 5).

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[35] Mara Carfagna entered the FI/PdL lines in 2004 after a career in the show business as model and showgirl on Berlusconi's channels. She was appointed Minister for Equal Opportunities in 2006 and 2008, and is one of Berlusconi's most devoted politicians. Nicole Minetti is also a former showgirl and dental hygienist, who entered Berlusconi's lines in 2010. She was elected as regional counsellor of Lazio after Berlusconi insisted she would be inserted in the PdL list headed by Formigoni. Berlusconi had made her acquaintance as the result of an attack he had suffered which had left him injured and with a few teeth chipped. Minetti was the dental hygienist who assisted the dentist. Allegedly, after a short conversation, Berlusconi asked Minetti: 'How would you like to be a politician?'

Exactly on the other side of the spectrum, has been the employment of Italian women as victims of sexual assault by foreign men as part of an anti-immigration stance by both the media and by the government. Since the early 1990s the topic of immigration has regularly been associated with issues of criminality, particularly, but not only, during Berlusconi's years in government (Peroni 2012). And from 2007 to 2009 the government put great effort into formulating legislation, or 'security packages', concerning national security and sexual assault, which associated immigration and sexual violence for the first time. Tellingly, in February 2009 the fourth Berlusconi government approved a new decree which was titled *Misure urgenti in materia di sicurezza pubblica e di contrasto alla violenza sessuale, nonchè in tema di atti persecutori* [Urgent measures in regards to public security and to contrast sexual violence, as well as stalking], where arguments for contrasting sexual violence were linked to norms regarding the expulsion of illegal immigrants, as if the two were part of the same phenomenon (ibid.).

Berlusconi himself played an important part in such discourses, on one occasion implying that Italian women's beauty put them in danger. In fact, he defended the decision of sending the military on to the streets to prevent rape by stating: '*dovremmo avere tanti soldati quante sono le belle ragazze italiane, credo che non ce la faremmo mai...* [We should have as many soldiers as beautiful girls, but this is virtually impossible...]' (*La Repubblica* 25/01/09, par. 1). This sentence not only frames Italian women as naturally vulnerable to men, and thus needing protection, but also sheds light to the fundamental role of Italian women's beauty in Berlusconi's nationalist project. As Woodcock argues (2010), '[w]ithin this paradigm, a "real" Italian woman is attractive in order to gain the protection (against the potential of sexual violence) of her boyfriend, her countrymen, representatives of the Italian state' (p. 484).

At the same time, Italy is characterised by a long-standing tradition of erotisation of ethnic and national difference in regards to women. The way the nationally and ethnically 'other' woman is constructed in the media will be developed further in the next chapters, nonetheless it is interesting to analyse the way Berlusconi himself produces these narratives. Berlusconi's attitudes towards ethnic women is quite different to the one he

reserves for foreign men, often referencing his international past relationships instrumentally to show his good disposition on his official international visits (Severgnini 2011). Moreover, in occasion of a bi-national summit with the Albanian government about illegal immigration from Albania to Italy through dangerous and deadly routes, Berlusconi went as far as to say: '*faremo un'eccezione per chi porta belle ragazze* [we will make an exception for those who bring beautiful girls]' (*La Repubblica* 12/02/10, par. 1).

Although stated as a joke, such comment shows how closure to the ethnic 'other' is not generalised, but is heavily dependent on gender and sexuality. The comment implies the idea that foreign women are welcome in Italy, and may also be naturalised, as long as they submit themselves to the national 'rules of the game' when it comes to hegemonic femininity: heterosexuality, beauty and sexual availability. In the *Aftermath of Feminism* (2009) McRobbie argues that the neoliberal rationality which has come to represent young femininity has been 'democratised' such that 'ethnic' women are encouraged to integrate with the majority and abandon multi-cultural differences. Ruby Rubacuori, the reason why Berlusconi was under trial for paying for having sex with an underage prostitute and abuse of power, fits well in this framework, which sees the incorporation of the ethnic woman in post-feminist culture as long as she subscribes to its specifically neoliberal gender relations, as it will be examined in more detail in chapter 4.

The appreciation of young, beautiful and intelligent women is counterpoised by an extremely aggressive vilification of older, and in his opinion less attractive women. Quite exemplary is when, on an official visit to the ateneo telematico of CEPU, a distance learning institution, he was heard saying: '*mi accusano sempre di circondarmi di belle ragazze senza cervello. Ecco invece qui delle belle ragazze che si sono laureate con il massimo dei voti e che non assomigliano certo a Rosy Bindi* [I am always accused of surrounding myself with brainless beautiful girls. Here instead we have beautiful girls who have accomplished degrees with flying colours and who definitely do not look like Rosy

Bindi]' (Berlusconi 2010 in Beppe Severgnini 2011, p. 120).[36]

Rosy Bindi, long-lasting member of the PD, has recurrently been object of malignant and vulgar jokes by the ex-Prime Minister. One of the most memorable times was when he called in during a popular current affairs' talk show, and commented that Rosy Bindi was '*più bella che intelligente*' [more beautiful than intelligent], to which she promptly responded: '*evidentemente io sono una donna che non è a sua disposizione* [clearly, I am not a woman at your services]' (*La Repubblica* 08/10/09, par 1). Hand in hand with attacks to his female political opponents in terms of beauty and attractiveness, Berlusconi reserves sexual comments to other powerful women. On Margaret Thatcher, even though he respects and admires her, he stated that '*me ne ricorderei meglio se fosse stata una bella gnocca* [If she were a hottie, I would remember her better]' (*Corriere* 06/07/07, par 2).[37]

Ultimately, women and female sexuality have taken a central role in Berlusconism, but in a way that suggests limited concern about improving women's lives, possibilities and fulfilment. The continuities between the gender discourses that run throughout policies, laws, institutions, political and personal narratives, and media representations of gender and gender relations in Italy, show how politics and the media participated in the *dispositif* of Berlusconism by interpellating femininity in very specific ways. Indeed, the heightened visibility of women, while at the same time their investment with little power, the focus on youth, beauty and sexual availability, the framing of women as victims, and rarely as active agents, are all themes that characterise the gender discourse that circulates in the culture of Berlusconism.

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[36] Rosy Bindi is a female politician now in her 60s who has never shown particular interest in making herself attractive through clothing or make up. An average looking woman, she has often been object of contempt by male politicians commenting about her unappealing appearance.

[37] This comment was wrongly translated in the British Press as Berlusconi paying a compliment to Margaret Thatcher, calling her a 'nice piece of pussy'.

Conclusion

In the past 20 years, Berlusconi has penetrated the Italian cultural and political landscape in an irreversible way, solidifying economically, politically, socially and culturally the neoliberal trends which his monopoly of commercial television had initiated. This chapter has explored the culture and politics of Berlusconism and framed it in terms of a *dispositif* (Focault 1976) in which a neoliberal authoritarian populism, strongly sexist and misogynist, has been implemented with the aid of the media apparatus. Indeed, Berlusconi has been able to exercise an intensification of state control and the gradual erosion of many of the fundamental institutions of democracy, by seeking justification and legitimation through popular consent. Hence, instead of creating a new democratic order in place of the old corrupted system, as he promised, Berlusconi has relentlessly mined the autonomy of those institutions which are in place to maintain democratic standards: the judiciary, the state and the law enforcement.

The media was the fundamental apparatus of Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism, connecting all the elements of his cultural, political and social project. Berlusconi's expertise in television, marketing and consumer culture provided him with the skills to 'shine' on a political sphere which was resembling more and more the market economy. Through marketing strategies, communication styles taken from television and advertisement, and techniques of image construction, Berlusconi managed to sell himself, and only then his party, to a section of Italians large enough to support his election on four separate occasions. Indeed, as Mazzoleni (1995) argues, 'to attribute his electoral success to his media power is a short-sighted reading of the complexity of the "Berlusconi phenomenon" [...] Berlusconi's victory was not *thanks to* the media, but he could not have won *without* the media' (p. 312).

The central role of gender relations in his mediatic populism should not pass unnoticed: media representations of gender roles and gender relations constructed by the media for the past 30 years are very much aligned with the ex-prime minister's world-view. Looking at television especially, women are overrepresented but very rarely given an authoritative

voice, being relegated to secondary roles and mostly providing a pleasant *décor* in programs led by men. Hence, their representation is mostly in terms of beautiful bodies, where femininity is identified with a sexy, young and attractive body. On top of that, Berlusconi's media has managed to legitimise the figure of older, average-looking and mediocre men attempting to seduce young and voluptuous women, such that the sexual scandals in which he was involved, his frequent inappropriate comments to women and his adulteries do not provoke outrage, but enhance his image and masculinity instead.

Furthermore, the gender discourses found in the media are in many ways consistent with (and instrumental to) those found in Berlusconism and its propaganda, especially in terms of women's subjectivity, their bodies and their relations with men. Indeed, the high visibility of women, their investment with little or no power, the focus on youth beauty and sexual availability, the framing of women as victims, and rarely as active agents, elements that have been unravelled in the exploration in the media representation of women in Italy, find parallels in the investigation of women's role in Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism. Hence, Italian post-feminism is characterised by a dichotomous understanding of femininity. Young beautiful women have, on the one hand, come to represent the new empowered, successful, smart and driven (but also hedonistic, self-interested and individualist) neoliberal subject, fully able to participate in the male dominated spheres of employment and politics. On the other hand, they have been employed in the traditional role of 'victims' as instrumental in anti-immigration discourses which aim at building a barrier between 'us' and 'them'.

While this chapter developed around the *dispositif* of Berlusconism, stressing how a new configuration of gender and gender relations, and the media apparatus were fundamental for its production, the next chapters will continue this argument by analysing three case studies through which to expose the way media participate in constructing and regulating the definitions of femininity and female sexuality of Berlusconism. Indeed, although Zanardo (2009) and Benini (2012) are right in criticising the limited roles and narrow canons of beauty in Italian television, I believe it more interesting to move the focus of analysis less on women's physical appearance and more on how media representations

participate in the construction of culturally intelligible forms of subjectivity and sexuality, as it will be explored in the next chapters.

Ch. 4 - Ruby Rubacuori: At risk girl vs post-feminist sex worker

After having explored the dispositif of Berlusconism and the interlacing networks of power which circulate throughout it, focusing on discourses about gender and sexuality, this chapter and future ones will focus on three specific case studies, that provide further insight into the figuration of femininity in Berlusconism. This chapter takes as its subject matter one of the several sexual scandals in which Berlusconi was a protagonist, and its representation in three of the most important national newspapers. Indeed, in the past 5 years the former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has been involved in a number of scandals which have attracted enormous national and international media attention: parties in his Sardinian villa, where prominent political figures as well as attractive younger women participated in 2007, being transported there via institutional means;[38] 'Bunga Bunga' parties in his villa in Arcore from 2008 to 2013, where escorts, showgirls and 'ragazze immagine' (for a discussion of the term see p. 48) alike all performed and entertained the ex-Prime Minister and his associates;[39] suspect illicit liaisons with minors, first with Noemi Letizia (his attendance to her 18th birthday party in 2009 led to the breakdown of his marriage to Veronica Lario) and then with Ruby Rubacuori in 2009-2010 (the underage run-away whose media representation is the topic of this chapter);[40] and

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[38] In 2007 some photos taken by paparazzi showed several prominent political figures, among which the Czech ex-prime minister Mirok Topolánek, leisurely spending time at Berlusconi's villa in Sardinia with several younger women in bikinis. Berlusconi managed to impede the publication of the pictures in Italy, but five were published by a Spanish magazine, which later incurred in a legal complaint by Berlusconi's lawyer.

[39] The name 'Bunga Bunga' originates from a homophobic and racist joke that Berlusconi was very fond of and used to tell his guests at his dinner parties. Allegedly Berlusconi also employed the terms to describe the second part of the events he held in his villa with the young female guests, the evening consisting in a dinner (apparently Italian flag-themed) first and a second part held in a club-styled room in the basement of the villa. Berlusconi denied ever using the term, and other associates of his claimed to be responsible for the term, nonetheless the term has come to describe the evenings, being used by the women involved in the legal case themselves (these conversations were leaked to the press). The discovery of the existence of the parties is to be attributed to the escort Patrizia D'Addario, who was invited to two parties by Gianpaolo Tarantini (condemned for aiding and abetting prostitution in favour of Berlusconi by the Bari magistrates). Both times D'Addario brought with her a recorder and on 19th June 2009 her exclusive interview with Corriere was released, exposing Berlusconi's secret parties.

[40] This scandal emerged when Berlusconi, at the time prime minister, attended the 18th birthday party of

so on.

More precisely, this chapter is concerned with the media representation of one very young woman who has been involved in the latest of Berlusconi's sexual scandals, Karima El Mahroug, alias Ruby Rubacuori [Ruby Heartstealer]. Like the other cases, the centrality attributed to Ruby in the media representation of the events represents a cultural fascination with young femininity as a site of excitement, titillation, anxiety and fear (Gonick 2006; McRobbie 2009) and as a symbolic means to articulate and confront the 'uncertainties, tensions, fears, and anxieties elicited by the rapid social, economic, and political changes taking place due to neoliberal policies' (Gonick 2006, p. 5). While youth has traditionally been associated with progress and modernity, becoming a symbolic register to articulate anxieties and fears about social and cultural transformations, it is only in the recent decades that young women have come to the fore as metaphors of progress and change (Gonick 2004, 2006; McRobbie 2000, 2004, 2009). Indeed, Ruby in particular, but the the *velina*/escort more generally, become symbols not only of the moral degeneration of contemporary youth, but of Italian society as a whole.

The connection between money, power and sex that this and other scandals brought into the spotlight has become object of intense debate in both mainstream media and academic circles in Italy. For the first time since the 1980s, feminist voices and concerns re-emerged in national media and culture, questioning what these events indicate about Italian culture and the role women play in it. Indeed, until then, Italy presented (and in many circumstances it still does, as it will appear throughout this thesis) a noticeable lack of feminist intervention in mainstream debates, more than in other Western democracies. This silence was, however, the result not only of the media's disinterest, but also the separatist stance of many of the most important feminist groups, that generally refused

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Noemi Letizia on 26th April 2009. Shortly after, Veronica Lario, Berlusconi's second wife, publicly declared that she could no longer be in a marriage with a man who appointed TV personalities (with little or no political experience) to institutional political roles and associated himself with minors. Berlusconi defended himself claiming that he knew Noemi's parents, however Noemi's at-the-time boyfriend later claimed that Berlusconi had seen a photo 'book' of Noemi's at the Mediaset studios and had contacted her directly (*Repubblica* 24/05/2009).

to participate in 'masculine' institutions and politics that were ultimately considered spaces created by men and for men, as it is documented in the introduction.

This changed, however, when Berlusconi's sexual scandals came to the surface. While some feminists have identified a form of backlash to feminism and a return to pre-feminist forms of male power in women's subservience to Berlusconi's desires (Melchiori 2008), others have coined the phrase *dopo patriarcato* [post-patriarchy], seeing these events (and its developments) as signals of the weakening of male power and the crisis of masculinity, being accompanied by unease, disturbances and small comebacks (Boccia et al. 2009; Doiminijanni 2014a, 2014b; Strazzeri 2014). However, neither explanations are fully satisfying to understand these sexual scandals and its representation in mainstream media. Indeed, there is a need to understand how and why post-feminist subjectivities have emerged in Italian culture, and their connection to the specifically Italian form of neoliberal governmentality which was brought about by Berlusconism. Furthermore, this needs to be linked with the way media representations participate in producing and reproducing normative gender identities and bodies, as well as reproducing unequal power relations that permeate Italian culture and society.

The chapter begins by providing an analysis of the events concerning Ruby's involvement with Berlusconi, from the episode that brought the law to scrutinise Berlusconi's sexual behaviour, to the latest legal trial brought against Berlusconi and some of the women who attended his parties (referred to as *Ruby-ter*). The analysis will take into consideration Italian legislation on prostitution, and how this affected the legal case. The following section engages with a discussion of prostitution/sex work, outlining common discourses around the issue, as well as feminist interventions in the conceptualisation of commercial sex.

The third part of the chapter will focus on the role of the media in constructing discourses about femininity and female sexuality, focusing in particular, but not only, on the representation of Ruby Rubacuori in the newspapers *Il Giornale* (478), *Repubblica* (516) and *Corriere della Sera* (570), from 2009 to 2015. This section is further divided into three

subsections: one that detects discourses and narratives of 'at risk' girlhood; one that maps the trajectory of Ruby from Oriental 'other' to post-feminist femininity; and one that investigates discourses of female 'agency' and 'choice'. Following this, two sections explore different attitudes towards post-feminist agentic femininity: its condemnation as the embodiment of the moral corruption of the country by *Repubblica* and *Corriere* and its endorsement for conservative ends by *Il Giornale*.

From rags to riches: the transformation of Karima to Ruby

Karima El Mahrough, born in Fkhi Ben Salah, Morocco, in 1992, lived in Morocco until aged 9, when she and her mother joined her father in Italy, where he emigrated to a few years before. The family El Mahroug settled in Letojianni, a small town near Messina, Sicily, his father making a living by selling cheap rugs on the Sicilian beaches. Karima fought incessantly with her father, until, aged 13, she ran away from home. From then on she entered the orphanage system, repeatedly fleeing from homes, surviving on odd jobs as a waitress or, more often, as dancer in night-clubs and bars, and committing small thefts. In 2009 she moved to Milan. Shortly after she was invited to one of Berlusconi's parties in his house Villa San Martino in Arcore (often referred to as just Arcore in the press), where she made Berlusconi's acquaintance.[41]

On 5th May 2010 Karima El Mahroug, who at the time went by the name Ruby Rubacuori,[42] was involved in a violent fight with the woman with whom she co-habited. The police were involved and discovered that the 17 years old young woman was well known to the authorities, having repeatedly fled from youth care homes and having been accused of theft three times. Consequently, the police discovered that only a few days before, on 27th May 2010, Karima El Mahroug was in police custody for the alleged theft of €3,000 and three Rolex watches, and that the Prime Minister himself, Silvio Berlusconi,

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[41]   While Emilio Fede denies the responsibility of taking Ruby to Berlusconi's party, the prosecution in the legal trial Ruby 1 believed it was him who introduced the two. However, Karima confirms Fede's version, claiming that she was invited by another friend.

[42]   This alias was one of many names with which Karima presented herself, but also the one she used most often, being also the one she employed on her facebook page.

had intervened by calling the police requesting them to entrust the young woman to the politician Nicole Minetti. He claimed that the young woman was the niece of the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. Further investigation into the matter lead to a series of interrogations, in which Karima disclosed salacious details about the parties that Berlusconi held in his house in Arcore. His close friends Emilio Fede (director of the news program on one of Berlusconi's channels), Daniele Mora (a professional agent, also known as Lele Mora) and Nicole Minetti (a PdL politician with a past as a TV showgirl) were also involved, being accused of acting as intermediaries between Berlusconi and the women invited to the parties who were paid to have sex with him.

The current legislation on prostitution in Italy dates to 1958 and has been relatively untouched since then. The '*legge Merlin* [Merlin Law]', that takes its name from the Senate member who brought it forth, Lina Merlin, put an end to State regulation of the trade (which constituted in recording and sanitary screening of sex workers by the authorities), outlawed call houses (on the grounds that they aided, abetted and exploited prostitution) and criminalised the aiding and abetting of prostitution. Hence, people of both genders were permitted to engage in sex work on the condition that they acted alone, and that they did not solicit in public places. Breaches of legislation were framed in terms of crimes against '*il buon costume e la morale pubblica* [decency and public morality]' (Helfer 2007, p. 66). Since then not much has changed: commercial sex between consenting adults is not criminalised, while commercial sex with a minor is; and any intermediaries between the parties are in breach of the law against aiding, abetting and exploiting prostitution, constituting crimes against public morality and human dignity.

Hence, following Ruby's allegations, the PM (*Pubblico Ministero* [public prosecutor]) Pietro Forno with PM Antonio Sangermano (who were later joined by PM Ilda Bocassini) began an investigation concerning Emilio Fede, Lele Mora and Nicole Minetti, suspecting the three to be involved in a prostitution ring in the service of Berlusconi. Subsequently, on 21st December 2010, Silvio Berlusconi himself became implicated in the investigation and was believed to have pushed for the release of Ruby Rubacuori from police custody to keep his relations with the underage prostitute a secret, committing abuse of office.

Consequently, he was charged with underage prostitution (*prostituzione minorile*) and abuse of office (*concussione*). On 3rd October 2011 Fede, Mora and Minetti were officially charged with aiding and abetting prostitution, specifically underage prostitution in relation to Ruby. Berlusconi and Fede, Mora and Minetti were tried separately, the former trial becoming known as 'Ruby', while the latter as 'Ruby Bis' or 'Ruby 2'.

Berlusconi, Fede, Minetti and Mora's legal defenses were built around the same narrative: the parties did not involve sex, but were just elegant dinners; they denied that any of the women involved were paid escorts; and denied ever exchanging money for sexual favours. In relation to his indictment for abuse of power, Berlusconi negated pressing the officers to release Ruby, but claimed he had acted in the interest of the country, believing Ruby to be the niece of Mubarak, and wanting to avoid a 'diplomatic incident'. Furthermore, Berlusconi asserted that he was not aware that the young woman was underage, believing she was 24, adding that once he discovered her true age, he put an end to all contacts and communications. This version of events was later subscribed by Karima herself. Indeed, while at the beginning of the events Ruby claimed to have seen the Prime Minister engaging in sexual intercourse with paid escorts, subsequently she described this narrative as a fabrication, claiming that never had she had sex with Berlusconi at the parties, nor had any other woman.

At both trials, many of the guests at Berlusconi's dinners/parties were called to testify. Furthermore, all the women involved were considered 'injured' (*parte offesa*) and were given the possibility of pursuing the accused for compensation. Although this is unusual for cases of prostitution, since legislation states that the crime is against the State and not against the sex workers themselves, the judiciary justified this choice by claiming to refer to more recent EU-based legal discussions, which recognise the possibility of the prostitute being harmed by the crime. Of the 29 women who attended the parties held in the villa 5 became plaintiffs, claiming that their public image was damaged, negatively influencing their work prospects and social relations. Later, however, 2 retracted their suit. The rest of the witnesses, besides Ruby, claimed under oath that the parties were nothing more than 'elegant dinners' and that nothing sexually inappropriate happened at

these events, the most extreme thing being burlesque competitions enacted by the women of their own accord, Berlusconi adding that '*le donne sono esibizioniste per loro natura* [women are by their own nature exhibitionists]' (*Corriere della Sera* 21/04/12, par. 4).

Karima/Ruby's testimony had a different development: called as a witness by both the prosecution and the defense in the trial 'Ruby', her testimony was first given up by the prosecution and later given up by the defense as well. However, the whole affair appeared suspicious, since she went missing exactly around the time she was due to testify (on 10 December 2012), not even her lawyer knowing where she was. The court later found out that Ruby was on holiday in Mexico with her partner, Luca Risso, and their daughter, and that she would not be back into the country before mid-January. Once she finally arrived to testify, Berlusconi's defense decided not to hear her and claimed to be content with the record of the first interrogations. This appeared to be a clear strategy of the defense to lengthen the trial until elections, since in the case of election Berlusconi could not be prosecuted (one of the many *ad personam* laws Berlusconi's government passed). The suspicions were then confirmed later, when investigations revealed that Berlusconi had paid Luca Risso to take Ruby away around the time of her testimony.

In 2012 Berlusconi was found guilty on both accounts and given a 7 years' sentence, with the interdiction from public office; however, the sentence was overturned at the second level of judgement (*Corte d'Assise*), claiming that the abuse of office did not take place (*il fatto non sussiste*) and the underage prostitution did not constitute offence (*non costituisce reato*), since the prosecution was not able to prove beyond doubt that Berlusconi knew Ruby's age at the time of the events. This judgement was later confirmed at the third level (*Corte di Cassazione*). Fede, Mora and Minetti were convicted at the first level of judgement (*Tribunale*), their convictions were reduced at the second level of judgement (*Corte d'Assise*), but the *Cassazione* quashed the PMs request for a harsher verdict and returned the trial to the *Corte D'Assise* for the accused Fede and Minetti (Mora decided not to appeal at the *Cassazione* and accepted his sentence). Minetti and Fede are now awaiting the new trial.

Nonetheless, at all levels and in both trials the juries agreed that Berlusoni's parties were not innocent dinners, but constituted a prostitution environment for the benefit of one man, Silvio Berlusconi, and with Ruby fully participating in the activities which took place. Thus, the authorities launched a new investigation, 'Ruby-ter', incriminating 32 people: most of perjury (*falsa testimonianza*) and corruption in legal proceedings (*corruzione in atti giudiziari*), among them Ruby; Berlusconi of corruption in legal proceedings and suppression of evidence (*inquinamento probatorio*); and Ruby's ex-partner, Luca Risso, was also incriminated of corruption and money laundering (*riciclaggio di denaro*). Luca Risso's accusations were in relation to the purchase of estates in Playa del Carment, Mexico, the location in which Ruby and Luca Risso were at the expenses of Berlusconi at the time in which she should have been in court to testify.

The fact that Berlusconi had given money, expensive gifts and accommodation to some of the girls involved had already been made public during the trial 'Ruby'. These benefits had allegedly stopped in 2012 when Berlusconi regretfully informed his protégées that his lawyers had suggested he interrupt these monthly 'wages', as his generosity towards the women (whose reputation had been destroyed by the accusations of the PMs) could have been misread as bribery. However, Ruby-ter investigations uncovered that the women continued to be paid, this time in cash, by Berlusconi's finance manager, Spinelli, throughout the trials. Calculations are that Berlusconi gave at least 10 million euros to the women involved (7 million euros to Ruby alone), as well as being involved in other economic transactions for the benefit of some of the witnesses in the trial.

Since the 1990s the media's involvement in legal matters has grown exponentially, to the point of playing a role in the development of court cases. However, this attention is directed predominantly towards high-profile trials and investigations, focusing on sensationalistic, controversial, personal and gory details (Fox et al. 2004). The justice system has itself developed ways to engage with the media, and continues to represent an important authority in the creation of court/media spectacles (Ericson et al. 1987; 1989; 1991; Chermak & Weiss 2005, Fox et al. 2004). As argued in Chapter 2, it is the

connection between the media and the legal system that produces a 'surface of emergence' for the figuration of post-feminist young femininity, with the production and reproduction of gender discourses that define, classify, monitor and discipline the female body, subjectivity and sexuality.

This case study is important not only for its representation of post-feminist subjectivity and commercial sexuality, personified in the figure of Ruby Rubacuori, but also for the connection it engenders between neoliberal governmentality, the emergence of post-feminist subjectivity and sexuality, and the role of the law and the media in the production of gender discourses which reproduce the status quo. Indeed, the newspapers' coverage of the case reproduces discourses about commercial sex that classify prostitutes as either victims or as workers, ignoring feminist critiques that have highlighted the way commercial sex in its widest sense is inextricably connected with issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, identity and citizenship, as well as with geography, colonial history, migration, family life, lifestyles, entertainment, economics, sexual norms and values, and the state (Sanders et al. 2009). The exploration of dominant discourses about sex work, and the critiques directed to them, is the topic of the next section of the chapter.

The prostitution/sex work debates between neoliberal governmentality and postmodern theory

Prostitution is often described as the 'oldest profession' in Western countries. This description serves to de-historicise sex work, making it an inevitable reality not affected by social, economic and cultural factors. This, however, is not the case, as large-scale commercialised prostitution as it is understood today, emerged out of the dislocations of modern industrial capitalism (Bernstein 2007b). Indeed, the cultural discourses about prostitution and its regulation that emerged at the time, concerned not only moral issues about female and male sexuality, but interlinked with concerns about social and economic changes brought about by industrialisation, such as unsanctioned social mobility, changes in the configuration of urban centres, unsettling of traditional gender roles, among others

(ibid.). To this day, these cultural discourses continue to affect the way prostitution is understood and the strategies for its regulation.

One of the discourses employed to describe prostitution, that, as a matter of fact, pre-dates industrialisation, is the understanding of prostitution as a 'necessary evil'. Prostitution was accorded a social function: by providing sex to satisfy men's, allegedly stronger, sexual drive, prostitutes helped protect the chastity of other women, as well as protecting the social order by the violence and disruption of men's un-channeled sexual energy (Danna 2004, Day 2007). This discourse not only reproduces a gender binary and attributes different sexual desires and behaviours to men and women, but also contributes in separating respectable and 'fallen' women. Indeed, the figure of the prostitute has historically been used to define 'proper' femininity, being placed as one side of the dichotomy whore/Madonna, a binary that still contributes to the definition of appropriate femininity nowadays (Day 2007). As the devalued side of the binary, the prostitute emerges as the epitome of failed womanhood.

Alongside the 'functional' approach was the understanding of prostitution as pathology developed by Lombroso and Ferrero (1893). In their work, which associated physical characteristics, irregularities and abnormalities with deviance and criminality, they described prostitutes as having the smallest cranial capacity of all female offenders. This view was later challenged by psychoanalytic approaches, which moved the focus from the physical body to the psyche. Nonetheless, women's paths into prostitution were understood in terms of individual psychopathology. Furthermore, psychoanalytical theory contributed in naturalising male sexual desire and, continuing the discourse of 'necessary evil', saw prostitution as integral to the institution of marriage (Bernstein 2007b). Despite their differences, both medical approaches to the issue framed prostitution in terms of individual deviance, and individualised women's participation in commercial sex, detaching it from economic, social and cultural factors. Furthermore, they produced the 'prostitute body' as identity and prostitution as deviant sexuality (Bell 1994).

A different discourse about prostitution has gained more currency in the past 30 years or so, one which understands prostitutes in terms of victims (Sanders et al. 2009). Exactly at the opposite end, sex workers advocacy groups have managed to introduce the notion of prostitution as work, demanding the same rights as other professions (ibid.). Hence, the cultural discourses about prostitution that prevail in Western countries (although the more traditional ones still persist, as well as affect the more recent ones) are, on the one side, the idea that prostitutes are exploited by those who manage and organise the sex industry (mostly men); the position that prostitution, as a patriarchal institution, affects all women and gender relations; and the conviction that prostitutes suffer physically and emotionally, being vulnerable to disease, violence and often falling into substance abuse. The other side of the argument claims that, when freely chosen, it represents just another form of work, hence, women in the sex industry deserve the same rights and should have the same duties as other workers; and that sex work can represent a 'liberation terrain' for women, who might in this way escape economic hardship and/or restrictive sexual norms of the female gender (ibid.).

Feminist debates have also generally fallen between the argument of prostitution as exploitative, damaging and patriarchal, and the position that it is just another form of work. Writers who subscribe to the former position have argued that prostitution is the epitome of the role that women have in society and in marriage (Pateman 1988; MacKinnon 1987); others have claimed that the female body is reduced to an object, and therefore subjected to exploitation (Barry 1995; Dworkin 1996; Jeffreys 1997; Farley 2004); others have stressed the high incidence of violence, substance addiction and mental issues among sex workers, claiming that this is evidence of the harm of prostitution (Kinnell 2008; May & Hunter 2006; Jeal & Salisbury 2004); and Jeffreys (2008) has argued that the mainstreaming of the sex industry has worked to continue male dominance in powerful positions.

