

Prefazione agli *Occasional Papers del CeSLiC*

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Sono lietissima di presentare un altro saggio nella serie degli *Occasional Papers*, una collana all'interno dei *Quaderni del Centro di Studi Linguistico-Culturali (CeSLiC)*, un centro di ricerca del quale sono responsabile e che svolge ricerche nell'ambito del Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere e Moderne dell'Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna.

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Louw, Bill, Dressing up waiver: a stochastic collocational reading of 'the truth and reconciliation' commission (TRC) - <http://amsacta.cib.unibo.it/archive/00001142/>

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A queste si aggiungono inoltre le altre pubblicazioni del CeSLiC:

1) la serie di manuali dei *Quaderni del CeSLiC: Functional Grammar Studies for Non-Native Speakers of English* – http://www2.lingue.unibo.it/ceslic/e_libri_1_func_grammar.htm – che già vanta tre volumi pubblicati, e un quarto in preparazione; e

2) gli Atti dei Convegni patrocinati dal centro:

- a cura di D. Londei, D.R. Miller, P. Puccini, Gli atti delle giornate di studio del CeSLiC del 17-18 GIUGNO 2005: **“Insegnare le lingue/culture oggi: Il contributo dell'interdisciplinarietà”**, <http://amsacta.cib.unibo.it/archive/00002055>

ora disponibile anche in versione cartacea: Londei D., Miller D.R., Puccini P.(a cura di), 2006, **Insegnare le lingue/culture oggi: Il contributo dell'interdisciplinarietà**, Quaderni del CeSLiC, Bologna, Edizioni Asterisco.

Sono lieta ora di poter proporre un nuovo contributo di grande interesse scientifico: il saggio di **Mette Rudvin**, ricercatore di lingua e traduzione inglese dell'Università di Bologna, specialista in mediazione linguistica in lingua inglese. Il titolo del suo articolo è:

STEREOTYPES OF 'PRIMITIVISM' AND 'MODERNITY' IN IMMIGRANT-RELATED DISCOURSE IN THE ITALIAN MEDIA

Con questo saggio, Mette Rudvin ci porta alle funzioni del primitivismo nelle cronache odierne, esaminando le occorrenze del paradigma “immigrato/ straniero = primitivo” in un piccolo corpus di testi scritti e orali tratti dai media – che comprendono telegiornali, articoli e anche *talk show* politici italiani che vertono sul fenomeno dell’immigrazione – e mostrando come i miti occidentali del primitivismo vengano rappresentati linguisticamente.

Lo studio, saldamente ancorato nelle teorie postcoloniali, rivela come il discorso popolare e giornalistico sull’immigrato si forgi sui più svariati e soventi contraddittori miti occidentali del primitivo – da quello del “buon selvaggio” in armonia con la natura, a quello del ‘selvaggio bestiale e incivile’, fino a quello del ‘selvaggio irrazionale e/o sensuale’, tutte modalità di rappresentazione dell’altro come subalterno. L’analisi documenta non solo come il ‘mito’ del primitivismo si concretizzi nelle rappresentazioni dell’immigrazione che emergono sia dai discorsi di carattere apertamente razziale che da quelli presunti ‘liberal’, ma anche i modi in cui tali rappresentazioni contribuiscono a riproporre e istituzionalizzare i pregiudizi stereotipati di lettori, la cui dieta giornaliera di ‘notizie’ alimenta timori dell’altro, piuttosto che offrire narrazioni positive di individui appartenenti a civiltà differenti, che potrebbero costituire il potenziale per la creazione di rinnovati e migliori paradigmi culturali da contrapporre ad antichi ed anacronistici miti.

Donna R. Miller

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Stereotypes of ‘Primitivism’ and ‘Modernity’ in Immigrant-related discourse in the Italian Media¹

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Introduction

This paper investigates some of the semantic and cultural-ideological aspects of the concept of ‘primitivism’ and how it is used in the Italian printed media. In particular, it examines how the language used in the context of immigration supports and constructs contemporary tropes of ‘primitivism’ and current ideology in immigration politics in Italy today and in East-West image-making more generally. The paper forms part of a larger research project the author is co-authoring with Jennifer Varney, a quantitative examination of terminology relating to primitivist tropes in Italian daily papers.

The study explores how the notion of ‘primitivism’, informed not only by historical and cultural considerations but also by current political and geo-political factors, is manifest in journalistic reporting on immigration in Italy today. It contends that this is present in the current view on immigration both in openly racist and more liberal approaches, and that the public’s view on immigration is mediated through this myth (generally recognised through Said’s work on Orientalism) generated diachronically by imperialism and hegemonic practices, and reflected today in 1st-3rd world relationships governed by socio-economic and political asymmetries. Numerous, oftentimes contradicting, manifestations of primitivism, ranging from the ‘pure, incorrupt, Edenic noble savage in harmony with Nature’ to the ‘bestial uncivilized savage or the irrational and/or sensual savage’, are present in the current popular discourse on immigration as representations of a hegemonic view of the subaltern as an inferior Other, rather than as an equal (the ‘Gaze’).

Notions from post-colonial theory will be used to analyse the rhetorical strategies employed in media discourse on immigration, for example, Orientalist myth incarnated in stereotypes, clichés, neologisms from other languages, and especially diachronic metaphors of modernity vs. primitivism (e.g. “Afghanistan has gone back to the Dark Ages/Middle Ages”, Islamic fundamentalism or Palestinian politics as primitive, savage and barbaric) or chromatic dark-light metaphors in open contrast (qualitatively and quantitatively).

Such representations (which are naturally not only verbal, but include the very selection of news material for broadcasting – especially in the wake of 11/9 and the Iraq invasion) contribute to consolidating stereotypical prejudices in the eyes of the public (i.e. what is represented? - war, conflict, torture, tension, oppression of women, rather than history, nature, art, poetry, interviews with women judges/ professionals/ artists/ intellectuals).

Part 1.

1.1. Problematic terms: ‘primitivism’ and ‘modernism’

Before we can discuss what we believe to be an artificial distinction in the Italian media today between ‘the primitive’ and ‘the modern’ - constructed ethnocentrically with a far from innocuous

¹A preliminary outline of this paper was first presented at the conference *Il primitivismo e le sue metamorfosi: archeologia di un discorso culturale*, at the University of Bologna, Bologna 17-19 November 2005. A report of the findings presented in Part 2 of this paper is in press in the conference Proceedings, CLUEB, Bologna 2007.

ideological agenda and closely related to and constructive of contemporary immigration policies, both terms should be qualified.