On the other side of the spectrum, liberal and pro-sex feminists have stressed the importance of considering prostitution as work (Califia 1994); see prostitution as an exchange based on a freely chosen contract (Ericsson 1980; Rubin 1984); argue that sex

work is about selling a service, rather than one's body or her/his self (Nussbaum 1999; Schwarzenbach 1990) and call for the legalisation and legislation of sex work (Califia 1994; Jenness 1990). A recent example of the latter view is the work by Hakim (2011; 2015), explored further below, who claims that sexuality is just another asset to be employed by women in the capitalist economy.

Both positions, however, produce ahistorical analyses of prostitution, ignoring the relevance of economic circumstances and inequalities that constrain/enable people's choice to become a sex worker, as well as the diversity of workers in the industry (Kempadoo & Doezema 1998; Sanders et al. 2009). As Sanders et al. (2009) aptly argue:

> Whilst macro structural forces affect all of our opportunities for work, economic survival and lifestyle choices, there are variables such as geography, gender, class, and ethnicity that are equally as powerful in determining our choices. In addition, the state, with its both oppressive and transformative mechanisms, is a crucial dynamic that affects the status of sex workers, especially their exposure to vulnerability, violence and stigma (p. 14).

Indeed, a variety of factors influence women's access to sex work, as well as influencing their working conditions and safety.

For example, Kempaloo & Doezema (1998) claim that race and ethnicity play an important role in the global sex industry: 'white sex workers inevitably work in safer, higher paid and more comfortable environments; brown women - Mulatas, Asians, Latinas - form a middle class; and black women are still conspicuously overrepresented in the poorest and most dangerous sectors of the trade, particularly street work' (p. 11). Moreover, class is equally important, cultural capital being associated with the higher paid sectors of the industry (Bernstein 2007a, 2007b; Hakim 2015). Hence, hegemonic ideals of physical beauty and sexual attractiveness continue to be reproduced, white middle-class sexual labour being most valued within the global sex industry. Other factors that might influence access to prostitution are strict immigration laws that, hindering access to formal employment, may push immigrant women - especially illegal migrants - towards forms of informal labour such as domestic work and prostitution. Conversely, policies might be developed specifically to avoid immigrant women performing sexual labour, such as in Italy, where

prostitutes benefit from immigration privileges on the condition that they abandon their employment (see previous chapter for a more detailed analysis).

But ultimately, commercial sex needs to be located and understood through the key features of global capitalism, and especially in relation to social, cultural and economic changes brought about by neoliberal policies and governments. Indeed, neoliberalism, understood as a form of governmentality which produces social reality, as well as subjects, is responsible for the increasing commercialisation of society, the market penetrating into spheres of social living, and of the self, that were previously considered as detached from the commercial domain (Foucault 2010). The mass entrance of women in paid work, the slashing of the welfare system and the growth of the service sector, have contributed to the feminisation of the workforce, with the result that domestic and affective labour, in the past performed by women for free, has been taken up as paid work by migrants, most often migrant women (Ehreneich & Hochschild 2002). Hence, an increasing number of feminist scholars have highlighted the ways in which intimacy and personal relations have entered the market, thus becoming, as a matter of fact, commodified (Bernstein 2007a, 2007b; Constable 2009; Hochschild 1983, 2003; Ehreneich & Hochschild 2002).

As Bernstain (2007b), Chapkis (1997) and Sanders et. al (2009) have shown, sex work, and in particular prostitution, does not entail just sex, or at least not at all times, but may also involve a form of affective labour, not so different from paid care work for the elderly and children. Indeed, sex work often involves a considerable amount of sexual, emotional and interpersonal skills (Bernstein 1999, 2007a, 2007b; Sanders et al. 2009), and can therefore be understood in terms of what Hochschild (1983; 2003) has called 'emotional labour' (Chapkis 1997). In her study on the expansion of sex work for the middle classes, Bernstein (2007a, 2007b) has found that many clients of middle-class sex work express a desire for authenticity in their encounters, such that she devised the term 'bounded authenticity' to describe 'the emotional and physical labour of manufacturing *authentic* (if fleeting) libidinal and emotional ties with clients' (2007b, p. 484). Bernstein's 'bounded authenticity', continue postmodern accounts where traditional procreative and modern

companionate models of sexuality are substituted by a 'recreational sexual ethic' that is defined by 'physical sensation and from emotionally bounded erotic exchanges' (p. 6).

Indeed, sexual and affective relationships have changed in late-modernity, such that they have become flexible, fluid, individualised, defined as forms of 'liquid love' (Bauman 1998) and 'plastic sexuality' (Giddens 1992). Sex is separated from duty, reproduction, fate and even love, and, according to Giddens (1992), becomes a question of individual desires and episodes of self-narration. Sexuality is decentered and dislocated, becoming an 'unstable chemistry of social and personal meaning' (Simon cited in Attwood 2006, p. 87). This results in two shifts: an 'episodic sexuality' devoid of affective intimacy (generally male); and a combination of love with sexual pleasure (generally female). What 'episodic' and 'pure' forms of relationship have in common is their provisional and conditional nature, an opinion also shared by Bauman (1998), who stresses the fluidity and temporary nature of human bonds. However, we are also aware of our own sexual commodification and of the fact that we may not retain our market value for very long, '[w]e are thrown back on ourselves and our own marketability, our status as commodity' (Attwood, 2006, p. 88).

Furthermore, the mainstreaming of sex and of the sex industry has profoundly changed cultural attitudes towards sex work. This shift has been named by some as 'the sexualisation of culture' (Attwood 2006; 2009; McNair 2002; Evans et al. 2010), 'pornified culture' (Paul 2007; Coy et al. 2011) or 'streaptease culture' (McNair 2002). The move of the pornography industry into the mainstream and its up-scaling is part and parcel of this trend, associated with popular culture becoming infused with symbols and images which would have been in the past deemed inappropriate, vulgar and even pornographic (McRobbie 2008). 'This mainstreaming of sexuality [...] has made sexually explicit consumption easily accessible, highly individualised and intrinsically tied to consumer practices' (Evans et al. 2010, p.119). Ultimately, sex is presented as a consumer product in late-modern societies and as such it is marketed, packaged and made available as any other commodity (Sanders et al. 2009). This has inevitably produced greater acceptance for the erotic, a normalisation of desire for the erotic and, to some extents, a normalisation and destigmatisation of sex work and of the sex industry.

Participating in such destigmatisation has been the glamorisation of sex work, via popular culture products such as *The Intimate adventures of a London Call Girl* (de Jour 2005), book that became a TV drama called *The Secret Diary of a London Call Girl* (Prebble 2007-2011), *Diary of a Manhattan Call Girl* (Quan 2001), and the Ho-Chic trend that has come to characterise a lot of the Hip-Hop genre. As a matter of fact, prostitution has been source of fascination throughout history, just a few examples are the classical opera *La Traviata*, Duma's novel *The Lady of the Camellias*, the Italian film *Mamma Roma* (Pasolini 1962)*,* and more recently the film *Pretty Woman* (Marshall 1990). However, what differs in the latest representations of glamorised prostitution is that the narrative does not lead to either a tragic ending or the 'rescue' of the failed woman by the male protagonist, the two narrative conclusions that worked to reintegrate the 'deviant' woman within the rules of 'appropriate' social living, but show characters that, in a very post-feminist guise, actively choose and remain in sex work, a 'liberating' gesture that stresses their agency, independence and sexual pleasure (Mendes et al. 2010).

Lastly, the way people think of and use their bodies has changed in contemporary Western cultures. According to Foucault (2010) neoliberal governmentality produces the *homo œconomicus,* a subject that thinks of him/herself in terms of human capital and manages her/himself as an enterprise, 'being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings' (Foucault 2010, p. 226). In this way, the body becomes a means to an end, contributing to the overall human capital possessed by human beings. Along these lines, Hakim (2010; 2011) describes women's beauty, sexual desirability and charisma in terms of 'erotic capital', a 'democratic' form of capital that women can employ to successfully move up the corporate and/or social ladder. Drawing on Bourdieu's work, Hakim (2010, 2011) claims that erotic capital constitutes another form of capital, besides economic, cultural and social capital, and that women have an advantage over men because 'they work harder at it' (2010, p. 499). Furthermore, she claims, erotic capital constitutes one of the biggest resources in sex work, attractiveness, physical beauty, social skills and personality relating to the highest earnings (Hakim 2015).

Hakim's (2010; 2011) claims, however, are hardly new: since time immemorial women have known that their social value depends on their ability to perform and embody normative beauty and femininity – standards of beauty and desirability that are tainted by classism, sexism, homophobia, cissexism, ableism, racism and so forth. Equally unoriginal is Hakim's (ibid.) idea that women might capitalise on their desirability to achieve power or economic wealth - there are many examples throughout history of women who have. But working by the rules of the system only contributes to the advancement of isolated individuals, the few who possess the erotic capital (or have the economic means to develop it) and know how to exploit it, rather than changing the system itself for the benefit of all women, even those who do not conform with constricting and limiting hegemonic beauty canons and normative rules of feminine demure and behaviour. Ultimately, Hakim (ibid.) sides with post-feminism and its focus on individual success rather than the communal good, its compliance with ever narrowing beauty standards, its subscription to ideas of natural sexual difference, its subservience to the market economy, and its complete neglect of interconnecting systems of inequality and prejudice.

In the discussion above I have outlined some of the discourses that surround the topic of prostitution, highlighting how feminist critiques have challenged dominant discourses of commercial sex that understand prostitution as either harmful and exploitative, or as simply another freely chosen profession. The presence, or absence, of specific cultural discourses about sex work and narratives of 'escort' subjectivity in Italian newspapers' articles about Ruby is the topic analysed next, focusing on individualising and individualised post-feminist discourses and depictions of 'escort' subjectivity. As it will appear from the analysis, the different representations of Ruby in the three publications, on the one hand, map discourses of prostitution as exploitative and victimising, on the other hand, as a matter of choice and agency, following what Gonick (2006) describes as the dichotomy between the 'Reviving Ophelia' and 'Girl Power' discourses. While these discourses appear to be conflicting and contradictory, taken together they work to

polarise female subjectivity and sexuality, while at the same time deflecting attention from unequal power relations and structural inequalities.

Young femininity in the spotlight - competing discourses for making sense of underage prostitution

The representation of Ruby Rubacuori in the online editions of *Il Giornale*, *Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera* is the focus of the remaining of the chapter. The objective is to explore the cultural discourses that have been employed to understand and describe Ruby's subjectivity and participation in prostitution, and the way they participate in defining intelligible forms of subjectivity, those that are sanctioned, as well as those that are deemed unintelligible. The employment of these three publications for the analysis of this case study is particularly interesting, since they have expressed different attitudes towards Berlusconi throughout the years. Indeed, *Repubblica*, a newspaper aligned with the political Left, has been one of the harshest critics of Berlusconi since his entrance in politics. While *Corriere della Sera* has also been critical of the ex-prime minister, its tones have not been as incendiary; nonetheless, it was *Corriere* that exposed the 'Bunga Bunga' parties, becoming one of the main outlets for the discussion of the interlinking of sex, money and power that followed. Finally, *Il Giornale* has always been extremely partisan to Berlusconi, unsurprisingly so since the publication is owned by his brother Paolo.

A Foucauldian discourse analysis of the newspaper articles of the three publications shows a very ambivalent representation of Ruby: sometimes as naive, others as crafty; fragile at the beginning of the events, ruthless towards the end; the ethnically and religious 'other', or the representative of Italian youth. These representations lead to the understanding of Ruby's engagement in prostitution through dichotomised cultural discourses on commercial sexuality that construct sex workers as either autonomous and empowered or as passive victims. Indeed, although such representations seem to be opposing, competing and contradicting, their effect is to place Ruby in a dichotomous representation as, on the one hand, the rebellious, problematic, vulnerable and sexually exploited 'at risk'

girl, and on the other hand, as the individualist, agentic, sexually 'liberated' post-feminist sex worker, a binary identified by Gonick (2006) as the 'Reviving Ophelia' and 'Girl Power' discourses. Gonick (ibid.) claims that these are two of the cultural discourses about girlhood that have emerged in mainstream media and culture: 'Girl Power' representing a discourse about girls as 'asserting, dynamic, and unbound from the constraints of passive femininity' (p. 2), while 'Reviving Ophelia' representing a discourse about girls as 'vulnerable, voiceless and fragile' (p. 2).

These discourses were not only present in the newspaper coverage of the case, but also employed by the prosecution: PM Pietro Forno described Ruby as '*fragilissima* [extremely fragile]' and '*un'adolescente sofferente e in difficoltà* [a distraught and suffering adolescent]' (*Repubblica* 29/06/11, par. 2); while PM Ilda Boccassini talks of '*una giovane di furbizia orientale* [a young woman, gifted with Oriental astuteness]' who '*non ha come obiettivo il lavoro, la fatica, lo studio ma accedere a meccanismi che consentano di andare nel mondo dello spettacolo* [whose objectives are not work, effort, education, but access to mechanisms that will allow entry in the show business]' (*Repubblica* 13/05/13, par. 6). The three publications vary in degree to which they portray Ruby as one or the other, swinging between the two representations even within the same publication, according to the angle given by the article, and by the evidence and stage of the events. However, as Gonick (2006) sharply argues, rather than contradicting each other, these two discourses contribute in processes of individualisation that obscure structural inequalities and unequal power relations, focusing instead on personal histories and personality traits.

At risk girl: troubled, media obsessed and vulnerable

Because of Ruby's troubled past, having left her house at a very young age and living in and out of foster homes, she is described as a girl who had to grow faster than most other girls (*Corriere* 28/10/10), a 'stolen' childhood (*Repubblica* 21/01/11, par. 6), a '*minore adulterizzata* [adultised minor] [sic]' (*Repubblica* 05/04/13, par. 1) and an adolescent who plays at pretending to be an adult (*Il Giornale* 29/10/10a, par. 7). But Ruby is also described as '*ribelle* [rebellious]' (*Il Giornale* 29/10/10b, par.6), '*difficile* [difficult]' *(Repubblica*

19/02/11, par. 17), '*fuori controllo* [out of control]' and '*fuori di testa* [out of her mind]' (*Repubblica* 15/01/11, par. 3), '*selvaggia e sola* [wild and alone]' (*Corriere* 29/10/10b, par. 1), '*senza punti di riferimento* [without any reference point]' (*Il Giornale* 17/01/11 par. 2), '*un rischio per le altre ragazze* [a risk for other girls]' (*Repubblica* 04/11/10, par. 1), '*sbandata* [misfit]' (*Corriere* 19/07/14, par. 3), and many other ways to indicate a 'lost girl'.

Comparing Ruby to the character played by Audrey Hepburn in 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' *Il Giornale* (19/05/13) writes:

> Have a look at what is hiding behind Holly's dark sunglasses, observe what there is beyond Audrey Hepburn's doe eyes and you'll find the wilted face of never-ending nights, you'll find a cynical and sharp girl fleeing the suburbs, and the fear of a stray life, and the desire for pay back because of that wrong hand picked at the beginning of the game. It's the desire for security, the one that arrives only through money and luxury and jewellery and forget about the rest, whatever it takes. The truth? Underneath the glasses there is Ruby Rubacuori (par. 2).[43]

By comparing the protagonist of the film Breakfast at Tiffany's, Holly Golightly, and Ruby, *Il Giornale* presents the recurrent themes of Ruby's story: the flight from poverty, the employment of her beauty and sexual desirability for her own advantage, the desire for symbols of wealth, such as jewellery and banknotes; but also her fragility and loneliness,and the risk of being taken advantage of. However, this poetic and romanticised analogy works to isolate Ruby from the social context in which she was brought up, deflecting attention from the poverty, marginality and disadvantage which characterised her upbringing.

Repubblica and *Corriere* also consider prostitution, or the possibility of being taken advantage of, as the risk that young women like Ruby face growing up. They do so through the discourse of the *velina*, a cultural figure that integrates within her discourses about

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[43] *Andate a vedere cosa si nasconde sotto gli occhiali scuri di Holly, scrutate cosa c'è oltre lo sguardo da cerbiatto di Audrey Hepburn e ci trovate il volto sfatto di certe notti senza fine, ci trovate una ragazza cinica e furba in fuga dalla provincia, e la paura di una vita randagia, e la voglia di dare scacco al destino per quelle carte sbagliate pescate all'inizio del gioco. E la voglia di sicurezza, quella che arriva solo dai soldi e il lusso e i gioielli e a remengo tutto il resto, costi quel che costi. La verità? Sotto gli occhiali c'è Ruby Rubacuori.*

female beauty, performance and sexual availability (the topic of the *velina* is explored in more detail in chapter 1, as well as below). While the theme of young women desiring entrance in the spotlight of TV and celebrity culture is a recurrent theme in all publications, the risk that this entails for young women is much stronger in *Corriere* and *Repubblica* than in *Il Giornale.*

Repubblica (15/01/11) describes Ruby, as well as the other women involved in the case, as 'pitiful, they have no talent. They have only one ambition: do television, appearing in it' (par. 7).[44] The desire to be part of the world of television and celebrity culture is represented, however, as a risk, the assumption being that this necessarily means sexual lasciviousness for the exchange of money or a TV role. *Repubblica* (19/01/2011) makes this assumption explicit by creating a parallel connection between the system of prostitution built around Berlusconi and his firm:

> Emilio Fede and Silvio Berlusconi appear to in some way "parallel" to the two public personas that we thought we knew. They move in an underground world, but also parallel to the Mediaset galaxy: interconnected by names, faces, events, money. The more you read the [trial] files, the more the "bunga bunga factory" reminds of the branch of a holding, that acts following corporate rules, with precise roles, tasks and rewards (par. 1).[45]

The extracts above highlight the way both publications see Ruby's desire to be famous as a risk, since entrance in the environment of television implies entrance to the 'bunga bunga factory' in the service of Berlusconi.

However, between the two publications it was *Repubblica* that manifested more sympathetic views about Ruby and the other women involved, at least in the beginning, considering the enormous economic disparity and age difference between Ruby and Berlusconi, implicitly suggesting that these power relations necessarily affect the

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[44] *poverette [che] non hanno nè arte nè parte. Hanno una sola ambizione: fare televisione, apparirvi*

[45] *Gli Emilio Fede e Silvio Berlusconi sembrano anche loro in qualche modo "paralleli" ai due personaggi pubblici che credevamo di conoscere. Si muovono in un mondo sotterraneo, ma anche parallelo alla galassia Mediaset: connesso dai nomi, dalle facce, dalle situazioni, dai soldi. Più si leggono le carte, più la "fabbrica del bunga bunga" ricorda il ramo di un'holding, che secondo regole aziendali si muove, con ruoli, mansioni e compensi precisi.*

commercial exchange. By drawing on a public letter that Veronica Lario, Berlusconi's ex-wife, wrote in early 2009, the publication referred to the young women frequenting the parties as '*figure di vergini che si offrono al drago per rincorrere il successo, la notorietà e la crescita economica* [virgins who sacrifice themselves to the Dragon in their quest for success, popularity and economic gain]' (*Repubblica* 16/01/11, par. 5), and to Berlusconi as simply '*il Drago* [the Dragon]'. And about the power differential between Ruby and Berlusconi *Repubblica* (19/02/11) writes:

> And it is Ruby's simple words that demonstrate that "the Dragon's nights" trample also who is helpless like her, she and the "whores", the "girls from the favelas", the "gypsies" [...]. It is this difficult, confused, saddened girl, but never discouraged, a runaway, who steps in Arcore. Looks like the story of The Little Match Girl but in the postmodern version of the show business. it [sic] is the story of a young girl that aged 13 starts making a living in a night-club and in the end meets a man who - like many other men who have crossed her path - can promise to her the ultimate turn around: your life will change, Silvio Berlusconi tells her. And it takes very little for this miserable life to change for the better (par. 11).[46]

Ruby's atypical and troubled past is made responsible for her vulnerability to a powerful man such as Berlusconi, his political, economic and social power tainting the balance of the sexual exchange. However, by depicting Ruby as a desperate, troubled, vulnerable and defenceless youth, as a victim of men's manipulation and exploitation, her agency and ability to make the choice to engage in commercial sex is undermined. Furthermore, it individualises the disparity of power by attaching Ruby's vulnerability to her atypical and troubled past, rather than extending the issue to document the way her age, race, gender, citizenship status and economic disadvantage interlinked in the sexual exchange.

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[46] *E sono le semplici parole di Ruby a dimostrare che le "notti del Drago" calpestano anche chi è come lei indifeso, lei insieme con le "zoccole", le "ragazze della favelas", le "zingare" [...]. È questa ragazza difficile, confusa, amareggiata ma mai sconfortata, in fuga, scappata di casa, che entra ad Arcore. Sembra la storia di una piccola fiammiferaia nella versione postmoderna dello show business. è [sic] la storia di una ragazzina che a 13 anni comincia a guadagnarsi il pane in una discoteca e che infine si imbatte in uno che - come tanti altri uomini entrati nella sua vita - può permetterle e permetterle [sic] la cosiddetta svolta: la tua vita cambierà, le dice Silvio Berlusconi. E ci vuole davvero poco perché questa vita desolata cambi in meglio.*

Even as telephone tapings revealed a money-oriented Ruby, who lied in court and to the media in exchange for 5 million euros, and therefore could not be easily made to look like a victim, *Repubblica* (01/05/12) still clung to this image:

> The girl had a difficult life, she has met many people ready to take advantage of her and of her beauty. Maybe also because of this she has built a guard, developed disillusion and got the idea that the world works more or less like this: be with the powerful, comply with them, do not betray them and, in the end, you will get your pay back. […] [Ruby's personality is] a mix of disillusion, of bitter "wisdom" that is born, perhaps, from her the negative experiences that she encountered along her path (par. 3).[47]

Repubblica's attempts to return Ruby to a victimised role, even in the face of evidence that seems to suggest the opposite. This is to be linked with both a very harsh judgement of women who show a materialistic attachment to money and expensive possessions, but also to the publication's palpable antagonistic (and long established) attitude toward Berlusconi. Without a victim, Berlusconi could not be *the Drago* [the Dragon] *Repubblica* was portraying him to be.

Furthermore, all three publications employed metaphors taken from popular folk stories to describe Ruby's ascent from nothing, either 'Cinderella' or 'The Little Match Girl', as in the extract above. Both narratives are about social mobility, where the happy ending consists in the integration of miserable and mistreated femininity into the appropriate social setting. Very importantly, in both stories the antagonists are members of the family: the evil step-mother and step-sisters of Cinderella, and the violent and abusive father of the child in The Little Match Girl. This was the role given to Karima's family, that Karima described as profoundly religious, chauvinist, repressive and abusive. In an interview given to Alfonso Signorini[48] on 19th January 2011, Karima disclosed that she was raped when

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[47] *La ragazza ha avuto una vita difficile, ha incontrato molte persone pronte ad approfittare di lei e della sua bellezza. Forse anche per questo ha sviluppato difese, disincanto e l'idea che il mondo funziona più o meno così: stai coi potenti, assecondali, non tradirli e alla fine, ne avrai il tuo tornaconto. […] [Il carattere di Ruby è] un mix di disincanto, di amara "saggezza" che nasce, forse, dalle esperienze negative che le hanno attraversato la vita.*

[48] Alfonso Signorini is the director of the gossip magazine *Chi*, published by *Mondadori*, Berlusconi's publishing house. Evidence has emerged that he 'educated' and trained Ruby for the interview, polishing her image and suggesting the right answers to protect Berlusconi.

she was 9 by her two uncles and that when she told her mother, her reaction was to silence, rather than protect, her. Karima also claimed that her father would not let her study, despite her insistence, and when she asked to change religion and become Catholic, he threw a pan of scolding hot oil on her.

Thus, one of the intelligible subject positions that are made available through the representation of Ruby Rubacuori is one of the vulnerable, victimised, 'at risk' girl. This gender discourse normalises a representation of femininity in terms of vulnerability, fragility and voicelessness, and implies a diminished agency in the face of events and people. However, this is only one possible discourse of femininity, the other being the one of the Italian post-feminist woman. As shown above, the encounter with Berlusconi followed a 'from rags to riches' narrative, often compared to 'Cinderella' or 'The Little Match Girl'. Indeed, Ruby described her familial situation as impoverished, miserable and violent, just as the stories' heroines'. This narrative is important for the discursive parabola that is enacted, showing Ruby to have fled a regressive, oppressive and sexist Islam, for the more liberating, empowering and progressive Italian culture. This dichotomising discourse was accepted in both *Corriere* and *Il Giornale*, participating in the wider 'Orientalism' (Said 1978) that Western societies have constructed to represent the East and maintain its hegemony over it, as it is explored below.

The trajectory from 'Oriental' Other to Italian post-femininity

While it is hard to establish whether Ruby's claims were true or a construction, it is nonetheless interesting to analyse the discursive parabola that is engendered, one that Berlusconi instrumentally employed to justify his actions towards the young woman.[49] By describing Ruby's culture of origin as backward, traditional, sexist and constricting, Italian culture is placed as the liberating terrain through which Karima can establish herself as a modern, autonomous, sexually empowered woman. This dichotomy is to be understood

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[49] *Repubblica* for example is much more sympathetic to Karima's father, including in some articles the father's objections to this narrative.

through the work of Said (ibid.), *Orientalism*, in which he argues that the West has constructed a system of knowledge about the East, that stands in binary opposition to the West and contributes in the definition of what the West itself is.

'[T]he West […] is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient […] is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior' (ibid., p. 300), and such a relation justifies and supports Western dominance of the East. Especially since 9/11, the Islamic religion and culture have become for the West a monolithic entity, stretching over from Afghanistan and Pakistan to the whole of North Africa, coming to represent what Said called 'the East'. The associate PM Ilda Bocassini's comment about Ruby's '*furbizia orientale*' [Oriental astuteness] was undeniably a racist remark, but rather than being geographically inaccurate, as *Il Giornale* (13/05/13) pointed out, had to be understood through the work of Said (1978).

Furthermore, since the early 2000s Islam has recurrently been related to women's oppression, Western countries even employing this discourse to justify military aggression of Afghanistan and Iraq (Finlay 2006; McRobbie 2009). Symbols of Islamic faith, such as the hijab, have been deemed sexist and oppressive by governments as well as some feminists (Pogliano & Gariglio 2013). Farris (2012) has called this mobilisation of feminist issues for nationalist and neoliberal ends 'femonationalism', whereby a notion of women's equality is employed instrumentally to demand that migrants adapt to Western culture and values. Ruby's life-story tells a tale of escape from such a repressive and constricting culture, in search for the empowerment and liberation promised by Italian post-feminist culture. As McRobbie (2009) claims, participation in post-feminist culture is liberated by traditional social limitation such as race, class, ethnicity and religion, but on the condition that women abandon any markers of their 'otherness', in Ruby's case the most important being the Islamic religion.

This discourse was repeated ad-nauseam by Berlusconi, who described the encounter with Ruby during his voluntary declarations in these terms:

On that occasion Ruby attracted the dinner guests' attention while narrating her story. […] She told us of her father kicking her out of the family home and that he also used to beat her, she showed us a big scar on her head that her father inflicted to her by throwing boiling oil on her, all because, she told us, of her decision of converting to the Catholic religion. She told us of many sad vicissitudes and lastly she recounted of having arrived in Milan a month before and of having co-habited with a friend. […] This was the story that she told us crying, moving many among my guests. I immediately offered an economic help for her sustenance and for her to find a house to rent and I assured her she could trust that I would have continued to care and help. […] I did so convinced that this was the means to help her have a respectable life, without having to undergo again the trials and tribulations that she had told us. Exactly the opposite of what I am paradoxically accused of (*Il Giornale* 20/10/12, par. 9-10).[50]

This narrative, however, was not taken at face value by all newspapers, *Repubblica* being the most critical, while *Il Giornale*, showing a clear bias towards Berlusconi, fully embraced the narration. *Il Giornale* went as far as calling Karima's father an '*integralista islamico* [Islamic fundamentalist]' (08/06/12, par. 6), when no evidence about his alleged fundamentalism was brought forward. This is in line with Pogliano & Gariglio's (2013) research, that found that in Italian media representations of muslims these are divided between fundamentalists and moderates, failing to account for the many different versions of Islam that exist throughout Italy and the world at large. A father such as Karima's, with regressive ideas about femininity and discipline, could not classify as a 'moderate' muslim, and therefore was necessarily included within the fundamentalist category.

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[50] *In quell'occasione Ruby attirò su di sé l'attenzione di tutti i commensali raccontando la sua storia. […] Ci raccontò di essere stata buttata fuori casa dal padre che l'aveva anche picchiata, ci fece vedere una vasta cicatrice sulla testa procuratale dal padre con un getto d'olio bollente, il tutto ci disse, a causa della sua decisione di convertirsi alla religione cattolica. Ci narrò di molte sue tristi peripezie e infine ci raccontò di essere arrivata a Milano un mese prima e di essere stata ospitata da un'amica. […]. Questa era la storia che ci rappresentò piangendo e facendo commuovere molti tra i miei ospiti. Le offrii subito un aiuto economico per il suo sostentamento e per cercarsi una casa in locazione e le assicurai di poter contare sul mio interessamento e sul mio aiuto. […] Lo feci convinto che questo fosse proprio il mezzo per consentirle una vita decorosa senza dover subire accadimenti quali quel li da lei narrati. Proprio il contrario di quello di cui vengo paradossalmente accusato Through this narrative of events Berlusconi continues to show himself to be generous and paternalistic, and to have the younger generation's future at heart. At the same time, he presents himself as the 'saviour' of the young 'at risk' woman, being vulnerable to fall into prostitution as a way to make ends meet.*

Very differently from *Il Giornale*, *Repubblica* was more suspicious of Ruby's story. The publication blatantly denounced the alleged creation and manipulation of Ruby's image by the TV show presenter:

> [r]aped at nine by her uncles, battered by the father who pours hot oil on her head, child victim of Medieval Islam. Signorini put in her mouth all the positive and politically correct stereotypes. Her Ruby is the identikit of a champion of modernity, a heroine of the Left, democratic, laic, emancipated, a small Lady Gaga, a small Madonna, one of those myths that allows us to shake off the unrefined Italy of machismo and repression. […] When she was nine she was a little feminist among the boys of Marrakesh: 'I rebelled because us girls could not go bathe'. At twelve she rejects Mahomet: 'I told my father that I did not believe in his religion'. At sixteen 'I secretly went to school'. She dreams of culture, education, 'they did not let me study and so I focused on easy money in the world of the show business (*Repubblica* 21/01/11, par 6).[51]

From this quotation *Repubblica* not only criticises the crowd pleasing dichotomy between regressive Islam and progressive Ruby, but also spells out the strategies of reintegration of Ruby within normative femininity, namely the ideal post-feminist Italian woman: an individualising story of strength, defiance, perseverance, desire for education and culture, and strong work ethic. To this, *Repubblica* adds '*la famiglia Italiana, tre figli, il vero amore, il matrimonio con Luca* [an Italian family, three children, true love, marriage with Luca]' (ibid., par. 4), continuing, ironically, the construction of normative femininity. This is the end of the parabola that sees the young woman at the centre of the case move from narratives of 'at risk' youth to the agentic, assertive, choosing subject of post-feminism, which is explored in the next section.