The term 'primitivism' alone is actually a bit too restricted for the purposes of this paper in that the term is being used not only in its narrowest application as 'savage/barbaric/primordial'; included in this analysis are a range of connotations, mainly negative, that this word conveys and evokes (old-fashioned, backwards, simple, animalesque, un-civilized). I will be examining the concept of 'primitivism', then, not as it is presented in ethnography/ anthropology (used by Malinowski and Boas), nor as a literary term, nor as it has been used in the fine arts (positively in both cases), but as it is constructed in the media to describe migrants whenever there is conflict or assumed conflict between them and natives. The paper will be looking at the positioning of Italians (through the Italian media) through primitivist metaphors embedded in their view of migrants in current Italian society. As Hayden White noted during the course of the conference in which papers in this volume were presented, 'primitivism' – at least as it is used here – cannot be defined out of context, but rather by association and usage as a trope than as a concept.

Thoroughly investigated in academic circles (especially cultural studies, anthropology/ethnography, literary studies), the word 'primitivism' can no longer be used without the appropriate quotation marks to indicate its problematic, ideologically ambiguous, status. The same cannot be said, yet at least, of 'modern', even when presented as a bipolar complement to 'primitive'. In common usage, it is frequently taken for granted that the term 'modern' has a definable and delineable semantic domain and that its connotation is positive. It is associated with the 20th and 21st centuries, and geographically with the Western world; an advanced level of technology is assumed. And yet, in this bipolar context, it is no less problematic or agenda-less than its complement 'primitive'.

As noted in the other contributions to this volume, the historical constructions of the primitive in Art, Literature, Philosophy, Ethnography and Cultural Studies are anything but innocent endeavours. As Torgovnick reminds us, the consequences of such rhetoric and of such ethnocentric tropes can be quite radical. An increasingly simplistic and bi-polar Us/Them representation (exacerbated by 9/11) in the contemporary media coincides with aggressive foreign policy campaigns in the West: "Many events in this century would have been less possible without operative notions of how groups or societies deemed primitive become available to "higher" cultures for conquest, exploitation, or extermination": from the partition of Africa and the Nazi 'final solution' for Gypsies and Jews to Vietnam and US action in the Persian Gulf.² It is possible that a close linguistic analysis of East-West image-making in the media, more specifically of immigration policy and foreign policy, will reveal the strategies used to uphold these myths and perpetuate their harmful consequences. (Larger studies along these lines would answer questions such as: were Bush and Blair justified in asserting that the war on terror is not a war against Islam/ against traditional cultures, or does linguistic evidence prove them wrong?). The psycholinguist Henzell-Thomas (2000) shows how the British media promotes Islamophobia through stereotypes and ethnocentric metaphors and argues convincingly that such language leads to violence and that "much of racism is learned by text and talk". The Western media, he says, simplistically presents Islam as monolithic, war mongering and intolerant of diversity, thus fostering a climate of aggression, fear and hostility leading (ibid), possibly leading, one might argue, to 'defensive' pre-emptive measures such as the Iraq invasion.

Studies in critical anthropology, psychology and cultural studies have established beyond any doubt that the 'Other' is constructed through the lens of the viewer, and as 'viewer' it is equally obvious

² Torgovnick, 1990:13 in Marianna Torgovnick, 1990, *Gone Primitive. Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. Torgovnick challenges the notion of primitivism, but seeks to uncover the ethnocentric agenda of the use of and interest in (at times obsession with) 'primitivism' in Western academia.

that the notion of ‘primitive peoples’, as the notion itself of ‘primitivism’ has been perceived exclusively through the lens of Western myth-making. The West, Torgovnick suggests, is both the viewer and the imagined primordial Self (1990:11).³ Do our perceptions, she asks, match the available data (1990:12)? Clearly not. Rather, it is quite clear that today’s political discussion on primitivism is fused with 21st C ideology and the politics of immigration. In the competition for precious and limited natural and human resources, in the struggle for domination over geographical and symbolic territories, the most harmful aspects of the Western primitivist tropes merge, triggering prejudices and euro-centric assumptions and activating the most aggressive stereotypes and ingrown phobias of the ‘Other’s potential to cause harm (especially in the discussion on terrorism, appealing to our innermost fears of safety/death). It would be interesting to see if such rhetoric is less aggressive when the economy is under less strain, unemployment is low and housing cheap and accessible.

1.2. The diachronic and essentialist aspects of the primitivist trope

The stereotypical representations of primitivism are built, I believe – both in their positive and negative manifestations – around two prime axes, the diachronic axis, and the synchronic ‘essentialist’ axis. In the modern-primitive bipolar representation on the *diachronic*-evolutionary axis we find the representation of Modernity vs. Un/Under-developed (rather than just ‘old’)– i.e. the primitive is an early stage of evolution that will eventually evolve towards a known goal. In tune with early anthropological theories, this patently erroneous perception is stubbornly persistent in the collective consciousness. On what I have called the *Essentialist* axis, we find the Other’s assumed essential characteristics and traits being probed and critiqued - in other words the nature of the primitivist person and phenomenon, rather than its positioning on a chronological axis.

The Primitivism of the Other

What is often forgotten is that this hegemonic bipolarity and simplistic stereotyping, that very same dialectic between primitivism and modernism is also played out in the target of the hegemonic gaze: The dialectic is played out all over the world – not least in the so-called ‘primitive’ cultures - employing a variety of different strategies and targets (although typically urban-rural, old-new, primitive vs. civilized). The pecking order is universal, it seems. In the Urdu language, for example, variations on the English root ‘jungle’ (‘jungel’ as ‘forest’, ‘jungli’ as epithet/adjective) signifies aspects of the primitive/savage/wild, the semantic field varying from pie-dog to everything non-civilized (“jungli batcha” - “you primitive/savage child”- a mother might scold her child in earnest or in play). The quintessentially primitivist reference to the African jungle is unmistakable.

Primitivism as ‘glorified Tradition’

Included in the semantic scope of the term ‘primitivism’ (in the wide sense in which we employ the term here) we must not forget its at times intensely positive connotation: primitivism also becomes an expression for the tradition, culture and religion of the ancients. It may lead to the nationalist rhetoric of the BJP in India, as it led to the more innocuous national-romantic rhetoric of the Grimm brothers or Scandinavian 19th century nationalism, where all things conjured up by ‘Viking’ and old Norse (ancient, pristine, original, the ‘essential national character’) were revered and used as a model on which to build a new language, culture and nation. Indeed, one of the main themes in contemporary Bollywood films is the tug-of-war between tradition and modernity; the ancient culture, religion, tradition, agricultural tools and customs, literature and songs are seen as a valuable cultural patrimony to be defended against the onslaught of savage technology and modernity, and

³ “For Euro-Americans, then, to study the primitive brings us always back to ourselves, which we reveal in the act of defining the Other”, ourselves as situated in the Africa/primitive that represents the primordial, beginning of time (ibid: 11). The Primitive self corresponds to aspects of our ego, she says: “We all react to the primitive according to an accumulated set of personal and cultural “intuitions”. “ ... “Our sense of the primitive impinges on our sense of our selves – it is bound up with the selves who act in the “real,” political world.” (ibid:17).

yet this is problematized at the same time (most notably perhaps in the well-known Mumbai production *Swadesh*) in the manifest need for technology in the fight against poverty (electricity, clean water, medicine, literacy and education, etc.) and corruption. In each of these expressions of tradition (and in the rhetoric/discourses around these expressions) we find the same Rousseuvian glorification of the ancient, pastoral and primitive. There is, of course a difference in degree (rather than in quality) between ‘tradition’ and ‘primitive’/‘savage’: urbans who might otherwise glorify an assumed acculturated past (e.g. India) may not endorse the assumed ‘savage’ customs of indigenous peoples, for example, the poor and the low-caste.

1.3. Primitivism and Islam. Tools of Islamophobia and racism

Henzell-Thomas (2001) identifies the most pervasive Islamic clichés and stereotypes in the UK media as: fundamentalist, ideological, monolithic, static uni-dimensional, implacably opposed to modernity, incapable of integration or assimilation, impervious to new ideas, retrogressive, retrograde, backward, archaic, primeval, medieval, uncivilised, hostile, violent, terrorist, alien, fanatical, barbaric, militant, oppressive, harsh, threatening, confrontational, extremist, authoritarian, totalitarian patriarchal, misogynist, negatively exotic, imposing on the world a theocratic system of government opposed to individual freedom. The most pervasive of these is fundamentalist (2001:1-2). There is a reasonably equal distribution between diachronic and essentialist attributions, but they are clearly interlinked.

The two main geographical domains of immigrant-related and primitivist rhetoric in the Italian media that emerged in this study were Africa and the Islamic world (clearly overlapping in part, and yet separate as phenomena). The most easily identifiable primitivist metaphors were those related to Africa and migrants from Africa, the Muslim diaspora and a few targeted European countries or cultural groups (Albania and the Rom); their points of contact with the Italian media are found primarily in domestic policy – African and European migrants in Italy and the traditional conflictual issues of unemployment, housing, etc. The domain of Islam is both foreign policy (especially war, terrorism and gender roles) as well as domestic policy (Muslim schools, Islamic values, terrorism).

The debate on primitivism and Islam is extremely complicated because like all other world religions, it embodies an immense range of ethnic groups and socio-cultural practices, which vary in all aspects of life, and also encompasses various kinds of dogma (cf. the global Christian community, from rural Amish to High-Church Anglican). The variation spans the entire Muslim diaspora, from traditional rural Kurds to metropolitan Londoners/New Yorkers, and thus the entire range of what are perceived as ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ communities, divided not only by culture and language, but also by class. The level of cultural hybridity between East and West (Asia and America/Europe) is sometimes taken as an indication of modernity (for example, Salman Rushdie is both Asian and British and therefore ‘modern’, by virtue of his cultural-ethnic hybridity) but this too is not clear-cut: witness the recent development of ‘home-grown’ fundamentalism in the UK. Among the younger generation of Muslims in the UK today, despite full access to education and technology (the manifest icons of modernity), many have chosen to espouse traditional Islam, and sometimes a violent misconstruction of Islam, as they become actively involved in terrorism. These youngsters are culturally hybrid, but considered ‘backwards’ in that they have chosen to give their religious allegiance to their Asian rather than their British ‘self’ and to implement this religious identity in an extreme and often hostile form, often as a result of the very same cultural hybridity and the difficulties it implies in terms of the psychological construction of the Self. This is always interpreted by the Western media through linear time-metaphors (“a step backwards”, “back to the Middle Ages” “back to barbarism”) never as an – albeit undesirable – step in a different (neither forward nor backward) direction. Despite the fact that modernity-technology has spawned violence and death on a massive, unprecedented scale, individual acts of violence in the context of Islam, and

especially terrorism, are always interpreted through the primitivist paradigm (nuclear power was never as frightening in the hands of the US and USSR as it was in the hands of General Musharraf or the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad). ‘Is Islam more threatening as “primitive” or as “modern”?’ one might ask. And what are the criteria for ‘primitive’, then, in this context? The degree of religious feeling (secular versus fundamentalist)? The level of education and literacy (secular schools or orthodox Muslim *madrassi*)?

Not surprisingly, the debate on Islam and immigration in Italy, as in many countries, tends to equate all Muslims: a Muslim from Delhi is no different from (or less threatening than) a Muslim from rural Indonesia because the only common denominator for this particular form of rhetoric is their membership of the group of global Muslims (forced ‘membershopping’). When Musharraf manages to stem the flow of Anti-Western sentiment from Pakistani fundamentalists, he is accused by the Italian press of being undemocratic and resorting to his military privileges; when he manages to please mainstream Muslims and give space for pro-Muslim sentiments he is accused of being dangerously lenient and encouraging terrorism. Islam, as any religious or cultural membership criterion, is complex, ambivalent, broad and is perfectly able to house contradictory elements. The debate in Italy is very different from the debate in the UK, for example, where Islam and modernity are not necessarily considered to be incompatible. The recent dispute over the candidature of Afef Jnifen, Tronchetti-Provera’s Tunisian-born wife and former top model for political office, and Alessandra Mussolini’s ironic comment about a ‘meticcio’ not being suitable for political office, is interesting because it might perhaps be signalling a change in the public attitude. It is symptomatic, however, that such changes come from above rather than the grass-roots (as they have in other European countries) and that they embody one of the most potent public icons in the Italian media: sexuality, also perhaps the quintessential measure/gauge of ‘modernity’ in Italy.