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[51] *[v]iolentata a nove anni dagli zii, picchiata dal padre che le versa l'olio caldo sulla testa, bambina vittima del medioevo musulmano. Signorini le ha messo in bocca tutti gli stereotipi positivi e politicamente corretti. La sua Ruby è l'identikit di un campione di modernità, un'eroina di sinistra, democratica, laica, emancipata, una piccola Lady Gaga, una piccola Madonna, uno di quei miti che ci aiutano a scrollarci di dosso l'Italietta maschilista e repressiva. […] Quando aveva nove anni era una piccola femminista tra i maschi di Marrakesh: 'Mi ribellai perchè noi ragazze non potevamo andare a fare il bagno'. A dodici abiura Maometto: 'Dissi a mio padre che non credevo nella sua religione'. A sedici 'andavo a scuola di nascosto'. Sogna la cultura, l'istruzione, 'non mi hanno fatto studiare e dunque mi sono messa a cercare il guadagno facile nel mondo dello spettacolo'.*

The post-feminist young woman: negative and positive portrayals of agency and choice

While not all publications analysed 'bought' the discursive evolution of Ruby's subjectivity, they all manifested a change in the representation of Ruby from 'at risk' subject, to one of agentic post-femininity as the events unfolded. The other representation of Ruby as 'post-feminist young woman' constitutes the competing gender discourse to the 'at risk girl' one analysed above. While the 'at risk girl' was infantilised, victimised, and her agency was diminished, as a 'post-feminist young woman' she was depicted as fully in control of her actions and decision, autonomous and agentic. Nonetheless, both discourses work to individualise Ruby and the events in which she was involved, such that these are attributed to her life story and personality, not acknowledging the interlinking patterns of inequality, neoliberal strategies of subjectivation, and immigration, work and welfare reforms that inevitably affect one's life choices.

As a matter of fact, it was quite quickly that in *Repubblica* and *Corriere* the position of actively choosing subject appeared, alongside the agency-diminished position as 'at risk' girl. Interestingly, *Corriere* made a shift between positions very early in the case, moving on from a description of Ruby as 'at risk youth' as early as in November 2010 (a month after the beginning of the media case). This brisk change in the representation of a still quite young woman (she turned 18 in 2010) goes to show how from very early on Ruby was not only described as '*minore adulterizzata [adultised minor]*', but treated as an adult woman. The publishing of revealing photos and sexy shots taken from her Facebook account, as well as pictures in which she appears fully 'made up' at events and celebrations work to reinforce her adult status, as well as placing her in the position of 'eye candy' for heterosexual male viewers.

As the trials went on, and in relation to the trial Ruby 3 especially, phone tapings documenting the bribing of witnesses, among them Ruby, were made public. While *Il Giornale* published very few of these conversations to hide Berlusconi's corruption, *Repubblica* and *Corriere* did, providing audio files that online readers could access to listen to the conversations themselves. A now fully agentic Ruby, with clear objectives and aims,

began emerging in the two publications, but attached to negative connotations as materialistic, avid, ruthless, cunning and cynical. Ruby, who '*potrebbe interpretare qualsiasi ruolo eccetto quello della povera sprovveduta* [who could play any role besides the one of the poor fool]' (*Corriere* 26/01/11, par. 1), '*bombardava* [bombarded]' Berlusconi's financial manager of requests for money (*Corriere* 19/01/11, par. na), being '*accorata, pressante, a volte quasi minacciosa* [heartfelt, pushy, at times even menacing]' (*Repubblica* 07/05/12, par. 1).

On 28/03/14 *Repubblica* titles an article 'La nuova vita di Ruby dal bunga bunga a Dubai con due milioni in tasca [Ruby's new life from bunga bunga to Dubai with two million in her pocket]' and describes her and her new entrepreneurial spirit as such:

> But the "new" Karima El Mahroug, alias Ruby Rubacuori, appears to be the living proof of the applicability of two aphorisms: "Homo faber fortunae suae" ("every man is the architect of his own fortune" Appius Claudius Caecus); and "money is better than poverty if only for financial reasons" (Woody Allen). […] It's the same old Ruby with only one, substantial difference: life really is "far from poverty" now (par. n.a.).[52]

This description of Ruby, '*che sprovveduta non è mai stata* [who has never been a fool]' (ibid.), completely forgets, and is profoundly different from, those made of her at the beginning of the events, in which she was described as vulnerable, troubled and confiding. She is accorded agency, entrepreneurial spirit and autonomy, almost described as a self-made woman, even if within the same article she is criticised for splurging the money, as '*[i]n due settimane Ruby si distingue per la fame di acquisti* [in two weeks she makes herself known for her purchasing compulsion]' (ibid. par.4), instead of investing the money.

Corriere is extremely damning of Ruby, who is described as manipulative, untruthful and greedy. Furthermore, the publication brings substantial evidence of Ruby's past as a

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[52] *Ma la "nuova" Karima El Mahroug, alias Ruby Rubacuori, pare la prova vivente dell'applicabilità di due aforismi: "Homo faber fortunae suae" ("l'uomo è artefice delle sue fortune", Appio Claudio Cieco); e "il denaro è meglio della povertà, se non altro per questioni finanziarie" (Woody Allen). […] È la solita Ruby con una sola, sostanziale differenza: la vita adesso è davvero "lontana dalla povertà".*

prostitute, positioning her as having made the conscious decision of engaging in commercial sex because of her desire for fame and 'easy money'. It writes:

> This adolescent girl who used to watch Italian variety shows from Morocco and dreamed of a shining future in TV seems to have completely substituted reality with reality show. Hers is a fluid and changing identity, there is no boundary between truth and lies: honest because it is fake and fake because it is honest. A designer brand, a fleeting apparition or TV, a few thousand Euros for a night, a luxury mansion and a party with a powerful man: these are the ultimate desires and dreams of the Arcore girls (*Corriere* 26/01/11, par. 2). [53]

Hence, Ruby's is accorded agency and choice, but one that does not distinguish between reality and fiction, and whose only concern is a superficial and crude conceptualisation of success and financial gain. Ultimately, through the reiteration of Ruby's '*spese folli* [crazy spending]' (*Corriere* 18/02/15, par. 1; *Repubblica* 17/02/15, par. 2), the consistent publication of extracts from the telephone tapings that show Ruby to be venal and money-oriented, and not-so-veiled insinuations she has been remunerated by Berlusconi for her silence, Ruby's agency is portrayed in both newspapers as cunning, manipulative, shallow, unconstrained, exhibitionistic, materialistic and having little respect for authority.

Very different is Ruby's treatment in *Il Giornale*. On the topic of her agency, very important is the article by Vittorio Sgarbi[54] (*Il Giornale* 15/01/11), an art critic and politician well known in Italy for his quick temper, coarse language and liaisons with beautiful women.

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[53] *Questa adolescente che dal Marocco seguiva i varietà italiani e sognava un futuro sgargiante in tv sembra aver totalmente sostituito la realtà con il reality show. La sua è un' identità fluida, cangiante, dove non c' è più confine tra verità e menzogna: sincera perché falsa e falsa perché sincera. A una griffe, a una fugace apparizione televisiva, a qualche migliaio di euro che piove in una notte, a una reggia di lusso e a un festino con l' uomo potente: a questo si limita la capacità di sognare e desiderare delle ragazze di Arcore.*

[54] Vittorio Sgarbi is an art critic, art historian, cultural commentator and television personality. He emerged in the late 1980s as an art critic, appearing in television and publishing several monographs on some of the most important artists and works of art in Italian history. His political career, that began in the early 1990s, is characterised by inconsistency and mutability, aligning himself with the centre-left as well as the centre-right. As a public figure and as a politician he often manifests controversial and provocative views and initiatives. He has also repeatedly been involved in scandals in regards to his use of public funding and resources, as well as resigning after accusations that his administration, when mayor of Salemi, had liaisons with the mafia.

He writes:

> It is blatant that the two major protagonists, Silvio and Ruby, have never aided and abetted anyone, if not themselves. […] If we overcome the idea that Ruby is a naive young woman overwhelmed by a situation bigger than herself, it is not clear whether the three indicted [Fede, Mora and Minetti] as procurers have favoured her or him or prostitution with her [sic] (par. 3).[55]

And later:

> Where is the crime? There is no difference between giving a blow-job and giving a conference. You can give a conference for free, you can give it and be remunerated. It is a performance that can be given for generosity, pleasure, gratitude or even for work. Prostitution is work too and if you do it autonomously it does not involve exploitation (ibid.). [56]

Sgarbi fully subscribes to a liberal understanding of prostitution, whereby both parties enter a communal agreement, are assumed to have equal power in the transaction, hence the same power of negotiation, and to respect the agreement made. However, sex work researchers have shown how structural power inequalities play a role in the sexual exchange, starting from the imbalance of power in the transaction between sellers and buyers (Sanders et al. 2009).

Eventually, in all three publications the representation of Ruby that prevails is the one of a fully able and conscious sex worker, although this is not always attached to positive connotations. Thus, the post-feminist sex worker emerges as another intelligible subject position in the figuration of femininity in Berlusconism. Ultimately, the depiction of Ruby as either 'at risk girl' or 'post-feminist young woman' suggests that the only two viable positions for women who engage in sex work is as either victim, and therefore with a diminished agency, or as an empowered 'choosing subject', fully autonomous and in control of her life. A more complex understanding of the way all women are constrained

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[55] *Appare subito che i due protagonisti principali, Silvio e Ruby, non hanno favorito nessuno, se non se stessi. […] Se superiamo l'idea che Ruby sia una ragazza ingenua travolta in una vicenda più grande di lei, non è chiaro se i tre principali indiziati come mezzani abbiano favorito lei o lui o a prostituirsi con lei.*

[56] *Dov'è il reato? Non c'è alcuna differenza tra fare un pompino e fare una conferenza. Si può fare una conferenza gratis, si può farla a pagamento. È una prestazione che si rende per generosità, piacere, riconoscenza, o anche per lavoro. Anche prostituirsi è un lavoro e se lo si fa in proprio non si dà sfruttamento.*

and enabled by the networks of power that circulate in society is completely absent, also from feminist critiques appearing on these media. These, and *Il Giornale*'s responses to them, are the topic of the next section.

The post-feminist sex worker as embodying the moral degeneration of the nation: critical discourses toward self-commercialisation in Repubblica and Corriere

The 'at risk girl' and 'post-feminist sex worker' discourses analysed above are evidence of the way young femininity has entered mainstream media and cultural discussions as sources of anxiety, excitement, and titillation, and as symbolic means to articulate and confront the uncertainties, fears and tensions elicited by quick social, economic and political changes (Gonick 2006). Indeed, the condemning judgement that is cast upon post-feminist subjectivity and sexuality in the representation of Ruby by *Corriere* and *Repubblica* explored above come to be representative for these two papers of a whole generation, and more. Ruby, as well as the other women involved in the case, become the symbols of an amoral youth:

> Should we be surprised of the moral decay spread among young people? Values reduced to zero, as a matter of fact, all of them, besides those of money and of visibility that can lead to success. Prostitution pretty much cleared - it's not a case that the term "escort" cleanses and polishes the profession - violences, abuses, bullying, thefts being considered silly wrongdoings, if not even justified when there is a gain, even if just pure fun (Corriere 18/01/11, par. n.a.).[57]

However, this is not only a social commentary on youth, but as young femininity has come to the fore as a metaphor of social change (McRobbie 2000, 2009; Gonick 2006), this anxiety is expanded to understand Italian society as a whole. Indeed, according to *Corriere*, the analysis of the behaviour of Ruby needs to be understood through the prism of '*quest*' *Italia malata che vuole tutto facile, che cerca scorciatoie e pensa che tutto possa essere*

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[57] *C'è da meravigliarsi allora che tra i giovani ci sia [...] un impressionante decadimento dei costumi? Valori azzerati, insomma, tutti quanti, tranne quelli del denaro e della visibilità in grado di portare al successo. Prostituzione praticamente sdoganata - non a caso la parola "escort" sbianca e ingentilisce la professione - violenze, soprusi, furti considerati colpe veniali, quando non giustificate se implicano un qualche tornaconto, non fosse che puro divertimento.*

comprato o venduto. Compreso il corpo delle donne [This afflicted Italy that wants everything to be easy, that looks for shortcuts and thinks that everything can be bought and sold. Including women's bodies] (*Corriere* 22/01/11, par. na). These words, taken from an interview to Isabella Rauti on *Corriere* ('Isabella Rauti: lancio un appello per la difesa dell' immagine delle donne [Iabella Rauti: I launch a plea for the defence of women's image]' 22/01/11), are part of a 'call to arms' by the politician to have working women (who belong to the healthy part of Italy) come forth to defend women's 'diginity'.

This attitude is shared by *Repubblica* (02/05/11), that similarly makes a social commentary about the state of contemporary Italy:

> Aren't the "bunga-bunga' girls maybe also the emblematic symptom of a world that is going really badly, because it has forgotten that, as Kant explained, only "things" have a "price, while people should always have a "dignity"? […] Today, youngsters are taught that what really matters is to "make it" and that, to "make it", the means justify the end. […] Why study hard, if you only need to spend a few nights in Arcore to have a nice apartment (par. 3-4)?[58]

These quotations highlight a number of important assumptions and moral judgements: 1. The belief that sex work is not real work, and as such it does not involve effort, skill and dedication; 2. The assumption that sex work, being easy, comes to substitute education and work as a way to make a living or for social mobility; 3. The idea that sex work means selling one's own sense of self, and not a service; 4. The belief that sex work is undignified, while all other jobs respect people's sense of self-worth and self-respect.

This represents an individualising and mortifying discourse that stigmatises the women involved (but by extension all middle-class sex workers), while at the same time ignoring completely the social factors that contribute to a woman's choice to engage in commercial sex. Indeed, while *Corriere* (08/03/11) stresses the importance of women's participation

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[58] *Le ragazze del "bunga-bunga" non sono forse anche il sintomo emblematico di un mondo che va veramente male, perché si è definitivamente dimenticato, come spiegava Kant, che solo le "cose" hanno un "prezzo", al contrario delle persone che dovrebbero sempre avere una "dignità"? […] Oggi, si insegna ai giovani che quello che conta veramente è riuscire" e che, per "riuscire", il fine giustifica i mezzi. […] Perché studiare sodo, se per avere un bell'appartamento basta passare qualche notte ad Arcore?*

in the workforce in the current economy as a way to claim that women want *'modelli, non di diventare modelle* [role models, not becoming top-models]' (par.5), neither *Repubblica* nor *Corriere* mention the extremely low rate of female employment, the aggressive sexism that still dictates women's entrance and progression in employment, the precariousness and flexibility of the job market that negatively influence women's patterns of employment, the gender pay gap, the slashing of welfare that has resulted in women needing to find flexible forms of labour to be able to care for their children and elders, the fact that education has little to no consequence in facilitating women's employment, and issues of racism and immigration legislation that limit and constrain women's access to the workforce. By ignoring these structural and material limitations, both *Repubblica* and *Corriere* imply that with hard work and effort women can achieve success, wealth and glory, one of the fundamental post-feminist tropes.

This is in line with Bonfiglioli (2010) and Peroni's (2012) arguments, that have pointed out the way feminist and non-feminist critiques that appeared in mainstream media fell into moralistic tones, the female authors posing as enlightened thinkers, bearers of a loosely defined 'dignity' of women, while blaming the young women involved in the scandals for buying in and reproducing a perverse and corrupt system of power, describing them as hapless victims indoctrinated by Berlusconi's television. These interventions have the effect of posing 'good' and 'honest' women (incidentally white, middle-class, highly educated, heterosexual, urban subjects) not only against the women involved in the scandals, but, by extension, all the *veline* of Berlusconi's channel as well as national television (Bonfiglioli 2011; Hipkins 2012; Peroni 2012). The body of the 'velina' comes to represent the abject body, which participates in the definition of proper femininity, just as the 'prostitute' has traditionally been employed to define proper, middle-class sexuality, as the whore/madonna dichotomy evidences. With this 'othering' of the *velina*/escort, *Repubblica* and *Corriere* inadvertently reinforce longstanding patriarchal discourses that dichotomise 'good' and 'bad' women.

Ultimately, the negative portrayal of Ruby by *Repubblica* and *Corriere* contributes in constructing a moralistic tale, that stresses not only youth's moral corruption, but of Italian

society as a whole. Furthermore, it participates in a dichotomisation of 'bad' *veline*/escorts and 'good' working women, that shows how the employment of 'erotic capital' (Hakim 2011; 2015) is a double-edged sword. This dichotomy stigmatises Ruby and her fellow Bunga Bunga-goers (and middle-class sex workers), without taking into account the changes that have been brought about by neoliberalisation. Hence, the representation of Ruby as an agentic, autonomous, sexually liberated post-feminist young woman continues the individualisation of her story and subjectivity, which is counterproductive to any feminist ethics and politics. Ironically, but not surprisingly, it is *Il Giornale* that rises as defender of women, denouncing the moralising tones employed by *Repubblica* and *Corriere;* the discourses and narratives employed by the publication are explored below.

Post-feminist mobilisation for conservative ends - Il Giornale

Il Giornale took issue with the moralising tones and the dichotomisation of femininity employed by the publications, and by a large part of the feminist interventions that appeared on national media at the time. Indeed, the too easy slippage between the category of *velina* or showgirl and the prostitute or escort outlined above is object of criticism in the articles on *Il Giornale*, which makes a connection between the left and feminism by stressing the restrictive moralising tones employed to describe the women involved in the scandals. In an article titled '*Sulle donne sinistra peggio dei talebani* [On the topic of women the Left is worse than the Taliban]' (07/05/14), the writer Anna Chirico defends the women involved by arguing that:

> the entire fault falls onto a Taliban feminism, with which the Left shifted the focus of debate from the political sphere to the moral one, to affirm itself not for what it did, but for what it felt it was: morally superior (par. 2).[59]

In line with the post-feminist trend noticed in other countries, in *Il Giornale* too the feminist movement is vilified and attacked, made to look un-cool, authoritarian,

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[59] *Tutta colpa di un femminismo talebano con il quale la sinistra spostava lo scontro dal piano politico a quello morale, per potersi affermare non per quello che faceva ma per ciò che presumeva essere: moralmente superiore.*

157

regressive and snobbish. The author makes a connection between the Taliban religious movement and the feminist interventions appeared on *Repubblica* and *Corriere*, implying that both are anti-liberal and repressive towards women. She then continues by claiming that her book refuses '*ogni stereotipo della sinistra femminista e bacchettona, che ci ha fatto credere di dover scegliere tra Belen e una dotta professoressa, tra madonne e puttane* [the rejection of any stereotype by the feminist bigoted Left, that has made us believe that we ought to choose between Belen and an educated professor, between madonnas and whores]' (ibid., par. 3).[60] While embracing a post-feminist understanding of female autonomy and choice, *Il Giornale* represents feminism as the political force that hinders personal freedom.

Indeed, similarly to allegations against communism, feminism represents a dogmatic 'ideology', which goes against the sanctity of individual freedom endorsed by Berlusconi's neoliberal ethic:

> Here come the moralistic, and profoundly totalitarian, retro-idea of today's feminists [...] The ontological discrimination [between 'real' women and 'veline'] becomes ethical authoritarianism, developed, as always, as in its Jacobin origins, on the cult of virtues as the basis of the social order (*Il Giornale* 16/03/12, par. 5).[61]

The judiciary, and especially the PM, Ida Boccassini, are also described as moralistic, and to some extent covertly as feminists, and are criticised for denying Ruby, among the other women, autonomy and self-determination by casting them as 'victims' of the prostitution 'business' running in Arcore:

> Hence, it is obvious that about 30 young women, even though one can disagree with their aims to take shortcuts to affirm themselves in the show business,

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[60] Bélén has emerged as one of the most successful TV showgirls in the last 5 years, managing to co-present a number of important shows on Italian television, including the most important musical event in Italy, *Il Festival di Sanremo.*

[61] *Ecco il retropensiero moralistico e, alla radice, totalitario, delle femministe odierne […] La discriminazione ontologica tra donne si fa autoritarismo etico ed infine incontrollato 'istinto totalitario, cresciuto come sempre, come ai suoi esordi giacobini, sul culto della 'virtù come fondamento dell'ordine sociale*

cannot all be branded, *urbi et orbi,* as participating in a "system of prostitution". Ruby especially, the ready-made victim, should not have been branded, violently, with the certainty of having exercised prostitution with a powerful man, proved with, at the very least, weak evidence, and to have thus reached her objective, employing physical beauty, "Oriental astuteness" and "immigrant status" (*Il Giornale* 16/05/13, par. 4).[62]

The women's agency is stressed, while at the same time the prosecution is attacked for destroying Ruby's life by depicting her as a prostitute. The conflation of feminism, communism, and to some extents the judiciary, in the articles, frames these political forces as those whose objective is the constraint of the individual and the erasure of his/her freedom. As noted in the previous chapter, this rhetoric was one often used by Berlusconi himself. This goes to show how the publication has appropriated some of the issues and language of the feminist movement, whilst at the same time describing the movement as constricting, old-fashioned and self-righteous.

Unfortunately, however, this post-feminist discourse does not mean that prostitution is de-stigmatised on the pages of *Il Giornale.* On the contrary, the newspaper tries its best to reinstate a clear boundary between prostitution and respectability. Ruby, as well as the other women, were repeatedly framed as victims of the media and of the judiciary, who were responsible for ruining their reputation, relationships, work possibilities, and so on, by casting them as escorts. Drawing again from a feminist vocabulary in the article *La magistratura che commette femminicidio* (16/05/13) [the judiciary that commits female genocide], (the term *femminicidio* having achieved wide currency in the past few years in relation to the staggering number of murders of women in Italy), the article suggests that the judiciary, and the media with it, have enacted a form of symbolic violence (and symbolic mass murder) moved by misogynistic contempt:

in the Ruby case, the only defendant is Berlusconi, but the indictment resembled

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[62] *Ebbene, è palese che una trentina di giovani ragazze, per quanto possano non essere condivisibili i loro scopi di percorrere sentieri veloci per affermarsi nel mondo dello spettacolo, non possono essere, tutte, bollate, urbi et orbi, come componenti di un "sistema prostitutivo". In particolare Ruby, la vittima confezionata, non sarebbe dovuta, con violenza, essere marchiata dalla certezza, affermata con prove tantomeno fragili, di aver esercitato la prostituzione con un uomo potente e di avere così raggiunto l'obbiettivo interessato, sfruttando bellezza fisica, "furbizia orientale" ed "extracomunarietà"*

a pompous and moralising lament, that concluded with the premature and irrevocable condemnation of not only Ruby (theoretically a 'victim'), but also of all those women who have as their only 'fault' the one of having been to dinner at Arcore, with the hope of succeeding on television, while they will be known, now and forever, as prostitutes. By the husbands that they will not have, their bosses who have fired them or who will not hire them, by their mortified families, by any interlocutor, even casual ones. Their children will be, by all effects, called 'son of a whore', without the possibility of denial (par. 11).[63]

In this and similar remarks in the coverage of the trials, the social stigma associated with prostitution and its very material effects are recognised; however, not to question them, but to reinstate the propriety and goodness of the women involved. Ultimately, *Il Giornale* employs a superficial liberal argument to allegedly defend the women involved in the case, but in all effects to protect the reputation of Berlusconi and to ingratiate public opinion. A post-feminist stance that protects women's auto-determination and choice ends up being employed instrumentally to defend one man's actions, but also for conservative ends, since it perpetuates the stigmatisation of sex workers.

Conclusion

The Ruby Rubacuori case shows how in Italian culture young femininity has taken centre stage, becoming a source of anxiety, excitement and titillation. This is the first time that young women have substituted youth in general as metaphors of social change (Gonick 2004, 2006; McRobbie 2004, 2009). The media's focus on Ruby, frame the figure of the *velina*/escort as symbol of the moral corruption not only of Italian youth, but as symbol of the general condition of Italian society. At the same time, the press' obsession with Ruby's appearance and looks, often publishing oversexualised images of her, represents a very specific Italian characteristic: the high visibility and sexualisation of female bodies in Italian

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[63] *nel caso Ruby, l'unico imputato è Berlusconi, ma la requisitoria è sembrata una geremiade pomposa e moraleggiante, che si è risolta nella condanna anticipata e per sempre, non solo di Ruby (in ipotesi 'vittima') ma di tutte quelle donne che hanno come unica 'colpa' quella di essere state a cena ad Arcore, con la speranza di sfondare in tv, e che, tuttavia, ora e per sempre, saranno ricordate come prostitute. Dai mariti che non avranno, dai datori di lavoro che le hanno licenziate o che non le assumeranno, dalle famiglie mortificate, da qualsiasi interlocutore anche casuale. I loro figli potranno, senza tema di smentita, essere chiamati figli di puttana.*

media, and the sanctioning of a voyeurism of young and beautiful bodies, even when this contradicts the legal case as well as some of the discourses about female victimisation present in the coverage of the events.

Indeed, two discourses about young femininity can be detected in the media representations of Ruby: on the one hand, Ruby is depicted as a vulnerable, voiceless and fragile girl, made so by a traditional and sexist culture of origin, a stolen childhood, a troubled past and men's sexual advances; on the other hand she is represented as an agentic, determined and assertive post-feminist young woman, who knowingly employed her sexual desirability for her own personal gains, as well as employing other 'feminine' characteristics in order to exploit the situation to her own advantage (namely duplicity, cunningness and manipulation). These two representations reproduce cultural discourses about femininity that circulate in Berlusconism that understand women as either empowered subjects or agency-less victims. While these discourses seem to contradict, oppose and compete, their combined effect is one of creating individualising narratives of young femininity, that hide the effects of neoliberal work reforms, immigration legislation, processes of subjectification and their connection with structural inequality, in which issues of race, gender, citizenship and economic disparity equally participate.

Eventually, the intelligible subjectivity that emerges from the publications is one of a post-feminist sex worker, her decision to engage in commercial sex being a fully autonomous, rational and empowering choice. Ultimately, the strength, agency and desire of these women is so powerful that Berlusconi comes to be almost a figure to commiserate, harassed by the women's blackmailing telephone calls and economically impoverished by Ruby's extortionate demands. 'Berlusconi comes to the fore as a man who, even during his trials, cannot escape "his" girl's demands. Who belong to a different generation (*Repubblica* 01/07/15, par. 5),[64] a generation in which 'many inhibitions, in the hyper-

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[64] *Berlusconi emerge come un uomo che, persino durante i processi, non può sottrarsi a pretese da parte*

connected Italy of the young women, seem to have disappeared' (*Repubblica* 05/07/15, par. 3),[65] sentences that seem to suggest that a profound generational change has taken place, young post-feminist women not fearing an older man's power and being finally free of male domination. However, throughout this thesis I show the limitations of seeing post-feminist subjectivities as inherently progressive, as it is further explored in the case studies that follow.

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[65] *delle "sue" ragazze. Le quali sono di un'altra generazione*
molti freni inibitori, nell'Italia iper-connessa delle giovani donne, sembrano saltati

Ch. 5 - The phallic girl goes to Italy

The previous case study concluded with the analysis of an agentic form of sexuality perceived as acceptable, even sanctioned by the newspapers - the post-feminist sex worker. The case study analysed below, that covers the trials for the murder of the British student Meredith Kercher and the accompanying media coverage, is profoundly different from the previous one, as the woman being accused of the murder, Amanda Knox, and her sexuality, were perceived to be so unintelligible that they became mythologised, attacked and vilified. Indeed, this case has been characterised by a discursive aggression towards the young woman at the centre of the events, not only through her vilification, but also through her forceful reinsertion into normative and intelligible forms of femininity.

Thus, the chapter primarily explores the means through which the connection between the news media and the legal system produce a space for the emergence of the figuration of post-feminist subjectivity in Berlusconism. Furthermore, it deals with the way this works to police the boundaries of normative femininity, and shows how the Amanda Knox case is central for understanding the current Italian cultural context. This is characterised by an obsession with women's bodies and sexuality, but also an anxiety toward a novel facet of the figuration of femininity in Italian culture, the phallic subjectivity and sexuality incarnated by Amanda Knox.

The chapter first provides an in-depth reconstruction of the events, from the discovery of Meredith Kercher's body in 2007 to the final acquittal of Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito in 2015. The following three sections outline the Italian Legal System, show its vulnerability to discourses closely connected with interlacing patterns of inequality that circulate in wider society and in mainstream media, and theorise the relationship between the law and the media in an epoch of 'tabloid justice' (Fox et al. 2004). The chapter then moves on to the analysis of the media coverage of the case, focusing on the gender discourses that are produced and reproduced through the representation of Amanda

Knox's femininity and sexuality in the publications selected. Lastly, I focus on the 'othering' process enacted by the media and the way this contributes in creating a social anxiety around immigration and multiculturalism, which is layered on top of those provoked by novel forms of female subjectivity which challenge more traditional constructions of femininity in Italian culture.

As I have shown in the discussion of the case study on Ruby, it is the interconnection between the court cases on the one hand (and hence the legal system) and the mediation of these court cases (and hence the media system), that has created a public space within Italian society to vilify specific understandings of femininity, while at the same time imposing normative models of gendered performativity. This strict policing of women's bodies is a fundamental feature of *Berlusconism,* and is of prominent importance for the understanding of Italian post-feminism, which is characterised by an aggressive sexism and a noticeable absence of feminist critique in the legal system as well as in the most widely read newspapers in Italy.

The troublesome investigation and trial for the murder of Meredith Kercher

On 2nd of November 2007, 21 years old British student Meredith Susanna Cara Kercher was found dead in her room in the *villetta* [detached house] in V. della Pergola, Perugia, she shared with another 3 female students. Her body, found partially naked underneath a duvet, showed numerous knife wounds, one of which was found to have been the fatal blow, delivered to the neck. She was studying in Italy for a year as part of the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) a program set up by the European Commission to facilitate international student exchanges within Europe. Perugia hosts approximately 40,000 students a year, who not only attend the *Università di Perugia* or the *Università per Stranieri* [University for Foreigners], but live and populate its centre.

On 6th of November one of Meredith's housemates, 20 years old American student Amanda Knox was arrested by the police in relation to the murder. During the

interrogation, which lasted until the early hours of the next day, Amanda Knox accused her boss, Diya Lumumba (nicknamed Patrick), a 36 years old Congolese bar manager, of the murderer of the British student, and placed herself at the crime scene. Following Amanda's allegations, both Diya Lumumba as well as Raffaele Sollecito, Amanda Knox's Italian boyfriend and fellow student himself, aged 23 from the town of Giovinazzo, were taken into custody: the three were accused of '*concorso in omicidio e violenza sessuale* [complicity in homicide and sexual violence]'.

However, forensic evidence on the crime scene led the police to believe the involvement of a '*quarto uomo* [fourth man]', which the police identified as Rudy Guede, a 21 years old Italian citizen with Ivorian origins, who had fled to Germany two days after the murder. Lumumba was finally released on 20th November: no evidence placed him on the murder scene (in fact he had never been in the house) and a Swiss professor confirmed his alibi for the night of 2nd November. Amanda Marie Knox, Raffaele Sollecito and Rudy Guede were instead tried for the sexual assault and murder of Meredith Kercher.