1.4. Primitivism and Gender

The most recurrent stereotype in regard to primitivism and gender is that related to Islam, which virtually overshadows all other gendered primitivist tropes. Perhaps one of the most potent symbolic representations of the primitive, oppressive Other manifested frequently (obsessively), eagerly and often eloquently is the verbal and visual icon of the *burqa* as the quintessential symbol of primitive oppression. Torgovnick, as many other scholars, emphasizes the obsessive linking in Western discourse of primitivism and sexuality, with the primitive/savage as the locus of the wild, non-rational, savage, raw, libidinal, female, infantile, lustful, etc. This trope has both positive and negative associations for the viewer, depending on context (art, literature, education, religion) and function. What I have decided to call the ‘*burqa*-trope’ is in fact the primitivism-sexuality connection inverted. The *burqa* has come to represent, in the West, the (forced) negation of sexuality (or of sexuality as it is understood/represented in the West), the forced relinquishing of female sexuality (compared to icons of Western sexuality – bare skin, freedom of movement, free interpersonal relations between the sexes, etc.).

Symbolism of the veil: seen from the inside, seen from the outside

It might be interesting to report here on the comments of the sociologist Louise Brown, who conducted a fascinating study 4-yr. of the red-light district and the *tawaif*, ‘courtesan/dancing girl,’ tradition in the city of Lahore in Muslim Pakistan; it is worth quoting at length as it shows both how important the symbolism of the veil is – even in such circumstances – and how complex it is as a signifier and signified, and how complex the management of that signification is depending on the social context:

In Heera Mandi [“the diamond market”, the brothel district], a rich, secluded, and veiled woman has honor. She has superior patrons, and because she is protected in her home and has fewer clients, her fees are much higher. There’s a finely judged code about exactly when

and how far a woman should be veiled. When a male visitor calls at Maha's [one of the prostitutes and main protagonists of this study] house, she adjusts her *dupatta* in a manner that reflects his social status in relation to her own. If the man is important and has high *izzat*, honor, she sits on the mattress while covering all of her hair, her breasts, and her legs with a *dupatta* or *chador*. She may also lower her gaze and speak quietly. If the man is less important, her *dupatta* is looser and her hair often tumbles out from under the material. If he's low status, the *dupatta* barely sits on her head and she jokes and laughs loudly while lounging on the mattress. If the man is a workman or a servant, she doesn't even bother to veil and the *dupatta* lies crumpled on the floor. Maha manages what is called her "shame" very carefully. ... Orthodox Muslim women are trained to observe "*pardah* of the eyes". Looking at the opposite sex is a form of adultery. ... Manipulation of the veil and management of the gaze is an art. Women flirt with a glance that lasts a fraction of a second, and they are provocative even while wearing a piece of material that's supposed to obscure their sexuality. (Brown, 2005:66-67)

And what, one might ask, about the West seen from behind the *burqa*? Many Muslim women (quite likely even the women in Brown's study) see the West as innately 'primitive' with respect to gender roles and female sexuality; no limits, no structure, no organization, no control of sexuality; indeed, the very definition of the term 'primitive' according to much of Western academia.

Older texts and films (*Kim*) present an Orientalist vision of the Veil as seductive (belly dancers, kohl-rimmed eyes hidden behind a *dupatta* or a sari) (as do innumerable Bollywood posters and South Asian singers) but there is no such romantic imagery surrounding the current debate in the Italian media on the *chador*, *burqua* or the veil more generally (indeed, 'even' former prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was criticized for choosing to wear the floaty, colourful gauze *dupatta* draped over head or shoulders). In the West, the veil symbolizes, unequivocally, oppression. (I have found no such connotations in the South Asian English-language media, quite the opposite, the *dupatta* remains a ubiquitous garment, fashion statement and symbolic preserver of modesty). In many Muslim countries the *burqua* is seen to protect private space and give access to public space for women and to protect them from being seen and represented as sex-objects.

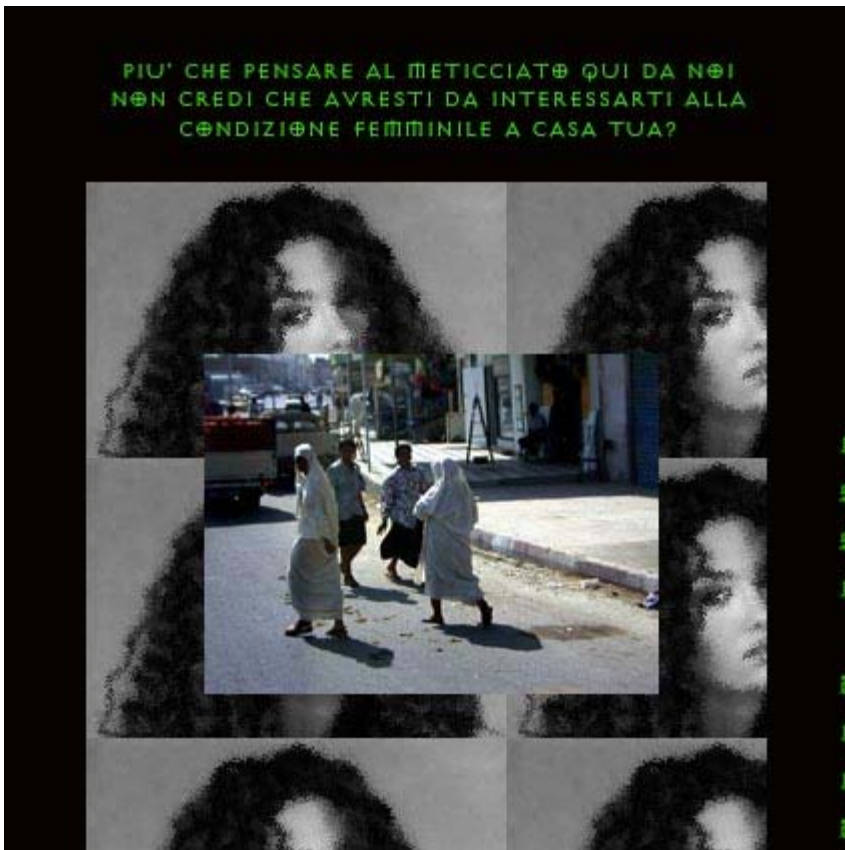
The Italian media, which has a hard enough time dealing with the combination female-brains-beauty, is having even more trouble dealing with Muslim/immigrant as an additional criteria to 'woman'. A good example of this myopic view of the Others' women, which can be found in the recent discussion, alluded to above when the Tunisian-born wife of a wealthy Italian financier, Afef Jnifen, stood for candidacy in the local elections in 2005.

The comments even allude to the fact that the notorious Hungarian-born former porno star "Cicciolina" (Ilona Staller) - who was an MP during the period 1987-1992 - was to be preferred - at least she made no claim to upset the view in which a woman's most essential characteristic is her sexuality. Many commentators in the Italian press implied that Jnifen (a beautiful top-model, a prize catch for her husband) married only for money. There were also allusions to the connection between public migrant women and prostitution/sex for money.

(http://www.beppegrillo.it/2005/08/il_circo_barnum.html). The most blatant comment was perhaps the caption to the following picture from 30.08.2005, which needs no further comment: [Carina....peccato che parli...](#) which translates as "Cute... pity she's talking"

Caption 1 (title): "Afef pronta per il salto in politica" (Afef ready for the launch into politics)

Caption 2 (picture): "Più che pensare al meticcio qui da noi non credi che avresti da interessarti alla condizioni femminile a casa tua?" (Rather than thinking about metisse here at our place, don't you think you should be getting interested in the position of women in your own home?)



Jnifen's humorous and generous replies are worth quoting: "Se la politica mi chiama, vuol dire che mi deciderò prima o poi a 'metticciare' il Parlamento" ("If the political world calls me, it means that sooner or later I'll decide to make Parliament half-caste"). And to the Lega Nord voters: "mi amano molto ma non hanno il coraggio di dirlo. Se mi invitano ad una loro manifestazione di partito, io ci vado..." ("they love me a lot but they don't have the courage to say it. If they invite me to one of their party rallies, I'll go...") and "non voglio entrare in politica, ma vorrei che mi si usasse per avvicinare il mondo arabo e il mondo italiano" ("I don't want to go into politics, but I'd like to be helpful to make the Arab world closer to the Italian world.).

http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:LpD_UrJzwsJ:esseacca.blog.excite.it/archive/category/Amenit%C3%A0+Tronchetti+Provera+Afef+Mussolini+meticcio&hl=it

Clearly, the 'Muslim woman-veil-oppression' connection is much stronger than the 'Female-Unfit for public office' connection. Beautiful women (models, actresses) seem less fit for public office quite simply when their main female virtue (beauty, sexuality) is highlighted rather than hidden or excused (as with Hilary Clinton) although no-one seems to be complaining about Angeline Jolie's status as Unicef representative.

Part 2. Ethnocentric stereotypes in the Italian media. A small sample

2.1. The sample

At the conference at which this paper was originally presented, I reported on some data collected by Varney – and myself in the light of the observations made above. For this presentation, we chose to examine primitivist-related stereotypes in one national daily paper, *La Repubblica*, and *Il Resto del Carlino*, a local paper from Emilia Romagna, examining every issue and every article for a week. The analysis was performed manually (not using corpora linguistic tools). We chose the week of the 20th-26th June 2006 (the year of the conference), following a highly-publicized rape-case in the city of Bologna involving a young Italian girl (a minor) and two migrant youths, one of whom is a minor. She was dragged behind a bush in the park and raped while her male friend was forced to

watch. The episode took place on a Sunday afternoon at the beginning of the school holidays when many young people and children frequented this park. We believed that this episode would disclose a number of particularly inveterate stereotypes in East-West primitivist image-making related to the status of the migrant as legal/illegal citizen, the migrant male, sexual relations in general, and sexual relations between Italians and Arabs.

In addition to this we chose a random sample of articles on migration and foreign policy during that same month to identify as wide a possible range of primitivist metaphors and stereotypes. Clearly, this second analysis is not representative, but it allowed us to identify the more specifically primitivist metaphors, and those related to modernity vs the archaic. The issues covered were related to violence, gender relations, terrorism, military 'Dictatorships', war, poverty, natural disasters, human rights (torture, censorship), religion, traditional medicine and 'superstition', culture difference-customs, food, illegal migration with no other connection to crime ("lavavetri e zingari-mendicanti che danno fastidio" (window-washers and gypsy-beggars who are a nuisance), as the mayor of Bologna described them - changed), and the organization and running of migrant-related public institutions (esp. the Questura, the Police dept. often dealing with migrant issues). Being a major category, domestic crime was subdivided into: drugs, prostitution, petty crime (theft, bag-snatching), illegal entry and employment. Our *geographical spread* for the random sampling was the following: Palestine, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, Albania, ex-USSR, Far East, South America and the European Roma diaspora (settlers in Italy).

Criteria

Based on our own prior assumptions (identifying key periods, themes and discourse strategies) and on a brief 'focus' phase of reading samples of each of the above newspapers, we chose the following textual criteria, taking on board also those identified by Henzell-Thomas in his article on Islamophobia (identified with an asterisk)⁴:

- *Direct references* (for example to 'Primitive, barbaric, medieval, savage')
- *Diachronic primitivist metaphors* ('medieval vs. modern, back to the Middle Ages)
- *Essentialist primitivist metaphors* ('barbaric, savage, wild, irrational)
- *Reported descriptions* of negative culture differences
- *Euphemisms**⁵
- *Negatively connotated metaphors*
- *Defensive strategies through disclaimers* "I'm not racist, **but**"
- *Mitigation**
- *Hyperbole*
- *Us/Them bipolarization*
- *Negative anti-migrant attributes (qualifiers and nominal groups (classifiers functioning as epithets))*

⁴Categories marked with an asterisk from Henzell-Thomas 2001: 4-6 and 8.

⁵ Henzell-Thomas lists a number of anti-migrant euphemisms: targeted killing for assassination/murder by death squads/ execution ; collateral damage (civilian casualties), respond for attack, settler for illegal immigrant, areas for communities neighbourhoods (less civilised), suburbs for illegal settlements, the international community for the West, a divided city for city with 99.8% Arabs, disputed territory for illegally occupied territory, provocative act for criminal act according to international law (H-T 2001:5). We also found euphemisms that work the other way however, that exaggerate the violence or illegality of the Others' actions, e.g.: execution/killing/assassination for execution legal execution after trial where death penalty is legal (e.g. Bhutto). It is extremely common to see hyperbolic euphemisms used about illegal migrants in Italy, namely "clandestino" (the tone of which is not a formal category but highly emotively connotative); the tone in which 'illegal activities' such as begging and offering window-washing services at traffic lights is reported is also hyperbolic in the Italian media. The metaphor 'extra-comunitario' (which in the collective consciousness does not include non-EU citizens from the US or Sweden) is extremely pervasive, almost ubiquitous.