The three suspects all pled innocent, but the judge ruled their indictment for the murder. Amanda Knox and Raffele Sollecito decided to proceed with a standard trial, while Rudy Guede opted for an abbreviated trial procedure. On the 28th October 2008 Rudy Guede was sentenced to 30 years in jail for the rape and murder of Meredith Kercher. On 22nd December 2009 his sentence was diminished to 16 years in appeal, as a benefit for choosing an abbreviated trial procedure. The prison term was confirmed on 16th December 2010, at the third opportunity for appeal in the Italian legal system. The conviction of Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito was carried out only on 4th of December 2009, where they received sentences of 26 years and 25 years respectively (Amanda Knox receiving a longer sentence as she was also convicted of slander for implicating Lumumba Diya). Amanda Knox and Raffele Sollecito appealed and, after 4 years spent in jail, had their conviction commuted and were freed on the grounds that they had not committed the act ('*commesso il fatto*').

But on 26th March 2013 Italy's highest court of appeal overturned the acquittals of

Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito, however they were not obliged to be physically present at the trial. On 30th January 2014, the *Corte d'Appello d'Assise* convicted and sentenced Raffaele and Amanda for the rape and murder of Meredith Kercher to 28 and 25 years respectively, but the defendants were allowed their freedom until the last judgement by the *Corte di Cassazione* (the third and last level of judgement). On 27th March 2015, 8 years after the beginning of the investigation, the *Corte di Cassazione* acquitted Raffaele and Amanda once for all.

The interrogations of Knox, Sollecito and Guede heavily contradicted each other's and changed substantially over time. Amanda Knox first claimed she was not in the villa, but had spent the night with Raffaele Sollecito, whom she has been dating since 25th October 2007, alone with him in his flat. However, Knox's account changed on the night of the 6th - 7th November 2007: during the interrogation she admitted to being in the *villetta* and hearing Kercher's screams as she was attacked by Lumumba. However, the deposition was released without Knox's lawyer and could not be used in the case against her. This, however, was made available in the slander case brought against her by Lumumba for having involved him in the case; as I explore in more detail below, this was to have an important role in the trial.

Sollecito's version changed as well, although this matter did not attract as much media attention as Knox's change of heart. As a matter of fact, he was somewhat responsible for leading the police to believe that Amanda had been in the *villetta* at the time of the murder. Indeed, while in his first account Amanda and his versions coincided (they had spent the night together in his apartment), he subsequently stated that Amanda and he had spent the early hours of the evening together, but that she left him at about 9.30pm. This version was the one that lead the police to believe that Amanda was implicated in the murder, resulting in Amanda's 'confession'. Raffele then returned to his previous account, repeating that the two had watched a film, smoked a few joints and went to bed.

Finally, Guede's account too was characterised by frequent changes, retractions and reformulations, but pleading innocence throughout the trial and beyond. He admitted to

being at the crime scene, and to having had some form of consensual sexual interaction with Meredith, but not of committing the murder. He claimed that he went to the toilet, and on his return he saw a man fleeing from the house and found the body of Meredith on the floor bleeding. He tried to stop the blood with his hands, but then panicked, covered the body with the duvet and fled. In a subsequent account he implicated Amanda, claiming that he heard the two students arguing about some money Meredith was missing. He then heard a scream, and when he went to Meredith's room to check, a male figure tried to hit him, while someone who looked like Amanda was running away. He attempted to help Meredith, but when he realised she was dead he fled, scared that the police would have thought he was the murderer.

While the forensic evidence clearly indicated Rudy's presence on the crime scene at the time of the murder, the evidence against Amanda and Raffaele was not as substantial. Not only were Rudy's DNA and footprints found on the crime scene, but his criminal history showed similarities to the evidence collected and reconstruction of the events of the murder. As for Amanda and Raffaele's involvement, the case against them was built on three different elements: the little scientific evidence found on the crime scene, the timeframe in which the murder was committed, and circumstantial evidence related to their behaviour before and after the murder.

In the last instance, the reasoning behind the acquittal of Raffaele and Amanda was due to the effective invalidation by the defence of the forensic analysis of the DNA evidence found on the murder weapon and on the crime scene, as all other evidence was circumstantial or inconsistent and would not hold up without it. Indeed, throughout the trials the whole work of the forensic team was put into doubt by pointing out mistakes and inaccuracies with the aid of visual material collected by the team itself. The defence attorneys effectively undermined the job of the forensic team, which appeared sloppy and unprofessional, creating the ground for arguing that the DNA evidence might have been the result of contamination outside of and inside the laboratory.

Vulnerabilities to personal and institutional misogyny and prejudice in the Italian Legal System

In the Italian legal system, it is up to the state to investigate if there has been a breach of the criminal law, to determine the perpetrator, to establish the responsibility of the crime and to punish him/her once established that responsibility. State authorities, such as the Police or the *Carabinieri*, have a duty to investigate all crimes that they have knowledge of, and before commencing an investigation they must notify the investigating authorities, the *pubblico ministero* (PM) [public prosecutor]. The PM has the duty of investigating the circumstances of a crime, to establish whether there has been a breach of criminal law and, where possible, to find the perpetrator of the crime. Thus, the prosecutor has an important role within the investigation, collecting evidence and building a case with the aid of officers of the state authorities.

In Italy there is no separation between the careers of judges and prosecutors, they are trained in the same manner and both have a responsibility before the state to find the truth about what has occurred (Watkin 1997). Alongside the public prosecution, third parties may decide to pursue the accused for compensation, as the Kercher family did by employing the lawyer Francesco Maresca. In addition, other civil suits may be brought forward, such as Diya Lumumba's defamation case against Amada Knox, because of the depositions she gave early in the investigation which involved him in the murder.

In the Mereditch Kercher murder investigation the role of PM was promptly taken on by Giuliano Mignini, who, throughout the case, worked in close proximity with the lead investigator, Monica Napoleoni.[66] Mignini has gained notoriety in Italy for his involvement in the *Mostro di Firenze* [Monster of Florence] case, a series of murders which occurred between 1968 and 1975 in the Florence province, the responsibility of which remains

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[66] Monica Napoleoni took the role of lead investigator only after Marco Chiacchiera decided to drop out of the investigation. The reasons for this decision are unknown, however Follain (2013) suggests that it may have been a result of disagreement between the lead investigator and the PM Mignini. Although unsubstantiated, this claim highlights the power of the prosecution over the investigative process.

unclear. Mignini became involved in the investigation in relation to the recovery of the body of a Perugian doctor, Francesco Narducci, in the Trasimeno Lake, where he advanced the theory that, instead of drowning, Narducci had been killed for his association to a masonic lodge which was behind the monster's murders. His theory appeared farfetched to some, landing Mignini with a reputation for being quick to suspect esoteric or satanic elements in crimes he investigates.[67]

Mignini formulated a theory about the murder early on in the investigation: according to him it was a '*perverso gioco sessuale di gruppo* [perverse group sexual game]', perhaps linked to a satanic ritual (*Corriere* 19/10/08, par. 2). It was only after some time that Meredith changed from the status of willing participant and casualty to that of victim: Amanda, Raffaele and Rudy, probably drunk and drugged, wanted to force Meredith into having group sex, but Meredith's resistance instigated the murder. Therefore, the motive behind the murder would have been sexual. After Guede's claims that on the night of the murder Meredith had complained about Amanda, Mignini changed his theory arguing that Amanda held resentment towards Meredith and the murder had resulted from Amanda wanting to teach her a lesson.

The leading role of the PM over the investigative process, is not to be underestimated, since prejudices and stereotypes on the PM's part may heavily influence the outcome of the investigation. Mignini's well known interest, if not obsession, with esoteric and satanic motives and group murders, as well as his profound and unwavering Christian faith, undoubtedly had in impact on the investigation itself. Indeed, the murder of Meredith Kercher fitted easily in a horror/satanic narrative of events, because of its proximity not only to Halloween, the day in which the souls of the dead return to the living world, but also the Italian *giorno dei morti* [day of the dead], when Italian catholic families

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[67] Most notable critics are Mario Spezi and Douglas Preston, who co-wrote the book *The Monster of Florence*. Their attitude landed upon them an investigation for obstruction to justice and tampering with evidence.

traditionally visit their passed relatives' graves. Indeed, elements of personal as well as institutional misogyny strongly participated in constructing Amanda Knox as a cunning, manipulative and deceitful femme fatale, as it will be analysed below.[68]

Furthermore, the fact that multiple suits are allowed to be placed together and judged by the same jury undoubtedly had an impact on the outcome of the trial, since eventually it was in all the accusing parties' interest to have the defendants convicted. Indeed, the civil lawyers, Carlo Pacelli and Francesco Maresca, strongly contributed to the demonisation of Amanda Knox by employing the most virulent and aggressive descriptions of her character and personality during the trial. Carlo Pacelli especially, described her as a '*strega [...] fangosa fuori perchè spoca dentro* [witch [...] muddy outside because dirty inside]' (Repubblica 26/09/11, par. 3), because it was in his client's best interest to describe her as a cunning, devious and mischievous liar in the civil suit.

This, in addition to the fact that the same jury had to pronounce on both the criminal and the civil suits, likely influenced the jury's perception of Amanda Knox. For instance, the two testimonies in which Amanda accused Lumumba of having committed the murder had to be thrown out, as during the interrogation Amanda's attorney was not present. These were, however, admissible as evidence against Amanda in Lumumba's civil suit, such that the jury was presented with the written record as well as being able to hear Amanda's interrogation by Lumumba's civil lawyer. On top of that, the final condemnation of Amanda for libel was upheld by the accusation as proof of Amanda's attempts to divert attention from herself and her boyfriend.

There are three court levels in the Italian legal system: *tribunale*, or *Corte d'Assise* for the most serious crimes (the jury being made of two ordinary judges and six lay people); *Corte d'Appello* (again, two professional judges and six lay people); and *Corte di Cassazione* (five professional judges). To each level corresponds a different prosecutorial office: a *Procura*

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[68] The connection between Mignini's sexist views and his unwavering Catholic faith is exposed quite dramatically in the documentary by Netflix *Amanda Knox* (Blackhurst & McGinn 2016).

della Repubblica is attached to each *tribunale*, a *Procura Generale della Repubblica* is attached to each court of appeal, and a *Procura Generale della Repubblica* is attached to the supreme court. While in theory the prosecution should change as the case moves along the different court levels, this is not always the case. Mignini showed a relentless effort to have Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito convicted, actively participating in virtually all trials, even though he was not legally required to do so. This further evidences the hypothesis that the prosecutor was moved by a strong personal attachment to the case, rather than a detached desire for justice.

If the accused has requested a fast-track trial, as Rudy Guede did, the trial is held behind closed doors and judgement is based solely on the evidence, rather than proceeding with a standard hearing. In return for saving the court considerable time, the sentence is automatically reduced by a third if the accused is found guilty. For standard trials, as in the case of Amanda and Raffaele's, the next phase is the trial itself, which is held publicly. The prosecution, the defence lawyers and the lawyers representing the parties requesting compensations (in the Meredith Kercher murder trial these were the Kercher's family and that of Diya Lumumba) have the right to call whatever witnesses they wish and to ask them whatever questions they need, as well as cross examine the witnesses the other attorneys have called.

Lena & Mattei (2002) argue that 'the right to appeal is so deeply rooted in tradition as to be considered, as in other civil law countries, a part of the fundamental guarantee of a fair hearing in both civil and criminal cases' (p. 107). Indeed, 50% of cases are overturned at the appellate level and 30% at the *Cassazione* level. Because of lengthy procedures of even a single trial, it is impossible to isolate the jury from external interferences, which might affect the outcome of the trial. Furthermore, as members of the jury change at the different levels or phases of the trial (and years are likely to have passed between them), it is impossible to make sure that they have not been influenced by descriptions, narratives and discourses about the events that circulate in media coverage, as well as in society at large.

The trial against Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito provides a perfect example. As early as in November 2007 the media reported a breakthrough in the case, claiming with almost certainty that the killers had been apprehended, with Amanda having cracked under pressure and having incriminated herself, Raffaele Sollecito and Patrick Lumumba (*Corriere della Sera* 06/11/07; *Repubblica* 06/11/07). This happened even before the case was brought to the *GIP* (the judge for the preliminary investigations), and way before the judges for the trail were appointed. Hence, it is very likely that spectacular media coverage of the facts had a role in the development of the case. Indeed, recent research on the relationship between the media and the legal system highlights the important role that the media plays not only in the 'court of public opinion', but also within the legal courthouse, as the next section explores.

Trial by media and media-logic trials: the increasing boundedness of the legal system and the media

Media today is characterised by an increased spectacolarisation (for literature on media spectacles see: Compton 2004; Garber & Matlock 1993; Kellner 2001, 2003, 2005, 2012; King 2005; Markovitz 2011). This concerns not only the area of entertainment, but also the one of information, such that these become meshed in a form of infotainment that tends to frame news in sensationalist, dramatic and intense ways (Fox et al. 2004; Kellner 2003; Mazzoleni 2009). Criminal trials are often dramatic and conflictual events, therefore they represent ideal subject topics for sensationalist media accounts (Ericson 1995). While 'media trials' have occurred episodically since the emergence of the print press Fox et al. (2004) remark that since the 1990s the media coverage of legal matters, as well as the role the media plays in its unfolding, has grown exponentially. While their study is limited to the USA, media trials can be found across the world, and most certainly in many European countries, including Italy (Resta 2008).

Fox et al. (2004) argue that 'the mass media, in both traditional and emerging forms, focus predominantly on the sensationalistic, personal and lurid details of unusual and high-profile trials and investigations' (p. 6), producing what they call 'tabloid justice'. Such

tabloid justice tends to personalise the events, providing details, descriptions and history of the participants (Drucker 1995; Fox et al. 2004; Jewkes 2004; Wolfsfed 2011); they increase dramatisation by employing graphic imagery, emotive and clamorous language (Fox et al. 2004; Peleg and Bogoch 2014); they emphasise conflict over conflict resolution (Peleg and Bogoch 2014; Drucker 1995); they express opinion, often through the employment of humour or irony (Drucker 1995; Marafioti 2008); and often show a lack of thorough investigative journalism and professionalism (Kellner 2003; Fox et al. 2004; Marafioti 2008).

However, the spectacolarisation of trials is not solely related to content and form, but also to the volume of and resources employed for the coverage of the story, with the employment of legal, psychology and criminology experts, reconstructions of the events using the latest technologies, the development of specialised programs, and the production of films, dramas and books. On top of that, the expansion of the media in new multimodal directions has increased the volume and speed at which media spectacles reach their audiences, in the forms of 24h coverage on cable TV, forms of interactivity on online platforms, as well as in more traditional media, user generated material in blogs and personal web pages, and so on (Fox et al. 2004).

Furthermore, the legal institutions themselves nowadays cannot avoid the engagement with the media, in a way that suggests that the verdict in public opinion is almost as important as the one in legal courts. Research by Ericson et al. (1987, 1989, 1991) has investigated the way in which organisations, particularly those connected with the judicial system, are able to produce self-serving official narratives and to have others accept them as legitimate. Furthermore, the increasing role that the media plays in social life means that institutions have developed ways to engage with the media for their own purposes and to construct themselves as legitimate. Examples are the appointment of public information officers who specialise in communication, and the organisation of press conferences, but also the leaking of sensitive information, as well as manufacturing narratives that will attract more media attention (Chermak and Weiss 2005).

This involves the prosecution as well as defence lawyers. As Coffey (2010), an American law practitioner, argues in his book titled *Spinning the law: trying cases in the court of public opinion*:

> In virtually every court case that appears on the media's radar, lawyers are attempting to spin reporters, control the message, and win the verdict of public opinion. With today's vast universe of cable television stations, internet broadcast, web sites, and blogs, an over-increasing number of cases receive media attention in one form or another. No one knows exactly to what extent a victory outside the courthouse translates into a favourable verdict inside the courtroom, but as I have described, it is too important to be left to chance (p. 323).

Indeed, lawyers have developed ways to engage with the media, hiring PR professionals and media consultants, constructing privileged relationships with lead correspondents, and generally trying to spin news in ways favourable for the defendant, something which would have appeared extraordinary only a few decades ago (Fox et al. 2004).

Therefore, the way these two seemingly separate fields interact and build on each other illustrate how their combination produces a space of emergence for the figuration of young femininity in Italian culture. In the Kercher murder case, the legal system and the media worked together in the production of gender discourses that define and police the boundaries of acceptable femininity and female sexuality, in line with wider cultural discourses that are employed to make sense of cases of women who kill, as I explore in the next section.

Women, crime and the criminal justice system

Throughout history female lawbreakers have been considered as deviant, and worse than their male counterparts. This is because, through their behaviour they are viewed as doubly deviant: they transgress society's rules as well as transgressing gender norms (Morrissey 2003; Seal 2010; Mallicoat 2012). Indeed, women who engage in criminal behaviour appear to challenge normative gender roles and behaviours, contravening the cultural assumption that women are helpless, docile, and in need of male protection.

The earliest study on female criminality was conducted in 1895 by Lombroso and Ferrero (*The Female Offender*), who pointed at physical irregularities and abnormalities as markers of criminal dispositions. They identified several unique features, such as occipital irregularities, narrow foreheads, prominent cheekbones and a 'virile' type of face. They were also described as having a larger cranium, which made them more like men. Because of the size of their brains, criminal women were more intelligent than 'normal' women (who were considered as physically and mentally less evolved then men); they also had 'strong passions and intensely erotic tendencies, much more muscular strength and superior intelligence for the conception and execution of evil' (Lombroso and Ferrero 1895, p. 152-153).

Every woman's propensity for evil was more intense and more perverse than men's, thus when 'excited' their evil was of much greater proportion and more varied than their male counterparts. Nonetheless, female criminals were born criminals and monsters, they belonged more to the male sex than the female, and concentrated within them the worst aspects of femininity, such as cunningness, spitefulness and deceitfulness, with the criminal dispositions and brutality of masculinity. Even though Lambroso and Ferrero (1895) study was challenged almost immediately by several scholars, the 'masculinisation' of the female offender is a practice still in place today.

With the diffusion of psychoanalysis at the beginning of the 20th century, explanations of female criminality shifted from biological determinism to psychological theories, linking it to women's sexuality. Medical and popular discourses claimed that women's psychological reactions were determined by their reproductive system, therefore the root of women's criminal behaviour was to be found in their sexuality (Kendall 2005; Mallicoat 2012). By holding responsible women's reproductive system for women's unexplainable criminal behaviour, they were stripped of their agency and rationality, and their actions cleared of meaning and motive (Kendall 2005).

Such discourses still influence legal, media and popular discourses about criminal women, with sexuality playing an important role in the evaluation of women's psyche, as well as

attributing criminal behaviours to women's psychological status, rather than to their own agency. Chan et al. (2005) argue that throughout much of the research on women criminals the recurrent finding has been that most women charged, sentenced and imprisoned for violent as well as non-violent crimes have been deemed abnormal, even in cases in which it has not been possible to indicate a mental 'illness'.

Indeed, until recently, the accepted orthodoxy in mainstream legal and criminal justice system was that women commit far less crime than do males, but are much more likely to be mentally ill (Kendall 2005). Such assumptions are based on essentialist discourses about women's 'nature', the result being that women's greater emotionality, passivity and weakness (while men are characterised by rationality, agency and aggression) explain and motivate women's criminal behaviour (Miller & Mullins 2011). Hence, claims about the nature of female offence span from the aggressive, violent, spiteful female criminal to the helpless, passive docile woman in need for male protection (Mellicoat 2012). Thus, historically, and to some extent still today, female murderers have been categorised as being either bad, mad or victims.

Since the mid-1990s feminist research in this area has become more prolific, with important critiques to the representations of women who kill, such as those of Chan (2001), Morrissey (2003) and Seal (2010). Wendy Chan and Lizzie Seal are professors in criminology (the first in the USA the second in the UK) who have published two monographs on female murderers; Belinda Morissey is an Australian professor of media and communications, who has also published a book on women who kill, concentrating on the connection between media and legal discourses in the representation of women murderers. These authors, whom I refer to extensively in this thesis, argue that mainstream legal and media discourses use 'stock narratives' and 'standard narratives', familiar from media and fictional portrayals, which create and reproduce discourses of gender.

As will be analysed in detail in the analysis of the press coverage below, the use of stock narratives was also present in the representation of Amanda Knox: for the prosecution she

was a hedonistic femme fatale, for the defence she was an innocent victim of the Italia justice system. Seal (2010) argues that the employment of such stereotypical constructions delimits the range of possible understanding of female violence, while at the same time reflects the missing language with which to understand cases of women who kill. Female murderers are either 'othered' from wider society or reinserted within the boundaries of normative femininity. These dominant discourses serve to contain, explain and manage what society feels to be unintelligible; in this way, 'belief in an ordered world can be maintained or restored and power relations preserved' (Kendall 2005, p. 42).

Feminist criminologists have worked to challenge stereotypical and essentialising discourses of mainstream scholarship, attempting not only to return agency to female criminals, but also to show how social structures and lived realities affect women who participate in criminal behaviour. Life-course theory introduced by Sampson and Laub, which 'attempts to link social history and social structure to the unfolding of human lives' (Laub et al. 2011, p. 314), has been increasingly used in assessing how events in women's lives can provide insight into the reasons, motives, patterns and peculiarities of women's criminal behaviour. However, a life-course approach legitimises the digging in and intense scrutiny of women's histories, becoming subject to what Birch (1993) has named a 'facile psychology', which often constructs arbitrary relations between childhood, family life and the criminal offence.

As it will be shown below, the obsessive and intrusive investigation of the media into Amanda's past, her relationships, her sexual behaviour, the social media she made use of, even the stories she produced as part of her university degree, helped in creating a specific image of Amanda Knox. The media, alongside the magistrate's construction of Amanda's personality and narrative of events, is integral to the need to construct a 'facile psychology' to make sense of women who kill. Indeed, Chan et al. (2005) have pointed out how 'psy' sciences have become such integral part of the legal process, that it is useful to think of a 'hybrid psycho-legal control system' (p. 10), the media participating in the system by creating, reproducing and magnifying discourses and narratives produced in the court and in wider culture, as it is explored in the next section.

Knoxy Foxy: enforcing normative femininity and sexuality through the figure of the woman who kills

To date very little academic literature has been written on the Amanda Knox case. Ellen Nerenberg (2012), Professor of Romance Languages and Literature, and Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Wesleyan University, dedicates only a few pages in the epilogue of her substantial book to the event. As a matter of fact, *Murder Made in Italy* (2012) is concerned with killings which are intrinsically 'regional' and 'national': these are cases which do not cross national boundaries and are strictly bound to 'particular cultural, historical and juridical contexts' (p. 250). Nerenberg (ibid.) correctly argues that the murder of Meredith Kercher 'challenges the regional and national character of murder in Italy confirmed in each of the three parts' (p. 1), and indeed must be analysed not only through what it tells us about the larger Italian cultural, social, and political context, but also about transnational communication, politics and migration (although issues of migration are present in all the cases analysed by Nerenberg).

Indeed, on the one hand, the case raises similar issues to the case studies Nerenberg (2012) analyses in her book, such as xenophobia, the invasion of the private space of the home, and the demonisation and hypersexualisation of the female criminal offender; however on the other hand, it differs in terms of the breadth and reach of the media, the transnational consumption and intertextuality of media images and journalistic coverage, and the double movement of making as well as blurring national boundaries. The Perugia murder must therefore be placed both within and without national cultural, economic and political boundaries, the originality of this case study being exactly this: the exploration of post-feminist phallic subjectivity as it crosses between the national and international spheres.

The other feminist critique of the case and of its media representation is by Simkin (2013), who focused on the reportage offered by the Daily Mail, with some references to US and Italian media. Similarly to this chapter, the author finds that the Amanda Knox case reveals

important contemporary attitudes towards what is perceived to be a 'transgressive' female sexuality, as well as the commonalities it has within long-standing representations of female criminality. As it will appear clearly below, this is undoubtedly the case. However, the analysis of the representation of Amanda Knox in the Italian legal system as well as in the media in this chapter establishes an important link between female subjectivity, media representations, the justice system and the political, economic, cultural and social context of Berlusconism, by uncovering the ambivalences and inconsistencies in regards to the empowerment and liberation that post-feminist culture allegedly grants to women.

Ultimately, the discourse analysis of the representation of Amanda Knox in this case demonstrates a binary understanding of the woman who kills: one is the deviant, hyper-agentic phallic girl/femme fatale; the other is the fragile, vulnerable, voice-less victim of the media and of the legal system. Hence, as explored in the previous chapters, this dichotomous representation of gender subjectivity not only participates in the production of normative gender identities and bodies, but contributes in erasing from the events the effects of systems of inequality and disadvantage. The binary representation of Amanda Knox is analysed below.

Deviant/phallic/mythical femininity as evidence of guilt

The trials of Amanda Knox, Raffaele Sollecito and, to a lesser extent, Rudy Guede have been covered extensively by a variety of media in Italy and abroad. Considering only the press in Italy, hundreds of articles, commentaries and editorials have been produced in regards to the Perugia crime, many of which had as its main protagonist the young Amanda Knox, the only woman involved. Amanda's personality and her personal history were researched, analysed and dissected, and Amanda's behaviour in court and in the 'privacy' of her time in jail was constantly reported and monitored.

The obsessive attention dedicated to Amanda Knox, akin to other national and international cases of women implicated in murder, results from the breaching of the boundaries of normative femininity which women who kill enact, as they not only disturb

notions of how women should behave, but also what a woman is (Seal 2010). Neroni (2006) argues that violence represents a fundamental signifier of masculinity, such that 'we not only consider violence more the province of men than women, but it is also an activity that inevitably enhances a man's masculinity as much as it would conversely detract from a woman's femininity' (p. 42). Female violence does not fit within society's ideas of what constitutes the feminine and as such attracts attention and provokes anxiety.

The media's obsession with Amanda Knox's appearance and the incessant questioning of the reality behind that beautiful mask reflects the anxiety provoked by women who kill. Amanda was constantly placed as the object of the gaze and the object of investigation, her beauty and attractiveness being constantly mentioned, her looks and conduct endlessly commented upon, with *Il Giornale* giving her the nickname '*faccia d'angelo* [angel face]' from very early on (10/11/07, par. 1). The media's obsession with Amanda's appearance results from the perceived incoherence between her candid type of beauty and the horror of the crime she was accused of having committed, reflecting the influence of physiognomic theories which proliferated in Europe in the 18th century and which can be said to still maintain a hold onto people's understanding of the relationship between the self and one's exterior appearance, especially in relation to the face (Featherstone 2010).

Recurrent were the use of formulas indicating that Amanda was wearing a mask, strengthening the idea of the deceptiveness of women's appearance, such as in the extract below from an article titled '*Il vero volto di Amanda* [Amanda's true face]' (Repubblica 29/03/10):

> Who was Amanda Knox? A fresh faced and good student from Seattle, the universal image of the American girl - attractive, athletic, bright, hard working, adventurous, lover of languages and of travelling? Or was her beautiful face a mask, a false front to hide a degenerate soul? (par. 3).[69]

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[69] *Chi era Amanda Knox? Una brava studentessa di Seattle dal viso pulito, l'immagine universale della ragazza americana - attraente, atletica, sveglia, gran lavoratrice, avventurosa, amante delle lingue e dei viaggi? Oppure il suo bel faccino era una maschera, una copertura per un animo depravato?*

As Birch (1993) has argued in relation to her own case studies, in this instance too the language and the hyperbolic metaphors used to penetrate Amanda Knox's appearance, and to reach beyond to find the truth, only work to embrace the mystery and reinforce the notion of femininity as enigma. The conceptualisation of Amanda's beauty as a mask unleashed deep-seated and long-standing fears of feminine inscrutability and the feminine as a source of evil (Seal 2010).

These feelings are made explicit by the following extract, taken from a commentary on *Il Giornale* (06/12/07): '*Una volta si faceva presto a capire di chi diffidare, quella lì ha una faccia che non mi piace, si diceva. Adesso invece quelle facce piacciono da matti*. [There was a time in which it was easy to understand who to trust, she has a face I do not like, you would say. Now those faces are the ones people like the most]' (par. 3). Indeed, the media's continuous reference to Amanda's beauty and looks is representative of the fear indicated by Blackman & Walkerdine (2001) that pathology or evil is no longer written on the body, but exists instead in the immaterial and private realm of emotions, desires and fantasies.

At the same time, however, assumptions that the body will nonetheless reveal in some way or another what is hiding underneath is widespread (Verhoeven 1994), hence the constant reporting and monitoring of Amanda's behaviour not only during her appearances at the trial and in the 'privacy' of her time spent in jail, but also by investigating in her personal history. All the information that was uncovered at the beginning of the judicial process seemed to confirm that Amanda failed the test of normative femininity, thus bringing upon herself the criticism of the prosecution and of the media.

Amanda reportedly had a 'strange' attitude: she was overly relaxed during the trials by smiling and singing; at other times she was cold and concentrated, looking around her with a '*sguardo di ghiaccio*' ([ice-cold gaze], *Il Giornale* 11/12/10, par. 1); and her appearance in court with a t-shirt with the slogan 'All you need is love' was met with intense media commentary and interpreted as a sign of direct hostility toward the Italian

181

legal system by the prosecution. These behaviours were worthy of attention and speculation since, in the eyes of the mainstream press, they challenged normative femininity, which dictates that a woman, having spent time in jail and facing the possibility of spending more time secluded, should appear dishevelled, desperate and hysterical.

Amanda Knox, especially at the beginning of the trail, did not give the appearance of being particularly affected by the trial, thus failing to inhabit a sanctioned normative femininity. Indeed, it was Knox's failure to meet the standards of normative femininity that attracted the police's attention to her in the first place. The media reported that the police became suspicious of Amanda as her behaviour after the murder of Meredith did not show the conventions of (feminine) mourning, was seen kissing Raffaele Sollecito, was doing gymnastics while waiting to be interrogated at the police station, and went shopping for sexy underwear with her boyfriend only a few days after the murder.

And it was such overt sexual drive which became the central focus of much media attention, but also became a fundamental theme of the prosecution's accusation. Amanda's past and personality was dissected by the media, especially by the British tabloids, which hunted down Amanda's ex-lovers, chased any saucy details, embellished their stories, rummaged through social media, found her Facebook and Myspace pages and reproduced nicknames, comments and pictures. A particular image of Amanda began to emerge, the infamous 'Foxy Knoxy', which was readily picked up by the prosecution as evidence of her deviance: she was a narcissistic, hedonistic, sexually voracious young woman, who enjoyed nightlife, drugs and alcohol.

As a matter of fact, Amanda's sexual behaviour came under scrutiny even before she became a suspect, because it was believed that her promiscuity had put Meredith in danger. In her account of the events the journalist Candace Dempsey (2010) recounts that when the police asked Amanda about the men she brought home, she compiled a list of names. Amanda dutifully wrote down all the names of male friends who had entered the *villetta*, but the police thought it to be a list of the people she had had sex with. The resulting assumption was that Amanda's alleged sexual promiscuity was to blame for

182

what happened to Meredith, reflecting not only long standing beliefs that it is women's sexuality which puts them and the people around them in danger, but also the belief that men are inherently aggressive, lustful and violent. As a woman, Amanda was to blame because she had opened the door to a series of potential rapists and assassins, endangering herself and the women who lived with her.

Corriere (25/11/07) reports an interview given by one of Amanda's ex-sexual partners to the English publication *News of the World*, describing her as:

> A man-eater, insatiable in bed […]. The 22 years old Albanian confessed to the British tabloid to have had an authentic 'sexual marathon' with the 20 years old American just a few weeks before her house mate was found dead in Perugia. The youngster, who worked as a barman in a venue in Peugia, highlighted that Amanda, just like a predator with its prey, is always able to possess the men she desires. (par. 1) [70]

And later in the same article:

> The Albanian also recalls that Amanda often bragged about her daily usage of drugs: "She was not the kind of girl you would take home to meet your mother - the young man remarks - I knew she only wanted sex" (par. 2). [71]

This is reminiscent of McRobbie's (2009) notion of the 'phallic girl', a new subject position available for young women today.