- *Imperatives* “must adapt to our culture, learn our language” etc.
- *Explaining away**
- *Repetitions** (“a civilised behaviour in a civilised nation...”)
- *Ridicule**
- *Association**
- *Blaming the victim**
- *Vague references to statistics and scholarly works**
- *Generalizations**

We also identified the following semantic fields realized generally by direct reference, euphemisms, ridicule or association⁶

Time – the migrants’ culture as backwards, archaic, primeval

Invasion of Italian space – spatial-temporal action and assertion of superiority/conquest

Temporal movement backwards forwards, forward (modern) opposed to backward or static

Religion-fundamentalism or magic, voodoo, superstition

Darkness as metaphor for evil, ignorant-unenlightened, dangerous

Urban vs. rural (urban as positive except when rural is idealized, glorified, but then non-incisive)

Rigidity, non-flexibility/plasticity (overlaps with harsh, oppressive and cruel; with fundamentalism and totalitarian rule identified with the migrants’ home culture)

Totalitarian – authoritarian (essence of Islam as subjugation)

Violence/Danger – the immigrant as intrinsically potentially violent

Irrational – the migrant as extremist, un-nuanced (unintelligent, mad), militant

Misogynist, patriarchal – the Muslim male as intrinsically misogynist

Bad human rights record, civil rights, torture, censorship in the migrants’ home countries

Inferiority-superiority, supremacy; intrinsic asymmetry between Italian and migrant

Migrant + illegal qualifier= illegal immigrant (clandestine, “extra-comunitario”, irregular)

Nomad – unstable, unreliable, no fixed structure, uncivilized living patterns

Civilised vs. uncivilized

Lack of freedom – the Muslim migrant esp. as inhibitor of personal freedoms

Visual imagery

Although the scope of this paper does not allow for anything more than a brief mention of the matter, it should be remembered that visual imagery too is crucial in the analysis of media discourse and it would be interesting and informative to examine the subliminal messages in primitivist and racist discourse portrayed visually in the media (for example, in our case study, the constantly recurring photo of one of the suspects, head bowed and covered, being led away by two plain-clothes policemen next to a picture of the sunny, light, innocent and idyllic park called “Villa Spada” in a middle-class area of Bologna in which this took place; see photos below). The frequent repetition of iconography and the dialogical relationship between image and text (image as an addition to and expansion of the text or in an indexical relationship with it) is of course significant in itself.

Referring to what was mentioned earlier, I believe that the most recurrent, potent insidious image portrayed visually in migrant-related discourse in the Italian media is the “veiled woman”, imagery that seems to fascinate the Western world to the point of obsession. When visual metaphors are used to exemplify rather than to report on specific episodes, they are used to classify groups, in the sense that certain groups are identified with specific activities, e.g. very often pictures of the queues at the *Questura* will zoom in on Chinese and African individuals (not American or Scandinavians);

⁶ It is not easy of course to differentiate clearly between all of these semantic fields, many overlap, elements of one field are contained in another; metaphors and directness are placed side by side, etc.

television or printed press photos depicting prostitution will often be of black women, presented as 'Nigerian'; pimps are associated with Albania, and petty crime with Albania or the Maghreb.

I also attempted to identify the primitivist trope in its complementary bipolar positioning: i.e. descriptions of 'Us' (the West) as 'modern' from the standpoint of the West (for example explicit references to 'our culture' being superior). Indeed, the bipolar positioning of 'Us' versus 'Them' was one of the most frequent – and effective – distancing strategies, and one that is used constantly in the Italian media also within a local framework, not least in party politics (aggressively promoted in the campaign anticipating the national elections in April 2006).

Hypotheses

We were operating with the following assumptions before embarking on the analysis. I have not been able to address these in the present paper, but intend to pursue them in the course of the larger project undertaken with Varney and provide empirical data to confirm or reject these hypotheses. On the basis of our small sample and general reading undertaken during the research period, we felt that we could confirm the first three hypotheses although we have not yet had the time to perform a quantitative analysis.

1. The number of negative primitivist stereotypes is higher than the number of positive primitivist stereotypes.
2. The frequency of negative primitivist stereotypes varies according to the political affiliation and explicit agenda on immigration of the newspaper's affiliated/supporting political party
3. The degree of primitivist discourse is related to the discourse genre (reports, in-depth articles, interviews, editorials and letters to the editor) which dictates the narrative strategies and stereotypes employed, the degree of openness or obliqueness (more/less scholarly and objective, more/less open and more oblique) and the degree of ethnocentricity
4. In domestic policy, the primitivist trope was most explicit in issues concerning health, education and crime
5. Primitivist rhetoric was more intense immediately subsequent to
 - a. international events relating to war, terror, poverty (famine, drought) and health epidemics
 - b. dramatic events in domestic politics relating negatively to migrants (violence and crime, unemployment peaks)
 - c. primitivist discourse reaches a peak shortly after terrorist attacks and is mitigated when reactions and tempers die down
6. Primitivist discourse has improved (reduction of negative stereotypes and a more nuanced debate) from the 9/11 attack till now, coinciding also with a dramatic rise in immigration in the last year⁷, Italy's membership in the EU and exposure to debate and conditioning from its multicultural neighbours

We were less sure on the following points:

1. Primitivist rhetoric is exacerbated when the right-wing government with *Lega Nord* is in power
2. Is the Us/Them dichotomy most explicit in domestic or international coverage?
3. The local papers are more openly outspoken in anti-migrant discourse (different objectivity goal and threshold; as local 'gatekeepers' they belong to a more 'private' sphere and are therefore less accountable to a large national readership)
4. Is foreign policy discourse more aggressive and domestic discourse more defensive or vice versa?

⁷ According to the Caritas Dossier 2005 Italy is in 3rd position in the EU in terms of its migrant population; a 100% increase since 2001.