In recent years women have been allowed to enter male domains in the form of mimicry of male behaviour, by smoking, drinking, swearing, engaging in casual sex, being involved in fights, getting arrested, going to strip clubs, and so forth. McRobbie (2005; 2009) has analysed the emergence of such subjectivities and called them 'phallic' following Butler's

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[70] *'Una cacciatrice di uomini, insaziabile a letto […]. Il ventiduenne albanese ha confessato al tabloid britannico di aver fatto un'autentica "maratona sessuale" con la ventenne americana poche settimane prima che la sua coinquilina fosse trovata morta a Perugia. Il giovane, che lavorava come barman in un locale di Perugia, ha sottolineato che Amanda, proprio come un cacciatore con la sua preda, riesce sempre a catturare gli uomini che desidera'*

[71] *L'albanese inoltre ricorda che Amanda si vantava spesso del suo uso quotidiano di droghe: "Non era quel tipo di ragazza che porti a casa per farle conoscere tua madre - commenta il ragazzo - Sapevo che lei voleva solo sesso".*

exploration of the 'phallic lesbian'. McRobbie (2005; 2009) understands young women to claim equality to their male peers by engaging in traditionally masculine behaviours, and thus appropriating symbols of male power. However, as noted by McRobbie (2009), this subject position is very much attached to young femininity, as women are eventually required to return to female propriety and matrimonial monogamy - this is represented in the extract above as opening the doors of the familial hearth, symbolised by the introduction of the girl to one's mother.

The increasing spectacolarisation of the media means that popular culture products influence greatly the way news are themselves portrayed. The narratives which have been constructed for Amanda's subjectivity seem to be heavily influenced by American portrayals of femininity, such as the women of the *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) TV show. *Sex and the City* is an American sitcom which concentrates on the lives of four thirty-something (and then forty-something) women friends in New York: Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda. Samantha is the most outspoken, explicit and sexually experimental of the four friends. Within the show she is the character who most represents the neoliberal notion of women's right to sexual pleasure, and is in fact the most sexually active and sexually satisfied (Henry, 2006).

Overt female sexual desire, such as Samantha's, is understood as being essentially American and foreign to Italian culture (Risé 1966; Alberoni 2009). Amanda's phallic subjectivity plays with some of the themes of Samantha's characterisation and lifestyle: Samantha enjoys casual sex, smokes marijuana, is familiar with New York's nightlife, owns a vibrator and does not feel she needs to hide her sexuality, just as Amanda Knox was portrayed to be. The popularity and diffusion of American TV shows such as *Sex and the City* (and more recently others such as *Jersey Shore* (2009-2012), which among its cast has many 'girls gone wild') has created a particular image of American femininity, which necessarily influences the characterisations and narratives employed both inside and outside the court.[72]

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[72] Ironically, the participants to *Jersey Shore* are of Italian ancestry and proud to be.

The 'phallic girl' or the 'ladette' subjectivity of Amanda Knox was counterpoised in legal and media discourses by the figure of the victim, Meredith Kercher, who became representative of respectable, morally superior, normative femininity. While Amanda had numerous sexual partners, had had casual sex and left condoms and sexual toys on sight, Meredith was a serious girl who thought more about her studies than boys, and had just started a loving relationship with a gentle boy who lived next door. *La Repubblica* (18/11/07) reports the interview given by the young man to the *Sunday Times*, in which he claims:

> [Amanda] used to flirt with men, Meredith and she were the opposite of one another: Meredith was calm, sweet and shy, while Amanda was an extrovert and loved being at the centre of attention. I am sure Meredith would have never let people draw her into an orgy or weird sexual things because she was not like that, she was not that kind of girl (par. 8). [73]

While Amanda on the night of the murder was stoned and drunk, Meredith was '*moralmente integerrima: non sono infatti state rinvenute tracce di droghe né di alcolici* ([morally righteous: indeed no traces of drugs or alcohol were found], *La Repubblica* 06/11/07).[74] The media reported the prosecution's claim that Amanda had killed because '*voleva vendicarsi di quella smorfiosa troppo seria e morigerata per i suoi gusti* [she wanted to get back at the girl to was too serious and righteous for her liking' (*Corriere della Sera* 05/12/09), thus placing Amanda and Meredith in a binary opposition on the scale of moral righteousness. Morissey (2003) argues that such moral plays of good and evil used by the media, where the outcome is always assured and the dominant ideology is always restored, has the main purpose of reinstating the basic moral standards of

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[73] *[Amanda] flirtava con gli uomini, lei e Meredith erano all'opposto: Meredith era calma, dolce e timida, mentre Amanda era estroversa ed amava mettersi in mostra. Sono certo che Meredith non si sarebbe mai lasciata coinvolgere in qualcosa come un'orgia o cose di sesso strane perché lei non era così, non era quel tipo di ragazza.*

[74] It is worth paying attention to the connection between morality and absence of evidence of drug or alcohol consumption, which becomes worrying when in the following sentence the police officer adds that '*É stata vittima, e basta*' [she was a victim, full stop]. This sentence implies that the consumption of substances involves a degree of responsibility on the part of the victim, so that if a woman who has consumed drugs or alcohol is victim of violence, abuse and even murder, she is herself made responsible.

society, and in this case norms of hegemonic femininity.

Ultimately, the prosecution depicted Amanda Knox as a sexually voracious 'femme fatale', who was able to submit men to her will by using her beauty and sexual appeal, a common narrative which originates from the 1920s' film genre of the *film noir*, often used in cases of women murderers (Morissey 2003; Seal 2010; Neroni 2006; Keitner 2002). The prosecutor, reported the media, pictured Amanda Knox as the mastermind behind in the murder of Meredith Kercher. Amanda is 'a young woman with a multifaceted personality, characterised by a quick wit and wiliness [...] [and] a strong dramatic flare and an elevated, one might say fatal, ability to bring people together'(*Repubblica* 05/12/07, par. 6);[75] Raffaele Sollecito is described instead as 'a young man characterised by a fragile temperament, inclined to being conditioned by influences of all genres' (*Corriere* 06/12/07, par. 7);[76] while Rudy is depicted as 'psychologically dominated by the American' (*Corriere* 21/10/08, par. 2).[77]

By constructing Amanda Knox as a cunning, devious and erratic femme fatale, and Raffaele Sollecito and Rudy Guede as subjugated to her beauty and personality, the prosecution reproduced *film noir* narratives, in which the *femme fatale* is able to manipulate men into doing her bidding by playing on their sexual desire for her. Indeed, the narrative produced by the prosecution was that Amanda, leading a life of escalating vice and excess, managed, through the manipulation of both Raffaele Sollecito and Rudy Guede, to recruit them for a perverse sexual game/ritual with the unwilling Meredith Kercher, which eventually ended up in tragedy.

In narratives of the *femme fatale*, sexual deviance is aligned with depravity and female sexual desire with violent transgression (Birch 1993). And indeed investigations in Amanda's sexual experience and subjectivity by the prosecution and by the media

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[75] *Una giovane dalla multiforme personalità, fatta di spigliatezza e scaltrezza […] [ed] una forte propensione scenica e un'elevata, si direbbe fatale, capacità di aggregazione.*

[76] *Un giovane dal temperamento fragile, esposto a condizionamenti di ogni genere.*

[77] *Psicologicamente soggiogato dalla statunitense*

grounded most of the allegations against her: the number of men she invited at home (*Corriere della Sera 08*/11/07), the condoms and the vibrator (*Il Giornale* 14/02/09), allegations of sexual incontinence (*Corriere della Sera* 25/11/07), the *'"hot sex" […] sesso "bollente"'* (*La Repubblica* 03/04/09, par. 7) she would have had with Raffaele, all seemed to indicate that she was guilty of murder.

Moreover, Verhoueven (1994) argues that by suggesting that conflict or violence subsumes eroticism and pleasure, the media unknowingly depicts sexual desire as a political struggle for power. The framing of the murder of Meredith Kercher as a mixture of sex, animosity and aggression, with Amanda playing the leading role, seems to suggest a desire on Amanda Knox's part to participate in the crime as equal to men, administering the final stab as a symbol of sexual penetration. Thus, the representation of Amanda in terms of the phallic girl/*femme fatale* has to be read as an anxiety on the part of the social order towards the emergence of a threatening subjectivity to the status quo, one which, subverting gender roles by expressing dominance and sexual assertiveness, may go as far as appropriating male violence in a quest for 'the ultimate control'.

By depicting Amanda as a *femme fatale*, placing the blame on her shoulders and arguing that Amanda (and Sollecito) killed for '*futili motivi*' (legal jargon for 'futile motives'), the young woman's humanity is rejected in favour of a depiction of mythical capriciousness. Seal (2010), Keitner (2002) and Morissey (2003) agree that women killers gain humanity only if they can be easily reinserted in the traditional non-agentic feminine position of the victim, when this is not possible their agency must be made mythical or monstrous. Indeed, Amanda's vilification by the prosecution and the media as a '*bugiarda* [lier]' (*La Repubblica* 09/11/07, par. 6), '*sporca dentro e fuori* [dirty inside and outside]' (*La Repubblica* 26/09/11, par. 3), '*luciferina* [evil]' (*La Repubblica* 28/11/09), '*maledetta* [damned]' (*Il Giornale* 18/10/10, par. 2) works to cast Amanda's agency as mythical, monstrous, diabolical and therefore in-human. The effect is the denial of human agency to women who employ violence and framing them as deviant, confirming that female aggression has no place in our culture (Morissey 2003).

A specific description of Amanda is worth attention:

> About Amanda - the pm remarks - [the court] has revealed a strong narcissism, rage and considerable aggressiveness, a manipulative disposition and an appeal to theatricality, the tendency to transgress, the lack of empathy and emotional anaesthesia, the tendency to dominate the relationship with the immediate satisfaction of the basic needs, the tendency to develop antagonistic feelings towards people who do not agree with her or that put themselves in competition with her, a profound disrespect towards the rules imposed by authority figures, toward which she has a tendency to defend herself through behaviours that show clear defiance […] the 'mind' the 'monster' with an angel face (*Il Giornale* 22/11/09, par. 6). [78]

This extract does not only show the aggressive vilification of Amanda Knox as a transgressive, aggressive, narcissistic, manipulative monster, but also the tendency towards what Birch (1993) calls 'facile psychology', a superficial and hasty attempt to provide a personality type based on indiscriminate clues found in the individual's history or behaviour. Indeed, no professional psychological evaluation was ever requested to be put into the *atti* [submitted as evidence] by the prosecution nor the defence teams.

However, this was not the only representation of Amanda Knox. Indeed, the moral play between evil femininity and good femininity, such as the one explored above, that must end with the forces of goodness overpowering evil, becomes even clearer when comparing the representation of Amanda's subjectivity by the prosecution and civil lawyers on one side, and the defence attorneys on the other. In addition, newspaper articles become more and more supportive of an image of Amanda as complying with normative femininity, and less inclined to describe her as cunning and duplicitous, as the evidence against her and Raffaele Sollecito became weaker. Ultimately, the woman who kills can only be understood as innocent if she fully embodies normative and sanctioned

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[78] *Di Amanda - dice il pm - sono stati posti in evidenza lʹaccentuato narcisismo, la rabbia e la notevole aggressività, la manipolazione e la teatralità, la tendenza alla trasgressione, la scarsa empatia e anestesia affettiva, la tendenza a dominare il rapporto con soddisfacimento repentino dei bisogni immediati, la tendenza a sviluppare casi di antipatie nel caso in cui interagisca con persone che non condividono le sue idee o che si presentano molto competitive, profondo sentimento di noncuranza dei dettami dellʹautorità verso cui tende a difendersi con atteggiamenti in termini di occulta sfida […] la "mente" un "mostro" con la faccia dʹangelo*

standards of femininity, as it is explored below.

Proving innocence: reinserting the phallic girl within normative forms of femininity

The other representation of Amanda Knox's subjectivity as '*l'Amelie di Seattle*' [Seattle's Amelie]' (*La Repubblica* 30/11/09, par. 1), as 'Jessica Rabbit' (referring to Jessica Rabbit's line: 'I am not bad. I'm just drawn that way) (*Corriere della Sera* 27/09/11, par. 3) or '*Venere in Pelliccia* [Venus in Furs]' (*Il Giornale* 28/09/11, par. 3)[79] proposed by the defence attorneys and enacted by the defendant in her '*dichiarazioni spontanee*' [voluntary declaration], responded directly to the prosecution accusations of deviant, hyper-sexualised, un-feminine behaviours, fully reinserting Amanda within standards of normative femininity, rather than challenging the sexist and misogynist attitudes towards the defendant. Interestingly, by invoking 'Jessica Rabbit' the defence attorney too employed an iconic symbol of American femininity, highlighting the way Amanda's subjectivity was perceived as strongly exotic and alien to Italian culture, in its 'good' as well as in its 'evil' forms.

As a matter of fact, it was not Amanda's attorneys who employed those metaphors, but Raffaele Sollecito's. Indeed, Giulia Buongiorno understood that, in a legal and media case which revolved around the vilification of Amanda's personality, the way to acquit her client was through the recovery of Amanda's character. Amanda's own defence attorney depicted her as a loving, naïve, faithful young woman, blaming the media for destroying her reputation (the most important trait of femininity in a masculinist economy):

> [She is a] naive and unexperienced american young woman. Very different from the one who has been described in these months in the newspapers, which dedicated a great deal of space to highlight her sexual habits. While, really, [she is] the girl-next-door-type, passionate about literature and with the ambition to

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[79]   This figure was employed by defence to argue that the prosecution had described Amanda as the Venus in furs, but that this was an imaginary representation that had little to do with reality.

become a writer (*Repubblica* 22/10/08, par. 1).[80]

And finally, Amanda too felt the need to defend her sexual respectability, deciding to respond to the accusations in a *dichiarazione spontanea* [voluntary declarations], claiming that she had had only two lovers in Italy and that the vibrator was given to her as a joke from her friends. The reinsertion of Amanda in respectable femininity works similarly to her demonisation: it denies her agency by framing her 'transgressions' as constructions and placing her in the position of the victim of the media and of the legal system.

Furthermore, in the media as well as in the court, as evidenced in the extract above, Amanda's academic brightness, her love of literature and her desire to teach were also stressed, becoming symbols of her 'goodness'. McRobbie (2009) has drawn attention to the way young women have been put in the spotlight through specific spaces of 'luminosity', one of which is academic and professional success. The emphasis on Amanda's intellectual capabilities serve to reintegrate her within the 'appropriate' post-feminist subjectivity, one which in Italy is inevitably still connected with domains considered 'feminine' such as literature and jobs that involve caring for others, such as teaching.

Very interestingly, Amanda's desire for motherhood gathered substantial media attention, all three publications writing and titling more than one article on the matter and stressing in a positive light Amanda's motherly instincts, so strong that she would resolve to adoption in the case she could not find a good partner. This would suggest that motherhood still holds a central place in the definition of normative femininity in Italian culture. The desire for a family and children does not only reinsert the transgressive woman within normative femininity, but is also connected to a social anxiety about the failing population growth in Italy. Indeed, in a country characterised by an ageing population and declining population growth (-0.01 in 2016 [World Population Review

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[80] *Una ragazza americana ingenua ed inesperta. Molto diversa da come è stata descritta in questi mesi dai giornali impegnati soprattutto a sottolineare le sue abitudini sessuali. Un tipo acqua e sapone in realtà, appassionata di letteratura e son l'ambizione di diventare scrittrice*

2016]), a woman's reproductive role needs to be reinforced and solidified.

Parallel to the discursive reinsertion of Amanda within the categories of respectable femininity was a noticeable change in Amanda's attitude: more respectable demure with standard outbursts of tears and emotion, which resulted in a more positive representation in the media. This points towards the idea of femininity as masquerade, a concept first conceived by Rivière, which has been further developed by feminist theorists such as Butler (1990) and McRobbie (2009). These theorists have pointed out the constructedness of femininity, which is not interpreted as an inherent characteristic of womanhood, but as a façade which is taken on to hide un-feminine yearns for positions of power and to avoid the social order's reprimand. This conceptualisation frames femininity not only in terms of a 'performance' (Butler 1990; 1993), but as a 'masquerade' which works to smooth the threat to the gender order as women enter male domains and to reassure that women pose no threat to masculine domination (McRobbie 2009).

The aggressive vilification by the prosecution and the media of Amanda's personality at the beginning of the trial had a tangible material effect on the defendant: she came to embody the post-feminist masquerade by 'retain[ing] a visible fragility and [...] displaying of a kind of conventional feminine vulnerability' (McRobbie 2009, p. 79). This was reinforced by the retrenchment into traditional structures of masculinist culture such as the Church and patronising relationships with older, male figures such as her lawyer, the prison priest don Saulo, and the MP Rocco Ghirlanda, who published a book on his frequent visits (every two weeks) to Amanda in jail (*Io vengo con te - colloqui in carcere con Amanda* [I'm coming with you - conversations in jail with Amanda] 2010). The growing fondness of these adult men towards Amanda, far removed from a professional relationship, was not questioned, on the contrary, it made them authoritative figures in speaking for her acquittal.

The reinsertion of Amanda in traditional norms of feminine respectability and in masculinist cultural structures, representations which became more pervasive in newspapers as the evidence against Amanda became weaker, have a strong symbolic and

discursive effect, marking the boundaries of sanctioned and unsanctioned femininity, and especially young femininity as that of Meredith and Amanda. Recent media appearances of Amanda Knox in the USA strengthen this argument: with the help of PR experts, Amanda's careful and purposeful representation as completely desexualised (at times even unattractive), fragile and vulnerable, often on the verge of tears, establishes 'the post-feminist masquerade as a strategy of undoing [feminism], a re-configuring of normative femininity' (McRobbie 2009, p. 79).

Boyle (2001) argues that when a woman commits a violent crime, this requires understanding and explanation, while male violence is seen to exist on a continuum and is somehow naturalised, with men's motivations or subjectivity not needing further enquiry. This is not entirely true: in relation to criminals sentenced to death in the USA, Keitner (2002) shows that all murderers are 'othered' in certain respects, and even demonised and de-humanised. Although much less media attention has been dedicated to Raffaele Sollecito and Rudy Guede, these two young men have also been 'othered' according to the discourses of masculinity that circulate in society, as it is shown in the next section.

Masculinity at the intersection of race and class

It is important to stress that the different ways in which violent criminals may be 'othered' do not depend solely on gender, but also on other axis of difference such as class, race, ethnicity and sexuality (Mallicoat 2012; on the intersections between crime, media, gender, class and race see also: Hall 1989; Blackman & Walkerdine 2001; Bissler & Conners 2012; Markovitz 2011; Milovanovic & Schwartz 1999; Seal 2010). The different constructions of Rudy Guede and Raffaele Sollecito's subjectivities within the court, and the way these have been reported on the media, reflect racial and class discourses which circulate in society at large, framing Rudy Guede as inherently hyper-sexualised and violent, while Raffaele Sollecito as deviant and feminised.

Colonial discourses (of which Italian culture is not exempt) often construct the racial Other,

and especially the black body, as hyper-sexualised, closer to nature and consequently more inclined to give in to animalistic urges (Jordan 2000). The black man especially has been constructed in racist discourses as fearfully hyper-virile, aggressive and physically potent (Fanon 2008). Woodcock (2010) argues that the stereotype of the dangerous black man who threatens white women is widespread in Italian media, an image that has been perpetrated by the Berlusconi's government.[81] As a matter of fact, in Italy everyone who has at any point held immigrant status must submit their fingerprints for police record, a clear sign of the connection that is made between immigration and crime in Italy, as it has been further explained in chapter 3.

Institutional racism in the police forces was shown early in the investigations, with the unfair treatment of Diya Lumumba, whose alibi was confirmed shortly after his arrest by a Swiss professor, who corroborated that Lumumba had spent the evening in his bar. However, this information did not lead to the immediate release of Lumumba. It was only when Rudy Guede was taken into custody, 14 days after Lumumba was arrested (and put in solitary confinement, without being able to speak to a lawyer), and the forensic evidence showed no sign of his presence on the crime scene, that he was released. Furthermore, in the narrative of the events provided by Follain (2013), it appears that during the initial interviews with Meredith's friends, police officers recurrently asked about 'foreign' men who might have visited the house, showing the police forces' prejudice towards non-Italian masculinity.

Rudy Guede was intensely 'othered' in terms of his ethnicity and his nationality in media discourses by being constantly referred to as '*l'ivoriano* [the Ivorian]' even

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[81] Fella & Ruzza (2013) argues that although Italy started the 1990s with a positive attitude toward anti-racist and integration policies for immigrants, the Berlusconi government of 2001 showed a striking unwillingness to engage in conversation with those associations in civil society interested in promoting the rights of immigrants, choosing instead to enter a dialogue with the economic élite, namely the employers association. Nontheless, in 2003 the UNAR (Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziale [National Office Anti-Racial Discrimination]) was established as a result of European directives. Fella & Ruzza (2013) however denounces the lack of independence of the institution from governmental and local authorities, as well as its inability to bring legal proceedings, as substantially limiting the efficacy of this organisation.

though he moved to Italy aged 6 and lived there most of his life. One illustrative example can be found on *Corriere* (05/12/09) where the prosecution is quoted starting a sentence with '*[l]a Knox, Sollecito e l'ivorian* [Knox, Sollecito and the Ivorian]' (par. 5). Furthermore, the prosecution and the newspapers which reported its words, framed Rudy Guede (but before him Diya Lumumba) as the perpetrator of the sexual violence way before any definitive evidence was produced in regards not only of the DNA found on the crime scene, but about the sexual violence itself.

This shows a clear racist prejudice in the legal system, one which is further reinforced in the naturalisation of sexual violence in the construction of Rudy's engagement in the crime. *Il Giornale* (05/03/10) reports that 'the jury believes it probable that Rudy Guede, "giving in to his lust", may have attempted to sexually approach the victim, who "clearly refused the attentions"' (par. 1)[82] And on *Repubblica* (04/03/10), quoting the motivations for the guilty verdict at the *Corte D'Assise*:

> Amanda and Raffaele - the judges write - actively participated in Rudy's criminal actions, which were directed towards crushing her retinence, to subject her will and allow Rudy to satisfy his lascivious instincts (par. 6).[83]

By employing terms such as 'instinct' and 'lust', words that are generally associated with the irrational and more 'animalistic' part of the human psyche, the sexual violence perpetrated by Rudy Guede becomes naturalised as an essential characteristic of black masculinity.

Finally, the fact that Guede's trials attracted much less media attention is also telling. On the one hand, one reason for this might be the fact that fast track trials are held behind closed doors, therefore it is impossible for journalists to report as consistently and in such detail as for standard trials. On the other hand, even upon the release of

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[82] *I giudici ritengono probabile che Rudy Guede, "cedendo alla propria concupiscenza", abbia cercato un approccio sessuale con la vittima che però "oppose un netto rifiuto".*

[83] *Amanda e Raffaele - scrivono i giudici - parteciparono attivamente all'azione delittuosa di Rudy finalizzata a vincere la resistenza di Meredith, a soggiogare la volontà e consentire a Rudy di sfogare i propri impulsi lussuriosi.*

the *motivazioni* [written justification] of the guilty verdicts, the publications analysed gave very little attention (or none at all) to the content of the legal document, suggesting that violence committed by an ethnically different man is not as noteworthy as that committed by a white middle-class woman, or by a middle-class man such as Raffaele, hence, normalising violence as an innate characteristic of black masculinity.

In comparison to Rudy Guede, Raffaele Sollecito's life was 'impeccable' for white, middle-class standards: he was raised in a wealthy, middle-class, nuclear family, had a conventional education and was going to graduate soon in Engineering. Similarly to Amanda, who was also white, middle-class and educated, the engagement in such a hideous crime could not be normalised, also considering the fact that he was the only Italian person involved. The prosecution and the media resolved to construct his subjectivity as deviant, which, very differently form the vilification of Amanda Knox, implied a form of femininisation, framing his subjectivity in terms of a dependent personality (*Il Giornale* 22/11/09)*,* fearful of showing disagreement (*Il Giornale* 22/11/09) and Amanda-dependent (*Il Giornale* 02/12/2009).

Corriere (06/12/07) reports that the judges describe Raffaele as:

> [T]he quite complex, and to some respects unsettling, personality of the young man […]. For Raffale violence represents a real appeal. With his behaviour and his attitude, as well as his inconsistent claims, often aligned with the fantastic versions of his ex-girlfriend, has shown a weak temperament, inclined to being conditioned by influences of all genres. The psychological evaluation of his participation in the events shows a desire to experience increasingly more extreme transgressions. In this situation he appears to be inclined to commit grave crimes with recourse to violence toward others (par. 2).[84]

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[84] *[P]ersonalità assai complessa e per certi versi inquietante del ragazzo […] La violenza costituisce per Raffaele una concreta attrattiva. Con la sua condotta e i suoi atteggiamenti, nonché con le sue ondivaghe dichiarazioni spesso allineate alle oniriche versioni dell'ex fidanzata, ha mostrato un temperamento fragile, esposto a pulsioni e condizionamenti di ogni genere. Il quadro psicologico del suo coinvolgimento nella vicenda appare espressione di una volontà di partecipazione a forme sempre più estreme di trasgressione. In questa fase risulta soggetto incline al compimento di grevi delitti implicanti il ricorso a violenza personale*

Raffaele is described as a troubled youngster, attracted to violence and able to commit crime as well as harm. At the same time, however, the judges believe him to be weak, easily influenced by external pressures, especially those coming from the *femme fatale*/phallic girl Amanda Knox.

Similarly to Amanda's case, the strategy of the defence was to reinsert Raffele Sollecito's subjectivity within normative frames, therefore stressing the young man's 'normality' and agency. The attorney denounced the representation of Raffaele as subjugated by Amanda and the marginal legal and media attention dedicated to him. The young man himself in his own *dichiarazioni spontanee* [voluntary declarations] stressed his capability to act and choose according to his own will, and distancing himself from the representation given by the prosecution and the media as '*il signor nessuno* [Mr. No-one]' (*Repubblica* 03/10/11):

> "I am not the Mr. No-one that everyone bosses around – Sollecito says - there's the Venus in fur who manipulates and commands him, those who make him to be a metal-head, dressed in black, there are those who put a rock or a knife in his hand". Sollecito insists, he is not that "Mr. No-one, for whom jail time or the death sentence is asked" (par. 2). [85]

Through these words Raffaele Sollecito detaches himself from the image that has been constructed of him in the courthouse and in the media, almost going as far as to say that the man who is guided by and dependant on his female companion deserves punishment, whilst claiming his difference from him. This highlights how masculinity too needs to be reinserted within normative boundaries; however, differently from femininity, rationality, agency and independence are the characteristics that allow the recuperation of Raffaele's personality into a normalised gender script.

The heterosexual couple is also recuperated, with the defence strategy being the one of emphasising the tenderness and affection between Raffaele and Amanda, something

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[85] *"Non sono quel signor nessuno cui ognuno fa fare quello che gli pare – ha detto Sollecito - c'è la Venere in pelliccia che lo plagia e gli dà ordini, chi lo fa diventare un metallaro, vestito di nero, c'è chi gli mette in mano una pietra o un coltello". Sollecito insiste, non è lui quel "Signor nessuno per cui viene chiesto il carcere o la pena di morte"*

which was instead mistaken for sexual appetite. Raffaele claims:

> […] I was in a beautiful place - the young man stated - under some respects almost idyllic: in a few days I would have had to discuss my thesis at my viva. At that time, in a short period of time, I met a beautiful, lively, cheerful girl. The night of the 1st November we wanted to have an evening of tenderness and cuddles, nothing more than that (*Repubblica* 03/10/11, par. 3). [86]

Raffaele's lawyer continues this depiction by claiming that the bracelet that Raffaele has been wearing since the early stages of the trail, which bears the sentence: 'Free Amanda and Raffaele', '*dimostra, a mio avviso, che tra Amanda e Raffaele ci siano affetto e tenerezza, non una mera relazione di sesso come vuole l'accusa* [demonstrates, according to me, that between Amanda and Raffaele there is tenderness and affection, not a relationship based on sex alone, as the prosecution portrays it to be]' (ibid., par. 4).

The exploration of classed and racialised masculinities is necessary for understanding fully the construction of femininity and of gender relations in the case. Indeed, the representation of Amanda and Raffaele produces a reification of the gender binary, in both their deviant forms and in their normative one: the counterpart of Amanda's representation as hyper-agentic and evil was a submissive and weak Raffaele, while an assertive and autonomous Raffaele corresponded to a victimised and vulnerable Amanda. This confirms how changing norms of femininity in post-feminist culture do not affect the structure of gender as 'complementary difference' (Budgeon 2014, p. 318).

Furthermore, as shown in Chapter 3, the xenophobia characterising Berlusconism framed normative femininity as vulnerable, especially to the male Other. This discourse is reproduced in the newspaper coverage of the racialised and classed masculinity of Rudy Guede, portrayed as the dangerous sexual predator to normative femininity. Thus, post-feminism in Italy is not only defined by sexism and misogyny, but also by racist and classist

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[86] *[…] ero in una situazione bellissima - ha detto il ragazzo - quasi idilliaca sotto certi punti di vista: da lì a pochissimi giorni avrei dovuto sostenere la mia tesi di laurea. Durante quel periodo in poco tempo ho conosciuto una ragazza bella, solare, vivace. La notte del primo novembre volevamo trascorrere una serata tra tenerezze e coccole, niente di più di questo*

discourses, which are rarely challenged in mainstream media and culture.

Conclusion

The Amanda Knox case is fundamental for the understanding of post-feminist culture in Italy, where a framework of nominal equality provides a cover to sexist forms of aggression towards women. Indeed, behind the illusion of sexual liberation that post-feminism promises, female sexuality is still object of intense scrutiny, policing and regulation. The aggressive vilification of Amanda's personality, the polarisation of her representation as either femme fatale or helpless victim, allusions to the mystery of femininity, as well as allusions to female duplicity, cunningness and deceitfulness, all participate in a profoundly mysogynistic discourse on which Berlusconi's authoritarian neoliberal populism is built.

Ultimately, Amanda was placed in what McRobbie (2009) calls a 'space of luminosity', which had the effect of submitting her to increasing disciplining and control. The complete absence of feminist critique both in the courtroom and in the national media of any political disposition (but especially in *Repubblica*, a newspaper aligned with the left) to such virulent, aggressive and misogynistic way of perceiving and describing women, reflects the invisibility of feminism from mainstream media which characterises Italian post-feminism. Indeed, no commentator, journalist or lawyer critiqued the whore/madonna binary employed to describe female subjectivity, the double standard in relation to men and women's sexuality, nor the sexist attitude towards Amanda, her defence being built on portraying her as a decent, respectable woman. Similarly, racial issues were downplayed in the media, with almost no mention of the institutional racism which led to the wrong imprisonment of Diya Lumumba, in solitary confinement and with no access to a lawyer for 14 days, even though the police had no proof of his involvement besides Amanda's 'confession'.