Methodological problems and constraints

We grappled with numerous methodological problems and constraints primarily about how to select chunks (clause, phrase – meaning elements) of text, on the basis of which we could categorize primitivist discourse, and how to quantify them (what constitutes one or more chunks?). This is frequently a subjective interpretation. Language is not quantifiable because it is interpreted differently from person to person (what is neutral? What is connotatively loaded? What is hyperbole? What is loaded and what is simply ‘reporting’, telling the ‘facts’). Even when language is interpreted taking into account context, this is no guarantee for ‘objectivity’. Context too is open to subjective interpretation; there are simply too many variables for accurate and/or meaningful classification. Much, of course, can be said or suggested through association – either of words and ideas within the text itself, through the link with visual imagery or with related articles on the same page (especially on crime statistics and migrants, for example an article on “Casa delle Donne - richieste di aiuto in aumento” (The Women’s House – appeals for help on the increase) which gives few concrete facts and nevertheless aggravates an already existing tension, creating a sense of emergency, anarchy, chaos and danger in the city where no girl is safe on the streets. Of course, classifying these associations (which are nevertheless relevant and significant) is highly subjective. Quotations skew the information value significantly. We chose to present them as separate data because they are important for the selection of information, stress, allusion, perspective, etc.. Nevertheless, it can be difficult to distinguish quotations from reporting. Formatting signals and layout (bold, font size), photos and positioning (first page – second page and heading, subheading, how much space) also provide a great deal of information.

This study is quite clearly *indicative* rather than representative, but as an indication it is, in my view, extremely telling. Apart from the information it gives us about each of the different papers, it allows us to compare the range of attitudes and ideologies found in them.

2.2. Findings

The results of the statistical survey were not quite what we had been expecting; in *Il Resto del Carlino* and *La Repubblica* the image-making was less direct and explicit, metaphors and negative qualifiers were recurrent but there was little variety and a narrow semantic range. We also expected less overtly racial discourse from *La Repubblica* compared to the more conservative *Il Resto del Carlino*, but were surprised to find that often the opposite was true.

Indeed, after the first stage of the analysis we radically revised our discourse categories and followed the following, reduced, set:

1. Emphasis and mention of racial attributes “straniero”, “immigrato” or “carnaggiana scura”, “marocchino” (foreigner, immigrant, dark skin, Moroccan) that are entirely redundant to the chronology of the episode
2. racially based irrelevant metaphors: “clandestine”, “irregolare” (clandestine, irregular)
3. The erroneous assumption that all foreigners are homogenous, one big group and the grouping together of heterogeneous individuals by association (esp. Romanians, the Rom).
4. Metaphors describing degraded housing – “baraccopoli, campi abusivi, accampamenti, case di comunità” (‘favelas’, illegal squatting, camps, municipal housing); squalid-primitive housing
5. The attribution of negative qualities/thoughts/ideas/attitudes to foreigners
6. Hyperbole in describing rape episodes
7. Hyperbole in presenting episode as a threat to the city/nation (“attacco ai nostri giovani” – an attack on our young people)
8. The assumption that the general public is under imminent threat as a result of single episode
9. Wild West scenario (dramatic chase and capture, “ore contate”, literally, hours counted – time running out)

10. Toponymy and Public-private space in which a previous idyllic normality is threatened by foreigners
11. disclaimers and mitigators (“mustn’t make parallels between Milan and Bologna”, “all ethnic groups aren’t alike”, “all foreigners aren’t alike”); such disclaimers mitigate but also draw attention to the issue and attempt to offer an excuse or justification of racist attitude
12. marked information structure for stress on migrant rather than episode (“prima straniero, poi stupratore” – first a foreigner, then a rapist)

Not all the categories are clear-cut. 4 is very subjective and hard to evaluate/categorize; 11 is difficult to evaluate.

There are four categories that stand out in the analysis of our case study:

- a. The dangerous predatory rapist as a threat to all girls in Bologna
- b. The dangerous predatory rapist immigrants as a threat to the city of Bologna and to Italy as a country; threat to the general public
- c. Us/Them bipolarization and group membership strategies – rapist as member of the Other, victims as member of Us group
- d. The sense of a safe, clean, familiar cityscape – “Bologna-per-bene” (bourgeois Bologna) – was under threat. Trees of Villa Spada and “baraccopoli” as jungle

The migrant as a source of danger, a threat to Italians

In the combination visual imagery-text the sense of a bipolar representation of material and symbolic space was very marked indeed: There was a clear sense of “the dark, dangerous predator lurking in the bushes” against a backdrop of a languid, sunny afternoon in the park in one of the city’s ‘good’ areas. The iconography/textual subtext was reminiscent of a Dr. Jekyll/vampire scenario, the rapist shies away from the sunny open public space of the park, dragging his victim into the dark jungle to commit violently primitive, savage, barbaric acts of unprecedented violence. The message this gives is one of fear, threat and potential anarchy: that any woman can be raped at any time by any migrant, when indeed statistics tell us that by far the majority of rapes are committed in the home, and that few rapes are committed by migrants). The rapist/migrant is seen a threat not only to the sunbathers and strollers in the park, but to all upright citizens in Bologna, and indeed to the whole country.

The Topos trope

The threat is generalized, directed as much at the city itself as the young girl who has been raped; the city has been insulted, offended, humiliated – all the more so because the assailants were immigrants, poor and down-and-out, rather than the well-clad businessman next door. We do not see the same fear-inducing discourse strategies in ‘native’ rape cases (including those against children and extreme high-violence crimes; that same month an Italian girl was raped by four Italian boys in a car and there was very little publicity). A single, infrequent episode aimed at a single individual (rape is not high on the list of crimes committed by immigrants) is by osmosis – and by anti-migrant ideology – extended to a whole group of people: the residents of Quartiere Saragozza, of Bologna, and of Italy.

Invasion of public space, cityscape contaminated

The cityscape of Bologna is under threat, according to the media coverage the week following the rape case, not only because of the dangerous-immigrant threat, but because the city’s aesthetic and social capital (bourgeois symbolical capital) is under threat. “Bologna per bene”, “Bologna sui colli”, “Bologna ricca” (bourgeois Bologna, Bologna on the hills (a wealthy residential area), rich Bologna) is all of a sudden under threat, its clean, safe public space invaded. This crime, the implication is, should have been hidden, private, not open to the public’s gaze.