Amanda Knox presents an element of the figuration of femininity in Italian post-feminism in terms of what Angela McRobbie (2009) has named the 'phallic girl', a new subject position available for young women today. This side of Amanda was emphasised by the

media and the prosecution, making a clear connection between excessive sexual desire, moral disinhibition, drugs and murder. The representation of Amanda as the one inflicting the fatal stab, and her conviction for both rape and murder, seems to symbolise the phallic girl's yearn for power in terms of a phallic penetration of Meredith's body with the blade and as the ultimate form of control, the one over life and death. Ultimately, the representation of Amanda Knox as a phallic girl conveys the social anxiety that this facet of the figuration of femininity provokes, one that is perceived as a challenge to the status quo, threatening to subvert the gender order by expressing dominance and sexual assertiveness.

Further techniques for the reabsorption of the transgressive Amanda were to reframe her within the terms of normative femininity, a strategy which Amanda's defence employed repeatedly. To the vilified and over-sexualised representation made by the prosecution, which was eagerly taken on by the media, the defence counterpoised a representation of Amanda as a loving, sensitive and naïve young woman. This shift in representation was paralleled by a visible change in Amanda's behaviour and appearance, becoming a post-feminist masquerade which reinserted the threatening phallic girl into standards of female behaviour, diminishing the threat she posed to the gender status quo.

Ultimately, Amanda's subjectivity and sexuality could be understood only as either the hyper-sexual, monstrously agentic, phallic girl/femme fatale or the sexually modest, fragile, respectable and agency-less victim. A middle-ground, where a woman might be capable to commit a murder without being a monster, or where a victim might still be able to exercise agency, are ultimately found to be unintelligible. Thus, this chapter goes to show how post-feminist culture actively performs an undoing of feminism, as indicated by McRobbie (2009). Women are bestowed with certain freedoms, such as being able to enjoy casual sex, drinking and taking drugs, but these freedoms can easily be turned against them in an attempt to redraw the boundaries of sanctioned femininity, made of domesticity, motherhood, docility, fragility and so on. The journey of Amanda Knox's public persona from a 'phallic girl' to the 'post-feminist masquerade', created by the narratives produced in court, media representations, and techniques of self-presentation,

is evidence of the way female bodies continue to be policed and domesticated into performing the 'correct' gender discourses, attached to a domestic, monogamous and docile sexuality. However, such an overt sexual desire is not always perceived as threatening to the status quo, as the next case study explores.

Ch. 6: Sexualised symptoms of post-feminist disorder

Similarly to the cases explored in the previous chapters, the representation of Sara Tommasi, on which this chapter focuses, is central to Italian post-feminism because it constitutes another important facet of the figuration of post-feminist femininity in Berlusconism: post-feminist disorder. As the previous ones, this case study involves the legal system (two separate court cases) and the media, providing a 'surface of emergence' (Foucault 1972, p. 41), a space for the figuration of femininity in Berlusconism. Hence, the media representation of this case is central to explore the way discourses about normative and sanctioned forms of subjectivity and sexuality are articulated and female bodies are policed, shedding light on the wider processes of gendered subjectification within neoliberal governmentality and post-feminist culture.

This case study, however, differs from the previous ones in that it is not as spectacular, although it can still be placed within the general trend of spectacolarisation (Kellner 2003) to which the two previous cases belong. Kellner (2003) has explored the way in which 'spectacle' has come to dominate media culture, with the production of increasingly more spectacular formats and contents, and the predilection of entertainment over information (or a mixture of the two). Indeed, the topic of this chapter - the press' coverage of a minor celebrity perceived to have gone awry - would not have gathered the mainstream press' attention were it not for the shift of the news media towards forms of infotainment and the continuous flow of information that modern technologies allow (Fox et al. 2004; Kellner 2003; Marletti 2010). Nonetheless, the events covered in this chapter have attracted less attention, and the coverage has been characterised by a diversification in style of coverage (political news, culture and arts, showbiz, local news, to the very distinctive category 'Weird News' coined by *Il Giornale*).

Thus, while the two previous case studies explored phallicism and commercial sexuality, this one focuses on post-feminist disorder. Through a detailed reconstruction of the events and the analysis of online newspaper articles (*Il Giornale* - 56 articles; *Corriere della Sera*

– 59; and *Repubblica* - 44) from 2006 to 2016, this chapter investigates the media coverage of the events, and the representation of Sara's subjectivity and sexuality. I define this case as critical, since it condenses many of the findings of the previous case studies, such as the vilification of 'deviant' subjectivities and behaviours, the anxieties and tensions around the *veline* and their aspirations to fame, ambivalence towards commercial sexuality, the dichotomisation of agency, in particular sexual agency, and the individualisation of subjectivity and personal history. Futhermore, this case study is critical because it clearly illustrates the discursive production of ideal post-feminist subjectivity, as well at its abject 'other'. These themes emerge through the discourse of female disorder, which has been articulated through the narrative of 'rise and fall' of a female celebrity: from the heights of ideal post-feminist success to the lows of hyper-sexualised madness.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the events that are deemed important to fully situate the case study in space and time. It then continues with a theoretical discussion of women and mental health issues, documenting the gender inequality that has characterised the psy-sciences, as well as cultural representations of women and madness. Then follows an overview and critique of the emerging field of celebrity studies, stressing the role of discourses and narratives produced about celebrity in establishing cultural values, norms and idealised forms of identity, but also arguing that there is a need to contextualise and gender this body of work.

The focus of the chapter then shifts to the media representation of Sara Tommasi by analysing the discourses which engender these constructions, and thus the kinds of subjectivites and female bodies that are made intelligible. This is further divided into 4 sections: the first explores the representation of Sara Tommasi as the ideal post-feminist subject - an educated, smart, successful, entrepreneurial, autonomous young woman; the second maps the application of the common narrative of 'the rise and fall' to Sara Tommasi's perceived 'failure', which is understood to be the involvement in prostitution first and then the development of mental health issues; the third section analyses the discourses employed by the publications to construct female disorder; and lastly I present

an analysis of the attribution of agency and accountability to Sara Tommasi in the legal case.

Ambition and demise of a young starlet

Sara Tommasi was born in Narni, a small town in Umbria, in 1981. Upon finishing secondary school, she moved to Milan to study at the prestigious university Bocconi, being awarded a Bachelor's degree in *Economia delle Istituzioni e dei mercati finanziari* [Institutional and Financial Market's Economics]. Milan, being one of the most important cities in Italy in regards to celebrity culture and life, initiated her into the show business, landing her several jobs as a model, in advertising, and eventually in television as *velina.* Her break in show business came in 2006, when she appeared in the Italian version of 'I'm a Celebrity, get me out of here', called *L'Isola dei Famosi* [Isle of the Famous], making it to the last episode of the series and arriving 4th. From then on, her career made a step forward: she posed in the nude in one of the most renowned calendars directed at heterosexual men in Italy, Max, (A-list celebrities such as Sabrina Ferilli and Monica Bellucci have also posed);[87] she conducted, as co-presenter, a number of television shows; she appeared in others; and starred in a film, *Ultimi della Classe* (Biglione 2008), landing a prize for best supporting actress.

However, in 2007 she became implicated in the *vallettopoli* scandal, in which several notorious people in the media industry were found guilty of exploitation of prostitution, drug trafficking and/or extortion. In the investigation Sara Tommasi admitted to having received money to accompany a man for a week in Saint Tropez, but denied being remunerated for sex (*Corriere* 14/03/07). However, in 2011 she once again became a person of interest in an investigation led by PMs located in Naples, which ran parallel to the Ruby trials, who were investigating the role of a few men in providing women and escorts for Berlusconi and other high profile men's parties. Berlusconi was implicated in

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[87] Max is a man's magazine which was distributed by RCS MadiaGroup from 1985 to 2013. From 1990 to 2008 it gifted its readers with an annual calendar portraying a selected female celebrity in the nude.

the trial only as user of the prostitution ring; thus, he was not charged with any felony. It is in this instance that Sara's mental state came under scrutiny. Several disordered texts were leaked to the press; at the same time, Sara made unsettling statements in interviews on other media, in which she claimed to have been harassed, drugged against her will, and controlled via a microchip underneath her skin, among other statements.

In early 2012 Sara entered politics, associating herself with the lawyer and writer Alfonso Luigi Marra in protesting against the banking system. Marra, a trained lawyer, entered politics at the end of the 1980s with the self-founded party *Partito di Azione per lo Sviluppo* [Party for Action toward Development], not aligned with any of the major parties at the time (PCI, PSI or DC). He was elected to the European Parliament under the first Berlusconi government, but resigned in 1996. In 1987 he founded the *FermiamoLeBanche* [LetsStopTheBanks] group, involved in fighting against the banking system and the central banks' monopoly of currencies. The group subscribes to the theory of the banking seignorage, a conspiracy theory according to which the process of printing money by the central banks produces profit for the banks and other obscure players, at the expense of the citizens. Marra is also famous for a few self-published books that cover the more disparate themes, from an analysis of his second wife's mental distress, to a treatise on Australia's xenophobic and anti-constitutional nature, passing through the limitations and constrictions of modern relationships (in a book called *Il Labirinto Femminile* [The feminine maze] [2010]).

While Sara Tommasi's involvement with Marra and his political objectives might appear bizarre, this is not an exception in Italy. Italian media and the political system have a longstanding relationship, and a considerable number of media personalities have become politicians, and the other way around. Examples are Vittorio Sgarbi, mentioned in Chapter 4; Irene Pivetti, a politician born in a family of entertainers, who later in her career became a television personality; and Vladimir Luxuria, a transgender woman who, before entering politics, was an actress, TV personality and presenter. This connection was intensified during the Berlusconi years, in which several young and beautiful women with

media careers were appointed to political positions, including Mara Carfagna and Nicole Minetti (who was implicated in the Ruby scandal explored in Chapter 4).

Despite this close relationship, to some extent Sara's activism confirmed Marra's bizarre and dubious politics. Although Sara spoke at several public events, she mostly employed her nudity as a move to attract media attention. As time went by, the episodes in which she exposed herself became more frequent and less connected with the political message to which the nudity was previously associated. In 2012 she made the national news with her participation in a porn movie, which was followed by another three (one was never released). However, towards the end of 2012 Sara Tommasi, aided by her previous associate and partner Alfonso Marra, filed a complaint against the producers, the director and two actors, claiming that she had been drugged and that she was in no psychological or physical state to consent to participating in one of the movies. One of the producers proceeded with an abbreviated trial and was convicted to 2 years and 10 months in prison. Federico de Vincenzo, manager of Sara Tommasi and producer of the porn movie, proceeded with a standard trial and was convicted to 18 months in jail.

Shortly after the shooting of the first film, Sara was forcibly committed to a mental health institution. Since then Sara has entered several rehabilitation and mental health institutions, being diagnosed with bipolar disorder by some psychiatrists or affected by borderline personality disorder by others. In 2015 Sara Tommasi entered in a relationship with Adrea Diprè, a lawyer by trade, who has become notorious for his interviews with porn stars, released on YouTube, whom he describes as '*opere d'arte mobili*' [mobile pieces of art]. Their relationship was life streamed on social media, the couple frequently uploading videos on YouTube, and sharing information on their personal Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. In their updates they often appeared inebriated, vocally celebrating a hedonistic lifestyle of drug taking, fun and sex. Diprè was critiqued for taking advantage of Sara Tommasi, many audience members and media personalities accusing him of having profited from the visibility given to him by a woman who was not in the right state of mind. Shortly after splitting up with Diprè in late 2015, Sara Tommasi let her fan base know she was undergoing medical care and living with her family.

The case of Sara Tommasi is crucial for the analysis of post-feminism in Italy, not only because it condenses many of the issues explored in the other chapters, but also because it clearly illustrates what is perceived to be the ideal post-feminist subjectivity, as well as its abject other. This is articulated through the intersection of discourses about 'failure' of female celebrity and discourses of female disorder, whereby these constructions work together to create an individualised narrative of 'rise and fall' of female celebrity. Historically, women have been more likely than men to be associated with mental health disorders (Appignanesi 2008; Chesler 1972; Russell 1995; Ussher 1991;), this knowledge (in the Foucauldian sense) affecting the understanding and representation of female celebrities 'meltdowns'. Thus, in the section below I explore the longstanding association of femininity with irrationality and madness.

Female disorder: femininity and madness

A discussion of the way femininity has historically been connected with irrationality, chaos and madness is central to the analysis of the case study and the discursive practices it generated. Hyde & Rosenberg (1976) show how in major myths from different cultures the feminine is often associated with evil, as well as with weaker morality and the inability to resist temptation. More specifically, in Western philosophical and religious traditions, women have been associated with chaos, irrationality and emotionality, while men with control, rationality and order. Artistotle, for example, believed that women were inferior to men and were not able to fully develop the uniquely human capacity of self-government through reason (Lange 1983). In the 17th century, Descartes' influence on Western philosophy solidified a binary understanding of gender, the separation of body-mind having a fundamental role in establishing one gender (male) on the side of reason and the other (female) on the side of the body (Bordo 1993), whereby the body is a non-thinking entity to be controlled by the mind.

But arguably the most pathologising discourse about femininity was introduced in the field of psychiatry at the end of the 18th century (Russel 1995). The medical study of hysteria not only placed women's mind as inferior to men's in terms of understanding, memory, judgement and reasoning, but also suggested that this was connected with their sexuality. While aversion and fear of women's sexuality have characterised Western religious and philosophical tradition, this was intensified in the Victorian period: women were believed to give in more easily to their sexual instincts because they were perceived to be closer to nature, and thus to animalistic passions and irrationality. As such, female sexual desire was believed to be dangerous, for the women themselves and for others (Groneman 1995).

However, it was the work of Charcot in the 19th century that inaugurated the modern epidemic of hysteria (Ussher 2011). Until the beginning of the 20th century the diagnosis became so frequent that the disorder became descriptive of femininity tout-court: 'all women are hysterical and … every woman carries with her the seeds of hysteria. Hysteria… is a temperament, and what constitutes the temperament of a woman is rudimentary hysteria' (Auguste Fabre in Ussher 2011, p. 9). By the late 19th century, such a vast array of symptoms was attributed to hysteria, that the diagnosis ceased to have any meaning at all (Micale 1995). Hence, Western culture has a longstanding history of attributing to women inferior rational capabilities, weaker control of their emotions and passions, and mental health issues.

Consequently, throughout history women have outnumbered men in diagnosis of mental health disorders - from the hysteria of the 18th and 19th century, to neurotic and mood disorders of the 20th and 21st (Chesler 1972; Russell 1995; Ussher 2011). Describing her own experience with her mother's commitment to an asylum, Ussher (1991) claims that madness is so intrinsic to femininity that:

> to be a woman is often to be mad. If we stay inside our prescribed roles and routes as my mother did, or if we speak out, or move outside our designated paths we become mad […]. We are all in danger of being positioned as mad. Forming part of what is to be a woman, it beckons us as a spectre in the shadows (p.6).

Despite feminist critiques (Appignanesi 2008; Blackman 2001; Busfield 2000; Chesler 1972; Fee 2000; Russell 1995; Showalter 1987; Ussher 1991, 2011; Urla and Terry 1995) to male bias in pys-sciences and the pathologisation of distress, the discourse of femininity and madness continues to affect how women are perceived in society, and deviant behaviour made sense of. Indeed, cultural definitions of madness do not just work to define what or who is 'sane', but are also important in marking the boundaries of who is a 'good' woman and who is not (Ussher 2011).

This is not to argue that, since mental health categorisations and classifications are cultural constructions, the embodied experience of distress is not physically and mentally debilitating for many. But a Foucauldian framework allows one to investigate the cultural discourses that are employed to make sense of the symptoms, as well as the way discourses enable certain manifestations of disorder that are gendered. Hence, I subscribe to Ussher's (2011) epistemological commitment to 'recognise women's lived experience of misery and prolonged distress as well as the material ad intrapsychic concomitants of this distress, while acknowledging that it is known as "madness" … only because of the discourses which circulate in a particular culture at a particular time' (p. 5). In other words, the definition of pathology is historical, as well as vulnerable to prejudice and bias related to interlacing patterns of inequality and discrimination.

The gender difference in the construction of mental health issues is confirmed in the representation of celebrity 'failure'. In the past decade there has been an intensification of media focus on female celebrities' 'failures', such as drug addiction, depression and mental health issues, often depicted in highly gendered and stigmatising ways (Harper 2006, 2009; Holmes & Negra 2011; Gies 2011; McRobbie 2009). Race, gender, sexuality and class play a fundamental role in the way media constructs narratives of 'downfall', on the possibility of 'rehabilitation' and the form that this might take (Gies 2011). Because of the longstanding relationship between femininity and madness, female celebrities' 'failure' is often articulated through discourses of mental illness (Bell 2011; Harper 2009; Holmes & Negra 2011; Meyer, Fallah and Wood 2011). Thus, celebrity culture has become a regular domain for the construction and discussion of post-feminist disorder. Below is

an assessment of the field of celebrity studies, with the intent of gendering and contextualising narratives of 'rise and fall', showing its connection with mental instability and personal failure when attached to post-feminist women.

Celebrity trainwrecks, gender and post-feminism.

According to Redmond (2014) the term celebrity describes 'a person whose name, image, lifestyle, and opinions carry cultural and economic worth, and who are first and foremost idealised popular media constructions' (p. 5). Celebrities exist (mainly) in and through the media, and represent valuable commodities within the media economic system, in term of their use and exchange value (ibid.). They are models of consumption practice and aspiration, as - through lifestyle choices and product endorsement - they work to legitimate consumerist values that are fundamental for the commercial interests not only of the media market, but of the capitalist economy at large (Turner 2004; Redmond 2014). Rojek (2001) groups celebrity in four categories: ascribed (flowing from dynastic or royal lineage); achieved (celebrity resulting from individual skill and achievements); attributed (celebrity derived from noteworthiness and unrelated to skill or merit); and the 'celetoid' (a subcategory of attributed celebrity where a person acquires short, intense bursts of media attention).

Dyer (1979) was the first scholar to analyse celebrities as cultural and ideological signs. He highlighted the way stars mobilise discourses about personhood, identity and individualism in capitalist societies. Dyer (1987) claims:

> Stars articulate what it is to be a human being in contemporary society; that is they express the particular notion we hold of the person, of the 'individual'. They do so complexly, variously - they are not straight forward affirmations of individualism. On the contrary, they articulate both the promise and the difficulty that the notion of individuality presents for all of us who live by it (p. 87).

Therefore, according to Dyer (1987), celebrities work to dramatise, disrupt and/or reconcile the dominant discourses about subjectivity that exist in a specific culture at one specific time.

While much of the literature on celebrity has concentrated on celebrities representing idealised representations of identity and individualism, and on processes of identification and longing, it is also important to focus on those instances which involve disidentification and abjection, as in the case of Sara Tommasi. While episodes of 'rise and fall' have never been alien to celebrity culture, since the 1960s the 'darker side' of fame (Grieveson 2002) has increasingly gained currency in cultural discourses about celebrity, especially among young female celebrities, such as Britney Spears, Kate Moss, Amy Winehouse and Lindsay Lohan (Gorin & Dubied 2011). The downfall of celebrities into drugs, drinking, illness, depression and so on, has become common place in gossip magazine, tabloids and even newspapers, in a cycle that quickly goes from adulation to abjection, and at times rehabilitation.

Thus, the field of celebrity studies provides insightful ways to look at the construction of media personalities and processes of identification, however, there are important issues that have escaped it. Firstly, while gender has not been neglected *per se*, there has been relatively little attention to the 'gendered politics of fame' (Holmes & Negra 2011, p. 9). This aspect is especially important in an era in which female bodies are being increasingly subjected to harsher scrutiny and policing, female personalities and celebrities often carrying most of the burden. Secondly, the focus on audience's identification with and relation to idealised figures, neglects the way in which media celebrities, and especially narratives of 'rise and fall' of female celebrities, need to be located within their cultural, social and economic context.

Many of the contributors to Holmes & Negra's (2011) collection *Into the limelight and Under the Microscope*, which focuses particularly on the differential treatment of male and female celebrities, agree that the popular interest and pleasure in the 'downfall' of female celebrities is to be connected with the 'intensifying double standard underlying a postfeminist cover story about gender egalitarianism' (ibid., p. 2). Harper (2009) sees this differential treatment in terms of a post-feminist backlash against aspirational femininity, re-establishing a gender binary and hierarchy that places the male as the preferred term. Furthermore, Holmes and Negra (2011), Watkins Fisher (2011) and Cross & Littler (2010)

have understood the interest and pleasures in female celebrities' failures as playing a political role in the context of recent social, political and economic changes. Cross & Littler (2010), for example, understand these episodes as *shadenfraude* (pleasure of the misfortunes of others), satisfying the frustrations of the 'wider public', as the neoliberal promise of economic and social mobility repetitively fails them.

Young female celebrities who 'fail' are often described with the term 'trainwreck', an American expression that has come to describe female celebrities perceived to be 'out of control' (Fairclough 2008). It is because of the longstanding association of femininity and madness, that female celebrities 'failures' are often understood through the discourses of (failing) mental health (Bell 2011; Harper 2009; Holmes & Negra 2011; Meyer, Fallah and Wood 2011). However, as this case study shows, longstanding discourses about female madness are re-articulated through a post-feminist lenses, with the effect of individualising female celebrities' break-downs, attributing failure to personal (feminine) weakness, rather than a failure of the neoliberal aspirational meritocratic model. Ultimately, failing female celebrities represent important vehicles through which discourses about normative and sanctioned forms of subjectivity and sexuality are articulated and female bodies are policed, shedding light on the wider processes of gendered subjectification within neoliberal governmentality and post-feminist culture.

It is also worth mentioning that the news media is increasingly playing a role in the production of celebrities (Redmond 2014). The spectacolarisation of information has not only affected the quality and form of the information provided, as noted in relation to the Amanda Knox case, but has also extended the range of topics that mainstream news media cover, including the field of celebrity news. Ellis (1991) argues that celebrities have become a valuable discursive trope in newspapers as they provide the space of the personal, becoming a vehicle for newspapers to discuss moral issues related to the private sphere of identity, sexuality, familial relations, and so on. Gorin & Dubied (2011) continue this line of argument, confirming that through celebrity news the media reproduces and reinforces normative values and ways of acting/being, even in those cases which show the failing of the 'dream'.

The highly gendered way in which the press has represented the events concerning the celetoid Sara Tommasi is analysed below. This is divided into 4 sections: the first two analyse the 'rise and fall' narrative, Sara Tommasi moving from the ideal post-feminist subject to an abject one, suffering from post-feminist disorder. The following section analyses the way the representation of Sara Tommasi as suffering from mental health issues works to naturalise disorder as part and parcel of post-feminist subjectivity, reproducing longstanding discourses of femininity as irrationality and madness. And finally, the attribution of agency or its negation to the post-feminist woman is explored, highlighting how in this case, as in the others covered in the thesis, agency is understood as being either completely present (and autonomous) or completely nonexistent.

The early career of Sara Tommasi: the celetoid as ideal post-feminist subject

While before the more dramatic events in which Sara Tommasi became involved there is little coverage of her activities, one article in particular is of crucial importance. In an interview given to *Corriere* on 05/10/06 Sara Tommasi appears to embody the Top Girl (McRobbie 2009) of post-feminism: she is educated, ambitious, hard-working, intelligent, rational, autonomous, entrepreneurial and individualist. Post-feminist culture dictates that women 'embark on individualised projects of self-definition and privatized self-expression exemplified in the celebration of lifestyle and consumption choices' (Budgeon 2011, p. 281). Women, as subjects of excellence as well as the subjects *par excellence* of neoliberalism (McRobbie 2009, p. 15), need to be flexible, adaptable, driven, tenacious, competitive, autonomously aiming for self-fulfillment and success.

Sara is seen to be actively involved in her personal and professional development, in a project of self-construction and -definition: she attended acting courses in Milan and New York (Corriere 05/10/06 par. 20; *Repubblica* 15/05/08, par. 8), hired a professional acting coach (*Repubblica* 15/05/08, par. 8) and trained with a professional stripper to get into character for one of her roles (*Repubblica* 15/05/08, par. 5). She eventually aims to enter the 'higher' realms of journalism, and even politics (*Corriere* 05/10/06, par. 6). In order to

arrive to where she wants to, she rationally and autonomously plans ahead: she undergoes breast augmentation to fit into normative standards of beauty ('*Chi bella vuole apparì, nu poco deve suffrì*' [par. 17], a popular saying, highly gendered, that translates literally in 'to appear beautiful one needs to suffer'), has a clear 5 years plan which is regularly updated (par. 20), and has a 'plan B' should her career in the show business not succeed (par. 21).

This effort towards self-management and self-improvement is integral part of post-feminist culture, which stresses an ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement, and demands that women take control of their lives through embracing independence and self-reliance (Blackman 2010). The trend toward individualisation of neoliberalism is shown in the way Sara understands her own success and ambition, how she takes it upon herself to maximise success, happiness and fulfilment through a range of practices that endorse self-invention, autonomy and personal responsibility.

Success is a trope central to post-feminism. According to McRobbie (2009) in post-feminism women's successes in traditionally male dominated spaces, such as work and education, are paraded and celebrated, in a way that suggests that equality has been achieved, and thus, that feminism is no longer needed. The journalist describes Sara in these terms:

> Sara was born with a great desire for success in her DNA and a will power that, usually, make a difference in the show business' world. The fact that her degree in Institutional and financial market's economy has been put aside is the proof of this, as the first of a long series of prizes to show, one day, to her fans (par. 1).[88]

Sara is described as ambitious and strong-willed, characteristics that have allowed her to succeed in one of the most prestigious universities in Italy, the Bocconi University, and that will open for her the doors to show business and its promises of fame and success. These

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[88] *Sara è nata con una gran voglia di successo nel dna e una forza di volontà di quelle che, di solito, fanno la differenza nel mondo dello spettacolo. Prova ne è che la sua laurea in Economia delle istituzioni e dei mercati finanziari alla Bocconi di Milano è lì, messa da parte, come il primo di una lunga serie di trofei da mostrare, un giorno, ai fan.*

characteristics are perceived to be such integral part of her personality that they are literally inscribed in her DNA, rather than being associated with upbringing, education and/or socialisation. This individualising narrative of success contributes in constructing culture - and media culture - as a meritocratic and democratic field, personal drive and efforts being enough to achieve celebrity status and success.

Sara's educational background and achievements (she was awarded full marks at secondary school and graduated with 105, the maximum being 110) are given particular emphasis in all the publications, her university degree being often mentioned when she is. The publications' focus on her studiousness and intelligence is symptomatic of the widespread assumption that women who participate in television as *veline* are dumb and superficial. Hipkins (2011) refers to this Italian cultural discourse as the 'beauty trade-off', which she describes as the way the possession of normative female beauty in Italian culture is automatically connected with stupidity, badness and/or sexual promiscuity. Sara's achievements contradict this assumption, but rather than challenging this preconceived notion, she becomes a striking exception. Corriere spells this assumption out, by writing: '*[Sara] si distingueva nel panorama delle starlette televisive per la sua formazione universitaria* [she distinguished herself from the wider group of television minor-celebrities for her university education]' (*Corriere* 12/02/11, par. 1).

The animosity towards *veline* in Italy, which has been explored at length in the Ruby Rubacuori case, can be connected with an aversion to a form of unsanctioned social mobility, young women being commonly thought as beautiful, but lacking any talent or merit. Differently from other European countries, literacy in Italy was slow to grow - it was not until 1959 that universal literacy (more than 90%) was achieved (Hanretty 2010). The national broadcaster played a fundamental role in educating Italian people, devising TV programs to teach how to write and read, one of them being called '*Non è mai troppo tardi* [It is never too late]' (Prada 2014). The message brought forward by the government and these programs was the promise that with education Italians would have been able to get better jobs, and, thus, social mobility. Sara's educational history, which predates her

entrance in media culture, confirms the legitimacy of her success, contrary to those *veline* whose only merit is perceived to be beauty and, potentially, sexual availability.

But perhaps most importantly for this thesis is the way Sara Tommasi understands her place in the economy of the media market and the role of her body:

> After 4 years studying at Bocconi, I have learned how to be an efficient manager of big-scale firms of industrial material or in the service sector. In this case I am the product, a product to be sold in the show business' market (*Corriere* 05/10/06, par. 4).[89]

In this case the neoliberal and post-feminist understanding of the body as part of one's human capital, and its employment as a source of revenue is quite literally spelled out. As she claims to rely on her physical appearance, because '*in fondo è l'inizio della carriere per molte donne* [at the end of the day it is how many women's careers start]' (*Corriere* 05/10/06, par. 20), Sara Tommasi appears to be fully conscious and in control of her 'erotic capital' (Hakim 2010; 2011), as well as having a clear understanding of the way the female body is commodified on Italian media. Nowhere more than here Butler's (1990; 1999) argument about the performance of gender becomes clear: for Sara Tommasi, femininity is inscribed onto the body, where hyper-femininity (in terms of a sexualised body, thin, but curvy, and with large sized breasts) is a performance knowingly employed to achieve success not only in the media industry, but in society at large.

This concept is reiterated in both *Corriere* (12/02/11) and *Repubblica* (08/02/11) at a later date, in relation to the implication of Sara Tommasi in the Berlusconi scandal. However, in this context, while the first publication continues to associate this sentence to a sanctioned post-feminist subjectivity, the latter treats it as a disquieting foretelling about Sara's participation to the parties thrown by Berlusconi in Arcore. However, no connection is made between Sara's comment on the commodification of her body and Sara's later involvement in the pornographic industry, which could be interpreted as the following

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[89] *Dopo 4 anni di studi alla Bocconi, ho imparato a essere la brava manager di una grande azienda di prodotti industriali o di servizi. In questo caso sono io il prodotto, un prodotto da vendere nel mercato dello show business (par. 4).*

logical step in a system that places the female body and sexuality as commodities to be consumed. Furthermore, no publication remarks on the connecting logic between a media system that demands that women take full agency for their own sexualisation and commodification and the world of sex work.

Ultimately, Sara Tommasi fully embodies the *homo œconomicus* that Foucault (2010) describes - 'being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings [sic]' (p. 226). The demand to manage one's self as an enterprise is central to neoliberal culture. Brown (2003) argues '[n]eoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care"' (p. 15). Sara is made fully accountable and responsible for her own personal development and for her choices, her 'self' and her body becoming an ongoing project for the achievement of success, and thus happiness and fulfilment. However, the investment in a discourse of entrepreneuralism results in an emphasis on personal struggle, at the expense of a discussion of the implication of wider structural inequalities, among which gender inequality (Gill 2014; Scharff 2016).

This personal responsibilisation involves also the management of one's mental health, obscuring both the social implications of class, race, gender and sexuality in the development of mental distress, and the possibility of intervening through social change (Harper 2009). Failure to maintain the neoliberal successful, aspirational, rational, managed 'self' results in becoming the abject figure of neoliberalism – the pathologised and ridiculed mad woman. Ultimately, Sara Tommasi's 'fall' into madness provides a cautionary tale, the publications employing the narrative of 'rise and fall' of celebrity to describe the woman's failure to manage her own emotions, desires and ambitions. This aspect of the media coverage is explored next.

The rise and fall of a celetoid: from Top-Girl to Post-feminist Disorder

The narrative which is employed in *Repubblica* and *Corriere* is the one of the 'rise and fall' of a celebrity, a common trope which is used to describe 'failed' celebrities (Gies 2011). However, because of the longstanding cultural discourse of femininity as irrationality and madness, failures of female celebrities are often understood through discourses of mental instability or out of control femininity (Bell 2011; Harper 2009; Holmes & Negra 2011; Meyer, Fallah & Wood 2011).

Recent work on the media representation of madness identify important differences in depictions of male and female mental distress (Cross and Littler 2010; Harper 2006, 2009). Harper's (2009) expansive analysis of representations of madness across different media and genres found that male narratives are often connected with the concept of 'overcoming adversity', supporting a neoliberal ethos of meritocracy and competitive individualism, while women's often end in tragedy, melodrama and hysteria. He continues that newspaper coverage of mental distress is often exploitative and misogynistic, and even when they appear to be sympathetic, they often work to reproduce and reinforce normative constructions of femininity. Ultimately, his analysis confirms other feminist scholars' point that women are identified with their mental health disorder and that, according to contemporary media, 'women are psychiatrically impaired *by definition*' (ibid., p. 183).

While longstanding cultural discourses about femininity and madness play an important role in the media representation of Sara Tommasi, the work of Foucault is fundamental to contextualise it within the Italian social, cultural and political context. Harper (2009) and Blackman (2010) draw on the work by Rose (1996), to argue that under neoliberalism individuals are demanded to take personal responsibility for their own health and psychological wellbeing.

Rose (ibid.) argues that neoliberal governmentality has produced forms of subjectivity and citizenship which align with what he calls 'the fiction of autonomous selfhood'. He claims

that discourses of counselling and therapy conceive and encourage the individual to increasingly 'monitor and evaluate mood, emotion and cognition according to a finer and more continuous process of self-scrutiny' (Rose 2007, p. 223). Selfhood is thus produced as a process of self-development and -transformation, individuals being independent, in control and responsible for monitoring their mental health and/or managing their mental health issues. This personalisation and individualisation of mental health works to disavow or minimise the social dimensions of personal suffering, supporting a neoliberal ethic of autonomy and self-reliance, allowing the undisturbed dismantling of the welfare system and privatisation of national health.

Blackman (2001, 2004), however, argues that this perspective ignores how class, gender, sexuality and race play a role in these cultural discourses. Because the category of 'woman' is already tainted by madness, the management of mental health is understood as a distinctively feminine province. Thus, women are prompted more than men to 'work' on themselves to achieve self-fulfilment, self-actualisation, personal growth and so on (Harper 2009; Blackman 2001). Blackman (2010) writes:

> The post-feminist woman may stand alone, single, happy, working on self-confidence, and achievements in her relationships and the workplace, while the stories of her sisters who cannot or who are unable to achieve such success stand as cautionary tales, marked out as pathological and seen to lack the psychological and emotional capacities to effect their own self-transformation (p. 22).

Hence, women are demanded to constantly evolve, change, improve, and maintain 'the fiction of autonomous self-hood' as the normative subject position, while those who do not, or cannot, conform become pathologised and/or ridiculed. The case of Sara Tommasi is found at the intersection of discourses about 'failure' of female celebrity and discourses of female disorder, whereby these constructions work together to create an individualised narrative of 'rise and fall' of female celebrity.

As Sara's implication in the prostitution scandal becomes public knowledge, both *Repubblica* and *Corriere* employ the 'rise and fall' narrative to describe Sara's career, where the possibility of a bright future is put to an end with her decision to prostitute

herself. However, as some of her texts are leaked to the press, some of which are particularly confused and bizarre, the narrative adds a further element of demise: from brilliant and promising young post-feminist woman, through prostitution, to a career struck down by mental health issues and unsanctioned sexual behaviour. Corriere writes:

> Four years ago she used to say: "Never overestimate yourself. One must not follow dreams that won't materialise and, most of all, one needs to understand one's own capabilities and limits. The risk of having to rebuild everything from the start is always lurking". Poor Sara, say her stunned friends, after reading her eccentric statements, and wonder if she has been left alone, maybe she wasn't understood, when the love story between her and Simone Giancola ended (12/02/11, par. 1).[90]

In this and other passages, an 'old' version of Sara is retrieved in order to describe the present situation as pathetic and miserable. Her own words about understanding one's own limits and capabilities are reported as to suggest that she did not follow her own advice, and is now, as she unwittingly foretold, '*al punto di partenza* [at the starting line] (ibid.).

Holmes & Negra (2011) claim that one of the recurrent themes employed by the media to describe 'failed' female celebrities is of their struggle with 'work-life balance', so that eventually their breakdown appears as the inevitable proof of women's inability to juggle work, family and relationships ('work-balance' is seldom an issue connected to male celebrities or men in general). Corriere implicitly suggests that Sara's emancipation and expectation to have a place in the world - which is the result of years of feminist battles and demands - is what eventually made her miserable. And this discourse is further reinforced by attributing her issues (the obscure texts being symptomatic) to an insignificant break up, suggesting that happiness for a woman is next to a man, and not in the public sphere of work, aiming for personal success. Indeed, implied in the coverage of the case, is the conviction that Sara's mistake was to aim too high and too fast, a discourse

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[90] *Diceva lei quattro anni fa: "Mai sopravvalutarsi. Non bisogna inseguire sogni che non esistono e soprattutto rendersi conto delle proprie capacità e dei propri limiti. Il rischio di tornare al punto di partenza è sempre in agguato". Povera Sara, dicono adesso di lei gli amici, che leggono basiti le sue uscite e si domandano se non è stata forse lasciata sola, non capita, quando è finita la storia d'amore con Simone Giancola.*

that connected with the very first interview to the show girl, in which she appeared as a strong and ambitious post-feminist woman, suggests that it was her self-confidence, ambition and drive that failed her.

Repubblica proposes a similar narrative of 'failing' celebrity, writing on 05/07/13b:

> […] Tommasi, degree in Economics, acting diploma and internship at the Actor's Studio in New York before *Isola dei Famosi* (feels like a lifetime ago), commits herself to a clinic to cure the depression she suffers ("no more pornographic films, I want to lead a normal life") (par. 1).[91]

Similarly to one of the quotations taken from *Corriere*, *Repubblica* lists the successes and achievements of Sara Tommasi. By employing the formula '*sembra una vita fa* [feels like a lifetime ago]' (ibid.), the publication suggests that, while not much time has in fact passed, Sara Tommasi's situation has changed so dramatically that it is as if 'old' and 'new' Sara are two distinct people. Furthermore, it makes a connection between Sara's mental health and the pornographic film, a theme which is further developed in the next section of the chapter.

Finally, even *Il Giornale*, the least sympathetic publication towards Sara, reports one of Sara's ex-boyfriend's posts on a social media site, in which he claims:

> Sara is a slave of success, a success that 3-4 years ago she could have had, but that now is done and dusted and, in my opinion, no serious and trustworthy person could ever work with her, and I am convinced that if [she] has associated herself with this individual [Diprè] she does it, in her impaired pyscho-physical condition, only in exchange of a bit of popularity (28/05/15, par. 9).[92]

Il Giornale aligns itself with the two other publications, and through the words of a third party declares the 'death' of the show girl's career. Ultimately, women are represented as

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[91] *[…] la Tommasi, laurea in economia, diploma di recitazione e stage all'Actor's Studio di New York prima dell'Isola dei Famosi (sembra una vita fa), si fa ricoverare in una clinica romana per curare la depressione di cui soffre ("basta film porno, voglio fare una vita normale")*

[92] *Sara è schiava del successo, successo che 3-4 anni fa poteva ancora avere, ma che ormai è sepolto da tempo e nessuna persona seria e affidabile dal mio punto di vista potrebbe mai lavorare con lei, e sono convinto che se si è associata a questo individuo lo fa, nella sua condizione psicofisica alterata, solamente in cambio di un po' di popolarità.*

being unable to deal with the success and visibility that celebrity status confers to them, and these inadequacies are seen as responsible for their demise.

This extract also points out at the dangers attributed to the desire for success and visibility, as it has already been explored in relation to Ruby Rubacuori. While the mental toll of fame is not a new concern (Braudy 1986; Rojek 2001; Schaller 1997), with the expansion of the media industries, the development of new communication technologies, and changes in the accessibility to fame, desire for visibility has become a major concern, especially in Italy (see for example the documentary *Videocracy: basta apparire* [Videocracy: appearing is enough] [Gandini 2010], Livolsi [2006] and Zanardo [2009]). Reality TV at first, and now online platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, have eased the rules through which celebrity status can be achieved (Rojek 2016; Marwick 2013; Senft 2008; Turner 2006). However, this has also brought about a 'crisis of value surrounding celebrity', as the concepts of 'work', 'merit' and 'talent' appear more and more unconnected with fame, especially in its feminine forms (Holmes & Negra 2011). In Italy, this anxiety about people's desire for visibility and celebrity is widespread, but has been expressed particularly through the figure of the *velina*, and the sexual favours that she would provide in order to 'make it' (Hipkins 2012).

Indeed, in all three publications the motive behind Sara's debacle is attributed to this desire for fame, often making statements about the extents to which people would go for some notoriety and visibility. Sara's participation in *L'Isola dei Famosi* was already tainted by this theme, as generally celebrities who participate in those reality shows are minor or fading celebrities in search for new visibility (Cross and Litter 2010). *Repubblica* continues the narration of Sara's 'rise and fall' by highlighting the way her hunger for fame led her to making the wrong choices. It writes:

> Her conditions were worsening and she was prescribed a mandatory sanitary treatment. But the fear of a standstill of her career pushed her to the set once again: more hardcore shots filmed in Milan and Bucarest, until last May

(05/07/13a, par. na).[93]

This theme plays a role also in *Corriere*, that reports an interview to Sara Tommasi that completes the 'rise and fall' narrative: the rehabilitation of the celebrity.

Rojek (2001) claims the 'fall' phase is not only accompanied by rites that involve stripping the celebrity from her/his privileged status, but it may also lead to a public confession and redemption - 'the ritualized attempt by a fallen celebrity to re-acquire positive celebrity status through confession and the request for public absolution' (p. 88). In an interview to *Corriere*, titled '*Sara Tommasi: sognavo la fama, cancellerei tutto* [Sara Tommasi: I dreamed of fame, now I'd erase everything]' (22/05/15), which is also reported in *Il Giornale* (22/06/15), Sara is represented as meek, regretful and repentant:

> When she left Terni to attend Bocconi University in Milan she dreamed to be famous, but not in this way. [Sara says:] "I imagined a clean type, such as Gerry Scotti…". She now realises instead to have lost the small treasure gathered by being a "*schedina*", a "*paperetta*", the *veejay*, the *valletta*, the castaway... It took only three bad pornos, the dives in public fountains in Rome, the involvement in the Ruby case, the consistently wrong boyfriends. [Sara admits:] "Had I a magic wand I would erase everything, also the calendar for Max, because it hampered any other career, be it entrepreneurial or political".[94]

The showgirl's admission of guilt and regret work to rehabilitate the celebrity into the norms of social living, and in this case the rules of appropriate femininity.

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[93] *Le sue condizioni mentali peggioravano sempre di più e le è stato prescritto un Tso. Ma la paura della carriera finita l'ha spinta a tornare nuovamente sul set: ancora pellicole hard girate a Milano e a Bucarest, fino al maggio scorso.* TSO - Trattamento Sanitario Obbligatorio [mandatory sanitary treatment]

[94] *Quando lasciò Terni per frequentare la Bocconi a Milano sognava di diventare famosa ma non così. "Immaginavo un tipo pulito, alla Gerry Scotti…". Si rende conto, invece, di aver disperso il tesoretto accumulato facendo la "schedina", la "paperetta", la veejay, la valletta, la naufraga… Sono bastati tre brutti porno, i tuffi nelle fontane a Roma, il coinvolgimento nel caso Ruby, i fidanzati perennemente sbagliati. "Se avessi una bacchetta magica cancellerei tutto, compreso il calendario di Max, perchè mi ha precluso ogni altra carriera, magari politica o imprenditoriale.'*

Indeed, in this case the admission of guilt is accompanied by a representation of Sara in terms of normative and sanctioned femininity: she claims that her happiest memories are related to her successes at school and at university; she re-established contact with her family; she is now in a monogamous relationship in which she feels safe; and she claims that one day she would like to have a family (*Corriere* 22/06/15). Once again, as in the other case studies, the reinsertion of the transgressive woman within society involves heterosexual monogamy, domesticity, desire for a family, and religion, as exemplified by her pilgrimage to Medjugorje (*Repubblica* 05/07/13b), a Catholic pilgrimage site in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[95]

The analysis of the 'rise and fall' of the celebrity carried in this section of the chapter confirms Dyer's (1979) claim that celebrities embody cultural values, social types and norms, even when they seem to contradict them. However, the intense vilification of Sara Tommasi depicts the way narratives of 'rise and fall' of celebrities are highly gendered, whereby women's failures are perceived as more threatening to the social order than their male peers, and therefore as needing stricter and more acute scrutiny and policing (Gies 2011). Just as the discourse of meritocracy and success, failure is also individualised, being understood as Sara Tommasi's inability to balance her own ambition, a satisfactory private life, and the success and visibility of celebrity culture. Hence, while on the one hand post-feminist 'empowerment' is celebrated, it is also perceived to be detrimental to women's subjectivity and mental health, signalling that women cannot cope with 'having it all'.

Hence, as Harper (2009) argues:

> the seemingly opposed discourses of empowerment and passivity might be
> argued to work in tandem, demarcating the poles of female success and failure
> within neoliberalism in terms of self-actualisation and abjection. Soap narratives
> of out-of-control housewives or magazine images of broken down celebrities
> dramatise the risks of feminine self-construction: without constant psychological
> self-monitoring, there is always a danger that women may backslide into the

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[95] Medjugorje is a town located in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 1981, it has become a popular site of Catholic pilgrimage due to reports of alleged apparitions of the Virgin Mary to six local children.

> 'natural', disordered, helpless state of femininity. (p. 190)

Thus, narratives of 'rise and fall' of celebrities work to support a post-feminist and neoliberal ethic of ambition, self-accomplishment and success, while at the same time reproducing longstanding discourses of femininity as weakness and madness. Ultimately, while Sara Tommasi's over-sexualised performances and statements are used to indicate her disorder, the representation of Sara's disturbed subjectivity works to normalise disorder as the dark side of post-feminist subjectivity, reproducing cultural understandings of femininity as on the brink of madness, as it is explored in more detail in the next section.

Post-feminist disorder: the naturalisation of mental distress

The publications analysed portray a fragmented and contradictory representation of Sara as afflicted by mental health issues, this being set off by the leaking of a conspicuous number of texts sent from Sara's phone to Berlusconi, as well as to other people of interest in the investigations. While at times Sara is depicted as suffering from serious mental health issues, at others the discourse employed is less of disorder and more of excess. The publications shift between these competing discourses, resulting in a non-linear and fragmented representation of Sara Tommasi's 'disturbed' subjectivity. This has the effect of reproducing cultural discourses of femininity as fluid, flexible and fragmented, as opposed to the more coherent, unified and stable subjectivity of men. This is also a subjectivity placed on the margins of the social order, in a zone between order and chaos and dangerously part of chaos itself (Wirth-Cauchon 2000).

While *Il Giornale* started voicing doubts about Sara Tommasi's mental health shortly after the news of her involvement in the Berlusconi scandal, *Repubblica* and *Corriere* were more cautious about making those remarks. Furthermore, while *Repubblica* moves from a discourse of excess to one of disorder (eventually making the conscious decision to stop reporting about the case), *Il Giornale* and *Corriere* ambivalently employ both discourses. Interestingly, *Corriere*, in its national edition, is the publication that deals the least with Sara's mental issues and her later sexual performances (the exposure, her participation in porn, and the legal case brought against the producers and some actors), it nonetheless

does cover these, and in a particularly prurient style, in its local editions (mostly in *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, but also in *Corriere del Veneto*, *Corriere Fiorentino*, *Corriere Brescia*), employing ambivalently both discourses.

Il Giornale presents a very unsympathetic representation of Sara as afflicted by mental health issues, employing irony and sarcasm to attack her credibility and the magistrates' in the midst of the Berlusconi scandal. In an article titled '*Caso Tommasi, si può credere a una donna che teme ufo e nazisti?*' [Tommasi case, how can you believe a woman who fears UFO and Nazis?] (*Il Giornale* 10/01/11), it states: '*Sara Tommasi, la nuova icona della sinistra, è una soubrette disturbata, molto disturbata. Cercava aiuto, in tutti i sensi* [Sara Tommasi, the new symbol of the left, is a disturbed show girl, very disturbed. She sought help, in every meaning of the word]' (par. 2). It then continues by listing some of the content of the texts she sent: she is the victim of witchcraft, she is persecuted by the SS, God is with the Jews, death to the Jews, when she walks in the street strangers inject her with drugs, and so on.

Another four articles concern the texts sent by Sara and she is described as '*[i]l ciclone Sara Tommasi, qualcuno la fermi* [the whirlwind Sara Tommasi, somebody stop her]'' (*Il Giornale* 10/02/11a, par. 1), '*piuttosto instabile* [quite unstable]' (10/02/11b, par.4) and '*fatta* [high]' (ibid., par. 5), and her statements and texts are described as '*un turbinio delirante* [a delirious whirlwind]' (*Il Giornale* 10/02/11a, par. 1), '*racconti scombinati* [disordered accounts]' (ibid.), '*alcuni scabrosi altri deliranti* [some controversial others delirious]' (*Il Giornale* 10/02/11b, par. 3), '*solide come una camicia di forza* [solid as a straightjacket]' (*Il Giornale* 10/02/11b, par. 2), '*farneticazioni* [gibberish]' (*Il Giornale* 10/02/11a, par. 2), '*non lucidissimi* [not very lucid]' (*Il Giornale* 10/02/11b, par. 4', '*allucinazioni* [hallucinations]' (*Il Giornale* 10/02/11b, par. 5) and other formulas to indicate issues with her mental health. This is an instance of over-lexicalisation, where the presence of a considerable number of quasi-synonyms to describe a single person or phenomenon, is employed in those cases where the issue at hand is morally problematic or contentious (Teo 2000). In this case the publication attempts to shift attention from the

guilty party - Berlusconi - by stressing the woman's confused state, and thus, her unreliability.

The publication employed even more irony and sarcasm to make fun of the show girl after the initial texts. It did so by regularly documenting events, statements, status updates, videos uploaded online, selfies taken, that were remotely controversial, exhibitionist, contradictory or 'trashy' (*Il Giornale* 20/03/15, 21/03/15, 31/03/15, 02/04/2015, 27/04/15, 22/05/15, 10/06/15). The language however is not of disease or disorder, but of excess, which works to normalise narcissism, exhibitionism and excess as (despised) characteristics of femininity. In the same publication there is also extensive coverage of the last one of Sara's partners, Andrea Diprè; however, he is not accorded the same treatment, even though one might say that his appearances were just as controversial and nonsensical. Differently to Sara, he is accorded agency, entrepreneurship and even talent, characteristics that are not awarded to his partner. If anything he is considered bad, being accused to have taken advantage of Sara, which reproduces a cultural prejudice of women as mad and men as bad (Fee 2000).

Corriere also represents quite unsympathetically Sara Tommasi, ridiculing her for her entrance in politics and her political associates, whose political credibility was further put into doubt. Both Scilipoti and Marra are considered uninfluential political and public figures, and the involvement of Sara Tommasi with their political association appears to make their political program even more derisive according to *Corriere*. Sara's endorsement of Marra's book is ridiculed and her subjectivity is described as multiple and fragmented: '*Sara Testimonial, Sara Scandalosa, Sara desnuda, Sara sedotta, Sara abbandonata, Sara Confusa, Sara pellegrina sulla via di Mejugorjie* [Poster girl Sara, Shocking Sara, Sara *desnuda*, Confused Sara, Peregrin Sara on the way to Mejugorjie] (*Corriere* 09/11/12, par. 2). Furthermore, Sara Tommasi's self-exposure as part of a political protest against the seignorage and the power of the banks is again ridiculed, *Corriere* (03/03/12) interestingly stating: '*che nostalgia però, gli anni '60, quando le donne scendevano in piazza a bruciar reggiseni* [Such longing though, those 60s, when women would come out to burn bras]' (par. 1). Sara's self-exposure in this instance is interpreted through a discourse of excess

and narcissism, not as a political gesture in the guise of the highly over-emphasised burning of the bras by radical feminists in the 1960s/1970s.

The unsympathetic treatment of Sara Tommasi is evidence of the longstanding stigma attached to mental health disorders.[96] At the same time, it is also representative of a misogynystic attitude toward femininity, as male celebrities struggling with mental health issues and disorders are valorised and even made to look heroic, while women are either stigmatised, or made to fit traditional stereotypes of tragic and helpless femininity (Harper 2009). On top of that, it can also be attributed to the way neoliberal subjects, women in particular, are called to take personal responsibility for their own health and psychological well-being (Blackman 2010). As argued in more detail above, women are encouraged to evolve, change, improve, promoting and maintaining the 'fiction of autonomous self' (one that is self-contained, independent and rationally able to exercise choice) as the normative subject position. Those who cannot or do not want to conform become pathologised and/or ridiculed, just as Sara Tommasi is in *Corriere* and *Il Giornale*.

On 25/09/12 *Il Giornale* continues the discourse of Sara Tommasi's mental instability by reporting a social media status update in which the woman tells her fans she is going to rehab. The paper comments:

> Many say that the show girl needs help, especially since the hardcore film in which she is the protagonist has been released. It would appear now that she understood too that she is experiencing some troubles, although nobody knows of what kind (par. 3).[97]

It is in this instance that the paper marks the connection between her mental health state and the decision to participate in pornography, implying that her performance in the film indicated that she was not well. Indicative is also the fact that while Sara mentioned 'rehab', which in popular culture is clearly associated with drugs and has to some extent

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[96] For a more extensive discussion of this theme see the seminal work of Otto Wahl (1995), and the Glasgow Media Group (1996)

[97] *Che la starlette abbia bisogno di farsi aiutare lo dicono in molti, specie da quando si è diffuso il film hard in cui la Tommasi è protagonista. Ora sembrerebbe che anche lei abbia capito di avere qualche problema, anche se non si sa di quale natura.*

become a standard element of celebrity culture, the publication decides to take the more general and medical definition of rehabilitation, which can involve drug addictions, psychiatric disorders, criminal behaviour, as well as other issues, and then leaving the question open as to which kind she is committing herself to.

A similar connection between mental health and Sara's sexuality can be found in *Corriere* (12/02/11), which in narrating the 'rise and fall' of Sara Tommasi brings as evidence of her disarray a list of statements that seem to indicate her confusion, but also connected to a promiscuous sexuality:

> "LIKE MONICA LEWINSKY" - The latest sally, the day before last at the radio show *Un Giorno Da Pecora*, managed to shock even Claudio Sabelli Fioretti e Giorgio Lauro, who are not pristine: "The truth is that I am too nice, too kind, and it is also for this kindness that I open my legs in a blink of an eye, as long as I feel someone is good-natured". More than once she repeated of feeling "followed and often drugged with substances that are dissolved in glasses". She accuses, among others, Lele Mora and Fabrizio Corona of this practice. She is even frightened by who might accidentally touch her: "I've heard that there are drugs that are diffused through skin contact. When I get touched by someone I have the feeling that this substance starts circulating. I feel an intense pin and needles sensation and I feel disinhibited: I would have sex with the first man who crosses my path". *Libero* wrote that in December *Verissimo* cut one of her comments because at the question "how do you seduce a man" she would have answered: "I act like Monica Lewinsky did". Definitely inappropriate for a politician wannabe (par. 5).[98]

The publication has chosen to focus on highly sexualised statements from the show girl in order to portray her as excessive and unbalanced, rather than other statements given during the interview that could equally represent her fantastic narrations. Furthermore, the last sentence is ambivalently attached to a statement by the woman, reproduced from

[98] "COME MONICA LEWISKY' - *L'ultima uscita, l'altro ieri alla trasmissione radio Un giorno da pecora, ha spiazzato pure i ben poco immacolati Claudio Sabelli Fioretti e Giorgio Lauro: "Io in realtà sono troppo buona, troppo gentile, e anche per gentilezza allargo le gambe come niente, basta che uno mi è simpatico". Più volte ha ripetuto di sentirsi "seguita e spesso drogata da sostanze che si sciolgono nei bicchieri". Pratica della quale accusa, tra gli altri, Lele Mora e Fabrizio Corona. Teme perfino chi può toccarla inavvertitamente: "Ho saputo che esistono droghe che si assumono con il contatto della pelle. Quando vengo toccata da qualcuno ho la sensazione che questa sostanza mi entri in circolo. Sento un forte formicolio e mi sento disinibita: farei sesso con il primo che mi capita". […] Libero ha scritto che a dicembre Verissimo tagliò un suo intervento perchè alla domanda "come conquisti un uomo" avrebbe risposto: "Faccio come Monica Lewinsky". Decisamente inopportuno per una politica mancata.*

a previous and different context, one which taken on its own would simply express sexual desire and agency, and not imply any diminished ability to participate in politics. What the publication seems to imply is that it is Sara's overt sexuality which is problematic, and a clear obstacle to entrance in politics.

Similarly, *Repubblica* (12/02/11), in reporting the legal case brought against some of the people involved in one of her pornographic films, makes a connection between the mental health issues and Sara's sexuality,

> This is the last act - only time wise - in the parabola of the show girl from Terni. A progressive and until now relentless descent into the darker depths of the soul: at the beginning small roles in tv and guest appearances, then the rest begins, complaints to the police, judiciary investigations, interviews and not-always-lucid comments, hardcore films (that she defends after having filed a complaint), transgressive exhibitions in night clubs, strip teases in public (par. 1).[99]

Here again, the mental health issue is linked with her sexuality, whereby the lowest point of her career is linked with sexualised performances.

This is not to say that the publications completely fabricated a discourse of mental illness by reading her sexualised performances as symptoms of disorder, but that the constructions of disorder in this case study focused on those episodes. Ultimately, Sara's disorder is described in terms of a fragmented, contradictory, excessive and uncontrolled subjectivity and sexuality, an impression which is further reinforced by the fragmentation and ambivalence of the reporting itself, sometimes attributing to her more serious mental health pathologies (such as bipolar disorder and borderline personality disorder), while others more moderate and risible forms of feminine excess. This fragmentation and ambivalence reproduces cultural discourses that associate women with marginality and instability in the face of cultural norms of selfhood, understood as coherent, stable and

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[99] *È l'ultimo atto - solo in ordine di tempo - della parabola della starlette ternana. Una progressiva e sin qui inarrestabile discesa negli abissi dell'anima: all'inizio partecipazioni tv e ospitate, poi inizia il resto, denunce, inchieste giudiziarie, interviste e dichiarazioni non sempre lucide, film hard (che dopo la denuncia ai magistrati rivendica e difende), esibizioni trasgressive nei locali, spogliarelli in pubblico.*

unified (Wirth-Cauchon 2000), normalising mental health issues as part of post-feminist female subjectivity.

Sara's sexualised performances and her participation in pornography are understood as either manifestations of her disorder or as worsening it, which has the effect of portraying pornography as bad for women, but not so much for men. Indeed, Rocco Siffredi, the most famous male porn star in Italy, is never pathologised nor perceived as problematic, and he is reported saying:

> Sara Tommasi, who wants to enter the hardcore industry, should know this: this is an area in which actresses are humiliated, debased. To take up this job one has to know her/himself very well, and one's body, be prepared to make it into an object (*Corriere* 18/06/12, par. 2).[100]

Despite claiming also that the pornography industry is in general '*spietato e perverso* [ruthless and perverse]' (ibid.), the ones who are perceived to be harmed the most are women, whose participation in porn means humiliation and debasement. The words employed are significant, because they are related to notions of personal integrity and self-esteem. Hence, pornography is depicted as something that harms women's sense of self, but not men's. Whether women are made responsible for their own humiliation and debasement is the topic explored below.

The legal case: victimisation and victim blaming

While all publications participated in constructing Sara Tommasi's sexual escapades as symptoms of her disorder, they varied in relation to the attribution of agency and accountability to her. The attribution of agency to femininity by the newspapers is a recurrent aspect in all three case studies explored in this thesis, and is a central theme of post-feminist culture. As mentioned above, empowerment in terms of agency and choice is one of the distinctive characteristic of post-feminism, women allegedly being liberated

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[100] *Lo sappia Sara Tommasi, che vuole entrare nell'industria dell'hard: è un settore, questo, in cui le attrici vengono umiliate, svilite. Per intraprendere questo mestiere bisogna conoscere bene se stessi, il proprio corpo, essere disposti renderlo un feticcio.*

from the constraints of the patriarchy and being now able to exercise their freedom through 'choice' (Budgeon 2003; 2015; Gill 2009; McRobbie 2004, 2009; Tasker & Negra 2007). However, the literature on post-feminism has neglected the way, alongside representations of agentic and choosing women, they also continue be depicted as agency-less victims. Indeed, agency and accountability become curtailed the moment one is placed in the role of helpless victim, a subject position which appears in all case studies, contributing to the production of an agency/helplessness dichotomy. Thus, this section of the chapter dwells on the attribution of agency to Sara Tommasi, and her differential treatment by the publications.

Repubblica constructed the more victimising representation of Sara Tommasi, as a woman in distress who had been taken advantage of, and who was in no mental state to consent to participating in a pornographic film. It is worth quoting extensively:

> They called her, ruthlessly, the "golden goose". But after getting her to star in a pornographic film, they put four thousand euros in her pocket, to then make the money disappear from her bag shortly afterwards. It's a sad story of exploitation and degradation, the one of Sara Tommasi, but also of violence and drugs, set into action by a complaint filed by her last year (Repubblica 05/07/13a, par. 1).[101]

And later in the same article:

> After shooting a film in Milan before summer 2012, not yet under investigation, her conditions worsened: she would eat only chocolate and Coke Light, she had hallucinations and manifested fits of rage. The mother, Rita Cascianelli, reached the point of taking her to Madjugorje hoping for a miracle. But Tommasi fell back into the hands of her captors, who convinced her to shoot another film between 18th and 19th September last year. […] Scenes of sex with multiple partners, in shots in which Tommasi is almost unconscious, she was held up by the arms. […] Tommasi could not withdraw: the two threatened her with harsh penalties if she were to break the terms of the contract and at the same time they allured her with compliments and promises of apartments and cars (Repubblica 05/07/13a,

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[101] *La chiamavano, senza ritegno, la "gallina dalle uova d'oro". Però dopo averle fatto girare un film porno, le hanno messo in tasca quattromila euro, salvo far sparire poco dopo i soldi dalla borsetta della showgirl. È una triste storia di sfruttamento e di degrado, quella di Sara Tommasi, ma anche si violenza e di droga, messa in moto da una denuncia firmata da lei stessa l'anno scorso.*

par. 1).[102]

In these extracts, as well as in another article dated the same day (05/07/13b), Sara Tommasi is victimised and made to look completely non-agentic - indeed she is said to have been '*incapace di intendere e di volere* [unable to understand and take action]' (par. 1).[103] The strong and dramatic images evoked by the narrative depict a woman emotionally, physically and psychologically debilitated, being manipulated and forced into a difficult situation by ruthless men, who could not care less about her mental and physical state, but are only interested in her value as a money making machine. While there is reference to the fact that Sara Tommasi had on several occasions expressed to have been willingly involved in the porn movies, this is taken as a symptom of her mental health disorder and her fragmented and contradictory subjectivity. The possibility that Sara Tommasi might have consented to some porn movies and not others is an unintelligible possibility for the publication, Sara Tommasi's agency having to be made completely void throughout and her participation in the sex industries made to look as resulting from and exacerbating her disorder.