The sense of a safe, clean, tidy, Italian, public space being invaded was remarkably strong: “violenza sessuale in piena giorno”; “Oltre alla ragazza e al suo amico i violentatori di Villa Spada hanno fatto un'altra vittima: la città”; “Villa Spada, fine dell'incubo” (Fine nel senso pericolo immaginato per la città). (Sexual assault in the middle of the day; In addition to the girl and her friend the Villa Spada rapists have created yet another victim: the city; Villa Spada, end of the nightmare – end as in the end of an imagined threat to the city.) Metonymically, “Villa Spada” is no longer a place name but the name of a tragic event, a geographical metaphor. This strategy aggravates the sense of emergency, anarchy, chaos and danger in the city where no girl is safe on the streets. Another association between cityscape and public space significantly exacerbated the primitive trope – namely that of dirt, contamination and cleanliness. The park was continually referred to as being ‘contaminated’ by dirty migrants who did not wash regularly, to the park as becoming a gypsy camp, “Baraccopoli campi abusivi, campeggio fra gli alberi” (Favelas, illegal housing, camping among the trees) in which there was no water to wash, where migrants sleep on the ground or thin mattresses, old dirty clothes. Symbolic dirt becomes material dirt.

Visual imagery

The contamination-topos theme was accentuated by the ubiquitous photos of Akram being arrested (photo 6), head covered in shame and fear, accompanied by two policemen alongside frequent photographs of the park, in both its ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ representation (photos 1-5). The trees of Villa Spada merge symbolically with the *baraccopoli* as jungle in a general degradation of the cityscape.⁸

Photos 1 and 2 “Violenza choc, 15enne stuprata in pieno giorno davanti al fidanzato a Villa Spada. La polizia: ‘I due aggressori con le ore contate’” (“Shocking violence, fifteen-year old raped in the middle of the day in front of her boyfriend at Villa Spada. The police: “Time running out for the two perpetrators””)⁹



⁸ These photos were recurrent in national and local papers. They can be found, along with many others, on: <http://ilrestodelcarlino.quotidiano.net/art/2005/06/21/5379262> (Villa Spada)

<http://qn.quotidiano.net/art/2005/06/21/5379263#> (Akram arrestato)

<http://lanazione.quotidiano.net/art/2005/06/20/5379197#top> (Villa Spada)

⁹ (left: available on

http://gallery.quotidiano.net/foto_scroll_leader.php?phpslideshow=4&directory=bologna_ragazzina_stuprata and right: on http://gallery.quotidiano.net/foto_scroll_leader.php?phpslideshow=3&directory=bologna_ragazzina_stuprata)

Photos 3 and 4 “Violenza choc, 15enne stuprata in pieno giorno davanti al fidanzato a Villa Spada. La polizia: 'I due aggressori con le ore contate’” (“Shocking violence, fifteen-year old raped in the middle of the day in front of her boyfriend at Villa Spada. The police: “Time running out for the two perpetrators”)¹⁰



Photo 5 “Bologna, uno dei fermati per lo stupro di Villa Spada” (“Bologna, one of the people held for Villa Spada rape”)¹¹



Lastly, the recurrent Us/Them bipolarity was perhaps one of the most effective strategies and worked at many group-levels: us as Bologna city and as Italians, us as a political party (“Il Comune, i nostri giovani, noi Italiani dobbiamo starli [la vittima e il suo amico] accanto” (‘Us’ as: The Municipality, our young people, us Italians (“...must support the victim and her friend”)) and “dargli il nostro supporto”; “fino del nostro incubo” (give them our support, the end of our nightmare).

The remaining categories contained interesting information too. It is extremely common to see hyperbolic euphemisms used about illegal migrants in Italy, especially “clandestino” (the tone of which is not a formal category but highly emotively connotative) or “immigrato” with negative associations and/or in a negative co-text; the tone in which ‘illegal activities’ such as begging and offering window-washing services at traffic lights is reported is also hyperbolic in the Italian media. The metaphor *extra-comunitario* (which in the collective consciousness does not include non-EU citizens from the US or Norway) is extremely pervasive, almost ubiquitous. The information structure and selection was interesting too in that the emphasis, in this case study, in the

¹⁰ (left: available on http://gallery.quotidiano.net/foto_scroll_leader.php?phpslideshow=9&directory=bologna_ragazzina_stuprata and right on: http://gallery.quotidiano.net/foto_scroll_leader.php?phpslideshow=5&directory=bologna_ragazzina_stuprata)

¹¹ (available on http://gallery.quotidiano.net/foto_scroll_leader.php?phpslideshow=2&directory=stupro_bologna_2005).

descriptions of the defendants was primarily on the attribute (category) 'foreigner' and secondly on the attribute/category "rapist". *La Repubblica* dedicated the whole of the first (national) page to this episode: it received first page headlines for three days and two and a half pages of local news the first day. It remained in the local pages of this national paper for a whole week; a great deal more than most national and international news items of global importance.

Concluding remarks

A sense of the migrant – and in particular the Muslim (but also east European and Rom) male, as a source of danger and violence, as a threat to the stability and harmony of the Italian city, emanated strongly from our sample and was presented by way of the associations mentioned above exacerbating the bipolarization of Us/Them: namely, the migrant as uncivilised and backwards, barbaric and non-refined, incapable or reluctant to integrate, misogynist, violent, unstable and nomadic, non-rational and impulsive/unpredictable. They clearly mirror the stereotypes that Henzell-Thomas associates with Islamophobia in the UK media. The essentialist axis – also the strongest and most explicit one – was most evident in our sample. The gender aspect was clearly present in our sample, but not in the manner discussed above (stereotyping of the Muslim woman). The aspect of gender relations that emerges here – equally disturbing – is the threat of the Arab male towards Italian women, clearly drawing on deeply rooted stereotypes in visual arts and literature through the centuries of the black man as predator upon (but also perhaps desired by) the vulnerable white woman.

This paper has argued, then, that the terms 'primitivism' and 'modernism' are not only a false binary construction, but profoundly ideological ones based on ethnocentric historical readings and analyses, prejudices and stereotypes. Indeed the juxtaposition is frequently presented as a euphemism for western vs. non-western in the interests of insidious myth-making in much of the western media. The myths do not, as Torgovnik remarks, match the available data and make no real attempt to argue anything above a superficial level, let alone present empirically-based claims. Such aggressive myth-making, with its appeal to the worst euro-centric assumptions by one of the most potent tools of technological societies (the mass-media) not only reflects but consolidates and generates prejudices and can be extremely harmful. We have seen how the simplistic and bi-polar Us/Them representation in the contemporary media, that Torgovnick suggests coincides with aggressive foreign policy campaigns, are played out at the local level in the regional Italian media. This paper has argued that such forms of aggressive stereotyping may foster - unnecessarily - a general climate of fear and aggression in which the most vulnerable target becomes the scapegoat for general evils.

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