While *Corriere* was particularly unsympathetic towards Sara Tommasi throughout the case, a more lenient attitude towards the celebrity appears in the coverage of the legal case brought against her agent and producer, the second producer, the director and two actors. A more compassionate view is represented, as she is described in these terms:

> Wrapped in a big black coat that mortifies her so-desired curves, hollow eyes and
> hesitant git. This is how Sara Tommasi appeared at the trial in Salerno, in which

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[102] *Dopo un film hard girato a Milano prima dell'estate 2012, non ancora oggetto di indagine, le sue condizioni sono peggiorate: si alimentava solo con cioccolata e Coca Cola light, manifestava allucinazioni e scatti d'ira. La madre, Rita Cascianelli, arrivò ad accompagnarla a Medjugorje sperando in un miracolo. Ma la Tommasi è ricaduta nelle mani dei suoi aguzzini, che l'hanno convinta a girare un secondo film tra il 18 e il 19 settembre dello scorso anno. […] Scene di sesso multiplo, nelle immagini in cui la Tommasi quasi priva di sensi, veniva sorretta sa altri per le braccia. […] Impossibile per la Tommasi tirarsi indietro: i due la minacciavano di penali esose in caso di rottura del contratto a allo stesso tempo se la tenevano buona allettandola con complimenti e promesse di appartamenti ed auto.*

[103] Titled '*Drogarono Sara Tommasi per farle girare un porno* [Sara Tommasi was drugged to make her participate in a porno]

she is injured party, for the affair of the hardcore film which she shot, according to the prosecution, under the effect of drugs and in unstable psychological conditions. In front of the court the reporter introduces himself to the ex-Bocconi-student and automatically stretches out his hand to her. Sara keeps her eyes on the ground and is unable to reciprocate that natural gesture of introduction. The hand of the reporter remains mid air for a few seconds. Like the life of a girl stifled by the dream of success, whatever it takes (Corriere 26/02/14, par. 1).[104]

In this melodramatic narration Tommasi is accorded an element of sympathy, being described as vulnerable, damaged and scared. But differently from *Repubblica* she is made to be fully responsible for her demise - it was her excessive desire for fame and success that led her to making the wrong choices and participate in a pornographic film. It is also worth noticing that, despite the melodramatic tones and the vulnerability attributed to Sara, her body continues to be sexualised – 'wrapped in a big black coat that mortifies her so-desired curves' (ibid.).

This element is further reinforced by the language that expresses doubt on the accountability of the men who stand trial. Throughout the case the rape of which they are accused is '*presunto* [alleged]' (Corriere 16/03/2016, title), Sara Tommasi is the '*presunta vittima* [alleged victim]' (Corriere 27/02/2014, par. 1), and the tenses used are in the conditional form, suggesting an element of doubt in Sara Tommasi's version. This appears also after the producer who proceeded via abbreviated trial is convicted, whereas in other cases a conviction would imply that the victim was truthful. Furthermore, as the newspaper reports the defence attorney's intention to call to testify Berlusconi, it suggests: '*per la difesa un modo per sottolineare forse lo stile di vita della showgirl* [perhaps a strategy by the defense to highlight the showgirl's lifestyle]' (*Corriere* 18/06/14, par. 5). This suggestion, made freely by the publication rather than being based on facts, indicates the sexist attitude of victim blaming, where elements of the lifestyle of the victim

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[104] *Avvolta in un giaccone nero a vento che mortifica le sue forme tanto desiderate, sguardo spento e andatura incerta. Si è presentata così ieri Sara Tommasi a Salerno al processo che la vede parte lesa per la vicenda del video hard girato, secondo l'accusa, sotto effetto di droghe e in condizioni d'instabilità psicologica. Davanti al tribunale il cronista si presenta all'ex bocconiana e istintivamente le porge la mano. Sara resta con lo sguardo rivolto verso il basso e non ce la fa a condividere quel naturale gesto di presentazione. La mano del cronista resta a per qualche secondo a mezz'aria. Come la vita di una ragazza spentasi sul sogno del successo ad ogni costo.*

are brought forward as evidence that 'she was up for it'. This participates in an individualisation of Sara Tommasi, where she is made to be fully accountable, even when her psychological and physical state are proven to be undermined.

Besides employing formulas such as '*presunto* [alleged]' and the conditional tense, *Il Giornale* further reinforces the doubt by writing in an article titled '*La Tommasi fa arrestare i suoi prono produttori* [Tommasi gets her porn-producers arrested]' (05/07/13):

> [In this case] there are at stake very grave crimes like rape and induction to the use of drugs: accusations (all yet to demonstrate) by which two of the producers of the impeached film have been arrested. [...] But at this stage a question naturally arises: if two people are now cuffed to "induce" Tommasi to film a porno film "against her will", why after the complaint the very same Tommasi starred in as many as three other porno films (par. 1-2)?[105]

Sara Tommasi's ability to consent, and therefore her agency, is understood as being either all or nothing: since Tommasi consented to three more porn movies this means that she had to consent to the fourth too. This replicates the logic implied in *Repubblica*, but rather than representing her agency as diminished at all times, she is placed in the position of being fully in charge of her decisions and accountable for her participation in the porn movie at all times. Furthermore, the use of the possessive pronoun '*suoi* [her]' in the title of the article implies the intention, almost malignant, on Sara's part to send to jail the men who 'made' her.

It is interesting to notice that the only times in which Tommasi is represented as victim in *Il Giornale* is through other people's voices: the porn star Rocco Siffredi, the manager Manila Gorio and an ex boyfriend, Stefano Ierardi. Particularly interesting is the contribution of the latter, who introduces in the narrative of Sara's subjectivity the information that her father also suffered from mental health issues, but most importantly

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[105] *[i]n ballo ci sono reati gravissimi come la violenza sessuale e l'induzione all'uso di droga: accuse (tutte da dimostrare) con cui ieri sono stati arrestati i due ideatori della pellicola incriminata. [...] Ma a questo punto una domanda nasce spontanea: se due persone sono finite in manette per aver "indotto" la Tommasi a fare un film porno "contro la sua volontà", perchè successivamente alla denuncia la stessa Tommasi ha interpretato ben altre tre film porno?*

that she was molested by her father as a child. This is the only instance in which a connection between Sara Tommasi's mental health issues are related to something besides herself, however this theme is not developed at all in the publication, appearing more like another opportunity for creating a spectacle rather than an actual discussion of the connection between culture, personal experience and the emergence of mental health issues and its manifestations.

Despite their different treatment of Sara Tommasi, all three publications eventually produce individualising narratives of subjectivity, by placing the show girl as either completely agency-less (*Repubblica*) or as fully accountable of her own actions (*Corriere* and *Il Giornale*), while at the same time the woman is ridiculed (*Corriere*) and made a spectacle of (*Il Giornale*). While the full agency and accountability attributed to Sara by *Corriere* and *Il Giornale* could be interpreted as a progressive outlook on mental health issues, by running counter cultural discourses that understand people suffering from mental health disorders as having no agency at all, this unfortunately is not the case. By attributing agency to Sara, while also disparaging it, they contribute to a stigmatisation of disorder, while at the same time normalising it. Furthermore, the coverage of the trial involving some of the staff of one of the pornographic films reproduces sexist cultural discourses of victim blaming that put into doubt women's experiences of rape and shift guilt onto them.

Conclusion

This chapter continues the analysis of the figuration of femininity during Berlusconism through the exploration of the media representation of the 'mentally ill' Sara Tommasi. More specifically, the chapter has shown how representations of celebrity contribute in producing and reproducing normative discourses of gender and sexuality, even in those cases which show the 'failure of the dream'. Indeed, the employment of a celebrity (more specifically a celetoid) and of a 'rise and fall' narrative to describe Sara Tommasi's career, contribute to the individualisation of subjectivity and of life experience, by describing both her rise to fame and her demise as solely a product of her own psyche, attitudes and

choices. This narration of subjectivity and of events not only ascribes full responsibility and accountability to the subject, but also contributes in deflecting attention from structural inequalities and unequal power relations. Ultimately, failure (as well as success) is attributed solely to the individual, while the neoliberal dream of upward social mobility and meritocracy remains intact.

While at first she was described as the ideal post-feminist woman (educated, self-assured, ambitious, rational and entrepreneurial), this soon became one of the reasons of her 'unhappiness', reproducing cultural discourses that indicate that women's mental health issues are the result of their own psychological weakness and their inability to 'have it all', thus normalising mental health disorders as constitutive of post-feminist subjectivity. This is not just distinctive of post-feminist culture, but is also connected to a more longstanding understanding of femininity as marginal to the social order and precariously living on the edge of rationality and chaos. Hence, the case study is representative of the way, on the one hand, women are overtly celebrated for their increased independence, their level of education and for their work-related success, while on the other hand, these very things bring about a 'sense of unease and ambivalence regarding the role that gender now plays within a transforming social order characterised by rapid change and uncertainty' (Budgeon 2011, p. 284).

This social anxiety is managed in the case through the reproduction of the discourse of femininity as madness. Indeed, the representation of Sara's 'ill' subjectivity as non-linear, fragmented, contradictory and ambivalent, reproduces cultural discourses about femininity, that find parallel in the way the psy-sciences have made sense of female disorder. While the effect is the one of representing a more complex and nuanced subjectivity, its pathologisation makes it an unintelligible subject position, reinforcing a modernist understanding of subjectivity as coherent, unified and stable. The gendered nature of the discursive production of disorder is clearly expressed by the different treatment of Tommasi and Diprè, the former being 'mad', while the latter 'bad', despite both appearing similarly eccentric and confused. Furthermore, the evidence brought forward by the publications in relation to Sara Tommasi's mental health issues are her

over-sexualised statements, texts and performances, which beccome symptoms of her disarray. Thus, the three newspapers make a similar connection between disorder and a too active and overt sexuality.

However, while *Repubblica* employed a victimising narrative to describe Sara's debacle and presenting her agency as diminished, *Il Giornale* and *Corriere* attributed to her full agency and accountability, to the extent of doubting her experience of sexual violence on the set of one of the pornographic films. Thus, the dichotomisation of accountability and agency which connected the previous case studies is reproduced in this case also, women being perceived as either fully agentic and accountable, or as helpless and voiceless victims. A position that would equally consider a woman's agency *and* her vulnerability is made unintelligible, confirming that '[a]ccording to neoliberalism's dualist construction of agents and victims, one cannot have their individual agency and their systemic vulnerability, too' (Bey-Cheng 2015, p. 287).

However, this is not to claim that the publications fabricated a discourse of disorder based solely on sexual practices and statements that transgress ideas of normative femininity, nor it is my intention to give my own interpretation of Sara Tommasi's mental health. But as Fee (2000) argues:

> Raising issues about the construction of disorders, then, does not deny 'real' forms of pathogenic experience in the world, but it does suggest more multidimensional modes of conceptualizing and representing that experience (p. 10).

Indeed, a possible interpretation of the fragmented and contradictory subjectivity that emerges from the pages of these publications, would be to understand Sara Tommasi's 'symptoms' as the literal inscription onto the body of the ambiguities and contradictions of femininity in contemporary Italian culture. Indeed, in Italian culture a post-feminist discourse of individuality, sexual agency and commodification of the body, which is even more invested in media culture, coexists with the more traditional one of femininity as domesticity, virtue and self-sacrifice. Sara's fragmentation and mutability could therefore

be understood not as pathological instability, but as a fluctuation between contradictory and irreconcilable subject positions.

Conclusion: the figuration of post-femininity in Berlusconism

This research project began as Berlusconi's centrality in Italian politics started to fade. After losing the elections in 2013, the centre-right coalition disintegrated. Part of it joined the centre-left in a cross-party coalition to reach the necessary majority to rule, while Berlusconi decided instead to place his party (resurrecting *Forza Italia*) in the opposition. In 2013 Berlusconi was condemned for tax fraud, committed to serve four years in jail, but because of legislation and his elderly age, this was converted to one year of social services. The verdict led to his expulsion from the Senate and a ban from public election for two years, though he remained the political leader of Forza Italia.

Other political leaders have gained important following, most notably the comedian-turned-politician Beppe Grillo, and the now leader of the xenophobic party *Lega Nord*, Matteo Salvini. Both politicians have expressed racist, xenophobic and highly sexist and misogynistic views, and employed a mediated populist rhetoric (mainly through new technologies and social media) and propaganda to reach the electorate. Their aggressive and sexist attacks toward Laura Boldrini, member of the socialist democratic party SEL (*Sinistra Ecologia Libertà* [Left Ecology Freedom]) and president of the Chamber of Deputies, are indicative of a misogyny that exceeds Berlusconi's.[106] While there are differences between Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism (explored in Chapter 3) and these recently emerged leaders, it is important to remark on the similarities in their

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[106] SEL is a political party founded in 2009, borne out of the merger of minor socialist and communist parties and the Green Party. In the years that followed it gained momentum, to the point that in 2012 its leader, Nichi Vendola, ran for the primaries of the Centre Left coalition, wining 15.6% of the vote. In the 2013 elections SEL ran as part of the Centre Left coalition, winning 37 deputies and 7 senators, Laura Boldrini becoming President of the Chamber of Deputies. Since then, Boldrini has been subjected to consistent attacks, mostly driven by and expressing unsettling misogyny and sexism. Beppe Grillo wrote on social media 'What would you do if you were in a car with Boldrini?', clearly inviting insults from his followers. They promptly responded, with hideous comments such as: 'You take her to a Gipsy camp and get her fucked by the chief', 'I would lower my trousers and let her do the rest, she's a master in these things', and similar remarks about different sexual performances, suggesting she was a prostitute. Similarly, in one of his party events, Matteo Salvini was presented with an inflatable sex doll on stage, which Salvini went on to describe as the 'doppelgänger of Boldrini'. These are only some of the virulent, brutal and sexist attacks that Boldrini has had to suffer.

rhetoric and the way they have managed to gain considerable consensus despite their controversial statements and attitudes.

Furthermore, similarly to other developed countries, since 2012/2013 gender issues in Italy have gained more currency in public debate. Since 2012 the issue of violence against women and '*femminicidio* [female genocide]' has become a real moral panic in Italian media and society. At the 2013 elections, all major parties included in their manifesto the need to address gender inequality and their commitment to doing so. Furthermore, in 2013 a team of researchers, teachers and communication experts devised the project '*Il Gioco del Rispetto* [The game of respect]', receiving considerable media attention. The project, supported by the region Friuli Venezia Giulia and University of Trieste, was conceived as a strategy to prevent gendered violence. The project created a kit of games and activities to be used in primary schools, to teach children from a very young age to respect one another and each other's differences, whether it be gender, race and/or sexuality.

However, there has also been a very strong backlash against what has been called '*l'ideologia del gender* [the gender ideology]' or '*la teoria del gender* [gender theory]', mainly from right-wing politicians and the Catholic church. '*La teoria del gender*' has been accused of wanting to eliminate all differences between men and women, of destabilising the family, of destroying the institution of heterosexual marriage (*Corriere* 20/06/2015; *Corriere* 02/10/16; *Il Giornale* 26/05/16; *La Stampa* 31/07/2015), of confusing children about their gender identity, of sexualising young children and of fostering non-normative sexualities (*Il Giornale* 11/03/15; *Il Giornale* 23/09/16; *Corriere* 20/06/2015). It is interesting to notice how the term gender is not translated into Italian, indicating the perceived foreignness of this discourse, to the point of condemning it as a form of '*colonizzazione ideologica* [ideological colonisation]' (*Avvenire* 19/01/2015, par. 1). However, it is also important to mention that this discourse emerged alongside political debate about the legalisation of gay and lesbian marriage and adoption, thus indicating an anxiety toward both shifting ideas about gender roles and LGBTQI issues.

While the current cultural and political context is undoubtedly different from the one I have analysed, it is important to explore the fundamental role of the 'cultural hegemony' of Berlusconism in the discourses of gender and sexuality that characterise Italy. In this research project, I have explored the gender discourses that have circulated in Berlusconism through an analysis of media representations of femininity and female sexuality in three of the most important newspapers in Italy. Through the case studies I have explored the way the media provides a map of intelligibility of post-feminist subjectivity and sexuality, by producing and reproducing gender discourses that circulate in the *dipositif* of Berlusconism. A thorough understanding of these is fundamental, as they continue to have a hold in Italian culture to this day.[107]

Although Berlusconi is frequently considered the source and cause of the sexism of Italian media, little work has been produced on the interlinking of his political practice, media representations and culturally intelligible forms of femininity. Furthermore, there is a shortage of academic work being developed in Italian media studies about the representation of women in Italian media, and when these appear, they often focus on the mediated female body as fictional and unrealistic. Through a combination of Foucault's theory and feminist critique, I have detached myself from most of the literature produced in Italy, to understand how media representations of female bodies, subjectivities and sexualities participate in reproducing normative gender identities and

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[107] Furthermore, to document and analyse the phenomenon of Berlusconism, and its reliance on specific mediated discourses of gender and sexuality, is not only important for understanding Italian culture, but has become incredibly important for the global context at large. The election of Donald Trump, a sexist, racist, xenophobic, authoritarian and populist leader, with strong connections to the media, in the USA, echoes what happened in Italy more than 20 years ago, but on a larger scale. Thus, it becomes apparent that Italy is not an isolated case, and that Berlusconism is not simply a disgraceful parenthesis in Italian history, but represents a trend that is occurring globally: 'the progressive occupation of the space of social communication by private holdings, and the progressive subordination of political power and the dynamics of democracy to the absolute power of the media-financial complex' (Berardi et al. 2009, p. 19). Very importantly, this trend has been defined by the re-emergence of an unapologetic sexism, that coexists with neoliberal discourses of female empowerment and choice.

bodies, as well as reproducing unequal power relations which permeate different spheres of Italian culture and society.

Indeed, this thesis contributes to Italian feminist debates by complicating notions of post- and neo-patriarchy, and the effects these might have on young women. By taking a poststructuralist approach, this thesis brings attention to the way interlacing networks of power are constitutive not only of social reality, but of our own subjectivities too. Thus, this works shifts the attention from the female body (common to much Italian scholarship) to embodiment: the way discourses of gender and sexuality produce bodies, subjectivities and sexualities, and the way these are enmeshed with wider systems of exploitation. Moreover, this projects stresses that while gender plays an important role in our experience of the world, so do race, nationality, sexuality, citizen status, and so on – these aspects of subjectivity have often been neglected or dismissed by Italian feminists. Thus, I maintain that we need to implicate ourselves and our experiences as individuals, scholars and feminists within the networks of power in which we are enmeshed, and not assume to be outside of them. Only this way will we be able to critique and resist the neoliberal, sexist or racist discourses that produce and reproduce social and economic inequality.

Thus, this research project has taken a poststructuralist feminist approach to analyse the figuration of post-feminist femininity in Berlusconism and its representation in Italian media. To this end, I have combined a Foucauldian genealogical method with a Cultural Studies-inspired case study method. The cases studies explored the conflicts and tensions within the figuration of femininity in Berlusconism, media representations participating in defining the boundaries of intelligible femininity and sexuality in Italian culture. It is the relationship between the legal system and the media, inherent in all the case studies analysed here, that enables a surface of emergence for the figuration of femininity, which is articulated through cultural discourses about commercial sexuality (Chapter 4), phallicism (Chapter 5) and mental health (Chapter 6). The style of argumentation has been based on the accumulation of narrative material, detecting the layers of discourse and subjecting them to critical scrutiny in a systematic way.

In Chapter 3 I have described Berlusconi's political project in terms of a 'neoliberal authoritarian populism', defined by an aggressive sexism and misogyny, at the same time showing a superficial commitment to gender equality and concern about women's lives. I have also indicated the centrality of the media in Berlusconi's political and cultural project, defining it as one of the fundamental apparatuses of power, for its role in creating a cultural context fertile to Berlusconi's ethics and propaganda, and how it has been employed to achieve consent, most importantly by disseminating specific discourses about gender and gender relations, which Berlusconi embodies himself. Furthermore, the chapter shows how the same gender discourses have been mobilised to articulate neoliberal, conservative, authoritarian, racist and/or xenophobic laws, legislations and policies.

The analysis of the media representation of Karima El Marough (aka Ruby Rubacuori) in Chapter 4, who was protagonist of the case brought against the ex-prime minister for exploitation of underage prostitution, showed two competing discourses to describe the young woman: the young, vulnerable, voiceless victim (at risk girl) and the individualist, autonomous, fully agentic sex worker (the post-feminist sex worker). These representations reproduced cultural discourses about prostitution that circulate in society at large: the unwilling victim of exploitation, mostly by men, and the autonomous and entrepreneurial sex worker. These representations interlaced with a racial discourse that positioned the young vulnerable girl as closely connected with her country of origin and the religion of her family, while as post-feminist sex worker she became naturalised and made to embody the moral corruption of the country.

The discourse about the victimised sex worker, which characterises the Ruby Rubacuori chapter, has been employed by the centre-right politician Mara Carfagna to draw policies for the limitation of prostitution in Italy. As explored in chapter 3 (note 34, p. 115), in 2008 the Minister for Equal Opportunities submitted a proposal for changing the law on prostitution, criminalising street prostitution and soliciting (*Disegno di Legge Carfagna-Alfano-Maroni*). The proposal eventually did not pass, but it important to point out how the objective was to target the more visible side of prostitution - street prostitution - while

it completely ignored 'indoor' prostitution. Since poor, illegal and/or foreign women are overrepresented in street prostitution, it would have been mainly these already less privileged groups to endure the consequences of such strict legislation. Hence, the articulation of the anti-prostitution legislation based on a discourse of victimisation worked not so much to protect women from exploitation, but for the reinforcement of existing power relations and patterns of disadvantage.

Very different is the representation and treatment of Amanda Knox, whose media representation is the focus of Chapter 5. The analysis of this case study demonstrates the insidiousness of racism and misogyny in the legal system, and the way this is unchallenged in mainstream media, for the sake of producing an audience-generating spectacle. Since violence is perceived to be alien to femininity, Amanda Knox was described as monstrous and evil. This was done through a permutation of the 'femme fatale' narrative, which is commonly employed to describe beautiful women who kill, by merging the femme fatale with the phallic girl of post-feminism. Sexual promiscuity, drug-taking and the consumption of alcohol, became inside and outside the court evidence of Amanda's guilt. Furthermore, in line with more traditional narratives to describe women who kill, her sexual allure and agency were described as monstrously overpowering. To counteract the demonisation of Amanda, the strategy of the defence team of both Raffaele and Amanda was to describe the young woman as fully complying to an idealised standard of femininity: docile, passive, loving and victimised.

Representations of femininity as vulnerable to black men's sexual predatory instincts, as in the Amanda Knox case, have sustained authoritarian and racist attitudes and legislation, that keeps migrant communities in poverty, rendering them pools for cheap labour. Indeed, Berlusconi's party drew on racist discourses to articulate and gain consent for an extremely strict immigration policy, which contributed to the emergence of a system of exploitation of migrant labour. Indicative of this attitude is the amnesty toward care workers of the Bossi-Fini legislation (Law 189/2002), explored more thoroughly in chapter 3. The legislation effectively frames immigrants (especially female immigrants in this case)

in terms of their utility to the state, whereby they are invited to provide the services that neoliberal reforms to the welfare system have withdrawn.

Chapter 6 explored the rise and fall trajectory of the 'celetoid' Sara Tommasi, a young starlet described as autonomous, entrepreneurial and promising at the start of her career, but who was later ridiculed, pitied and/or condemned as she started showing signs of mental health issues through hyper-sexualised performances and her participation in three pornographic films. This case study too evidences how agency in post-feminism is mostly understood through a dichotomy: Sara being portrayed as either fully and autonomously agentic (and accountable) or as a voiceless and helpless victim. Ultimately, the case study portrays post-feminist ideal femininity as a precarious subject position, women being perceived to be too mentally weak to handle 'having it all'. This discourse naturalises mental health issues as constitutive of femininity, in line with widespread historical cultural discourses that assigned women weaker rational capabilities, a not-fully-developed sense of morality and unstable and fragmented subjectivity. The individualising discourse employed to describe Sara Tommasi shies away from a critique of the toll of neoliberalism on people's psyche, and the interlacing patterns of inequality inherent in it, casting all responsibility of managing (or failing to manage) mental health onto the subject herself.

The responsibilisation of the individual in terms of their mental and physical health in the Sara Tommasi case study, supports an individualisation of health, where the individual (and/or the immediate family) are encouraged to act on the environmental factors and lifestyle choices that are perceived to contribute to one's wellbeing. The connection between disease and human behaviour made by institutional bodies has been called by Larsen (2011) 'lifestyle politics', who describes it as 'the strategies employed by political authorities to counter the rise in lifestyle diseases, including their understanding of the lifestyle category and the technologies employed' (p. 202). Several national and regional state institutions and projects that deal with health concerns include sections about the responsibilisation of the individual in the prevention and cure of both lifestyle diseases (such as diabetes, cancer and heart conditions) and mental health issues (see for example

the project Azioni [actions] (2015), the webpage 'Vivi Sano' [live healthy] by the *Ministero della* Sanità [Ministry of Health] [2013], and the initiatives by Guadagnare Salute [gaining health] [2017]).

This attitude to illness and disease not only aims at producing a self-managing individual, but works to legitimise the privatisation of health. Since the early 1990s public health has entered processes of neoliberalisation, in which public health is understood in terms of an actor in the market, following the tropes of corporatisation, competition, private-public equality, costs and benefits, and so on (Pelissero 2010). Furthermore, recent cuts to public health has led to the boosting of the private sector, as well as the creation of partnerships between public and private institutions for the former to survive. Since the responsibility shifts from public institutions to the individual, it encourages the individual to seek other means and institutions to prevent and cure health issues. However, it is also an incentive to consumerism, since it is the subject's responsibility to purchase the services, activities, products and media that will keep them sane and in good health.

Thus, to respond to my research questions, I have explored how Berlusconi played a fundamental role in the networks of power and how he was able to manipulate its discourses to create and sustain his political and cultural regime. While neoliberal subject positions are produced discursively by networks of power that extend beyond Berlusconi himself, I have nonetheless argued that Berlusconi has been able to articulate a political regime by interpellating and reproducing those subjectivities, being placed at the intersection of several important networks of power: economic power, political power and symbolic power. Gender and sexuality played a fundamental role in the *dispositif* of Berlusconism, women being ambivalently interpellated as empowered subjects of change as well as victims, at the same time being aggressively attacked by a renewed sexism and misogyny.

My second endeavour was to explore what kinds of female subjectivity and sexuality were made intelligible by media representations of femininity, and how they related to Berlusconism. All case studies analysed in this thesis present a dichotomisation of post-

feminist agency, women being understood as either fully and autonomously (or even monstrously) agentic or as vulnerable, voiceless and helpless. This dichotomisation reproduces longstanding sexist discourses that separate women between whores and Madonnas, bad and good, sluts and virgins. The combination of poststructuralist and post-Marxist approaches to power that is engendered in this thesis was directed toward uncovering the micro-processes of domination alongside wider systems of exploitation. Indeed, as shown above, the dichotomisation of femininity and female agency was employed in Berlusconi's neoliberal authoritarian populism to articulate neoliberal, conservative, authoritarian, racist and xenophobic legislation.

At the same time, this dichotomisation of femininity is also indicative of the neoliberal logic that negates the coexistence of agency and structural vulnerability. Indeed, while several scholars have claimed that under neoliberalism vulnerability and victimisation are denied, in favour of the entrepreneurial subject who takes full responsibility for their life (Bay-Cheng 2015; McGee 2005; Phipps 2014; Scharff 2016), this research project has shown how in Italian neoliberalism women are interpellated as both agents and victims. In the case studies, the position of victim appeared necessary for the reinsertion of the deviant woman within normative standards of femininity. Indeed, in all the case studies the position of victim was the one that attracted no reprehension: Amanda Knox's defence strategy was to depict her as vulnerable and a victim of the media; the most sympathetic representation of Ruby was when perceived to be victim of a regressive Islam or taken advantage of by older men; and, after her sexualised performances, Sara Tommasi was accorded sympathy and/or respect only the moment her mental illness was perceived to deprive her of agency. Thus, victimisation acted to return women to a more comfortable and acceptable position, one in which their agency was denied and thus made unthreatening to the status quo.

Ultimately, as both empowered, agentic and autonomous post-feminist women or as in the more traditional position of the helpless, voiceless victim, the women's subjectivities and experiences are individualised, with the effect of erasing the role of unequal power relations and structural constraints in people's choices, opportunities, life histories, and

so on. The virtual absence of feminist critiques in the case studies participates in portraying them as isolated events, neglecting how gender inequality, sexism and misogyny connect them, although in different ways. This blindness does not only portray feminism as irrelevant in at least two of the case studies (Sara Tommasi and Amanda Knox), but also neglects issues of class and race, that are equally important in determining people's experiences and possibilities.

A further point made throughout this thesis, is that post-feminist culture, and especially the culture of Berlusconism, have intensified the public scrutiny and evaluation of women's appearance and behaviour. Thus, the case studies highlighted another trait of Berlusconism: the intense vilification and symbolic aggression of women, especially when they do not fit into normative standards of femininity. Amanda Knox was perceived as unnatural, unfeminine, even monstrous when embodying the *femme fatale*/phallic girl subject position, and, as a consequence, was berated inside and outside of the court room. Sara Tommasi's was mocked, ridiculed, condemned and pitied when she started manifesting mental health issues, and *Il Giornale* went as far as doubting the credibility of the case she brought against her agent and the director who took advantage of her mental and physical state. Lastly, even if Ruby Rubacuori's commercial sexuality was ultimately perceived as intelligible, she nonetheless incurred criticism as venal, superficial, despicable and corrupt, as well as being highly sexualised.

The case studies not only revealed which subject positions are considered intelligible or unintelligible in Italian culture, but were also indicative of what kind of femininity and sexuality is sanctioned. Indeed, in all the case studies the educated, beautiful, hard-working woman, but one still linked with the reproductive role, heterosexual monogamy, marriage and religion, emerged as the safe, unthreatening and respectable subject position. Ultimately, the construction of the ideal post-feminist woman in the newspapers indicates a woman who has taken advantage of the achievements of the feminist movement, in terms of having a place in the public sphere of work and education, but not at the expense of the domestic sphere and the heterosexual family. The danger of taking

too much of a masculine role or investing too much in one's career results in murder or madness.

Thus, throughout this thesis I have responded to critical questions about Italian post-feminism and its connection with Berlusconism. I have shown how young femininity has emerged in the national popular imagination as a barometer of social change, at the same time becoming subjected to increased scrutiny and policing. The media plays a fundamental role, providing a map of intelligibility of the figuration of post-feminist femininity and its tensions in Berlusconism. While Berlusconi's sexism and his role in and influence on Italian media and culture have been frequently remarked, very little academic work has been produced on the interlinking of his political practice, media representations and culturally intelligible forms of femininity. Even less work has engaged in a systematic analysis of media representations and narratives. With this research project, I aimed to fill this theoretical and analytical gap, highlighting how media representations of femininity and female sexuality have participated in Berlusconism, where longstanding sexist and misogynist discourses have been accompanied by new forms integral to neoliberal governmentality.

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