Performing Feminist Resistance on Twitter: The case of #ParliamoneSabato in the Italian Twittersphere

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Abstract

In mid-March, 2017, Italian public television channel RAI Uno aired the last episode of a popular show called *Parliamone… Sabato*. The episode discussed the romantic preferences of Italian men, and – particularly – why Italian men allegedly fantasize about Eastern European women as their ideal partners. Following the episode, a portion of the public rose in outrage for thesexist and racist content of the show. The protest obtained the cancellation of the show and a public apology by the RAI network soon thereafter. One of the key sites for the protest was the official Twitter hashtag of the show (#ParliamoneSabato). This paper offers a discourse-centered online ethnography of a corpus of tweets gathered from #ParliamoneSabato during the two weeks following the announcement that the show would be put off the air. Text circulated via Twitter was analyzed in light of its broader context thanks to on-line observation and limited ethnographic engagement in the analog realm. The protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato was analyzed through the lenses of Bennett and Sageberg's 'logic of con-nective action' and Kelsey and Bennett's 'synoptic resistance', as well as through the work of others involved in the study of the relationship between social media and social movements. This paper concludes that, despite its spontaneous character and its focus on singling out the misconducts of 'the few' running the *Parliamone… Sabato*, the overall features of the public involved in the pro-test (especiallythe narrowness of the user based) make it hard to characterize it as a self-organized protest of 'the many'. In particular, it is crucial to notice that the protest might have originated somewhat spontaneously and mostly online, but almost immediately traveled into the analog world thanks to the brokerage of the Italian feminist movement "Non una di meno". A closer look at the language used in the context of the protest highlights that much of the conversation be-trays some level of anxiety on behalf of the Italian public because of a (real or imagined) growth in diversity within the country and its intertwining with gender issues and gender-related politics.

Keywords:
Social media, twitter politics, Italy, Parliamone Sabato, Non una di meno.

Introduction

On 18 March 2017, Italian public television channel RAI Uno aired what ended up being the last episode of a relatively popular talk show called *Parliamone… Sabato* ['let's talk about it… on Saturday']. The show used to air in the primetime afternoon slot (4.40 – 6.45 p.m.) and enjoy relatively broad viewership (on average, 1.5 million viewers per episode) (Zacconi, 2017). Despite its success, the show was abruptly taken off the air after widespread outrage for the content of its last airing. This episode discussed 'the romantic preferences of Italian men', with a particular focus on why Italian men seem to fantasize of Eastern European women as their ideal partners. The show identified six imagined reasons for this imaginary, and namely that:

► They are all mothers, but after giving birth they manage to regain a sculpture-like body;

► They are always sexy: no sweatpants or large pajamas;

► When it comes to cheating, they are forgiving;

► They are willing to let their men be in charge;

► They are perfect housewives and they learn housework from an early age;

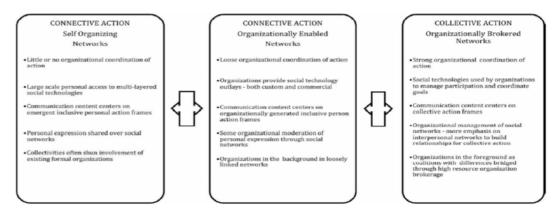► They do not wine, they are not clingy, and they do not hold grudges[1].

Soon after an infographic with the list above aired, a portion of the Italian public mobilized to oppose the narrative therein advanced. The public articulated three key demands: a public apology for the sexism and racism involved, the resignation of the journalist hosting the show (Paola Perego), and the cancellation of the show from the schedule of public TV networks. Interestingly, all of

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1   All translations from Italian are from the author.

the above demands were granted by the administration of RAI. One of the spaces where public mobilization took place was the official social media hashtag of the show #ParliamoneSabato. During the two weeks following the last episode of the show, more than 15,000 messages were tweeted or retweeted at #ParliamoneSabato. This paper presents the findings of a discourse-centered online ethnography (DCOE) focusing of the social media mobilization around the above described case within its broader contextual framework.

Literature review and theoretical framework

The main lens for the analysis carried out in this paper is the theorization of 'connective action' advanced by Bennett and Segerberg (2012). According to Bennett and Segerberg, the advent of new communication technologies (such as commercial social media) brought about new possibilities for social mobilization. While in the past people used to voice their grievances through 'collective action formations' (forms of communication that emerge as the output of centralized consultation within a community of practices), nowadays it is possible to engage in public advocacy on an individual basis. In their view, people increasingly voice their grievances though what they termed 'personalized action formations': individual political viewpoints somewhat related to a loosely defined political claim (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, pp. 774–6). The crucial difference lies in the role of institutional brokers. While collective action formations require presence of some (however light) structure to produce a unified narrative and convey it beyond the boundary of the community producing it, personalized action formation can be voiced individually and can travel across community boundaries thanks

Image 1: Elements of connective and collective action networks (Bennet and Sageberg, 2012)

to the affordances of commercial social media (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p. 777).

Based on the above, Bennet and Segerberg (2012) advance a threefold typology for present day social mobilization. The first category is represented by 'self-organizing networks': people that mostly use personalized action formations and respond to what they termed 'the logic of connective action'. The second category is represented by 'institutionally brokered networks': groups that mostly use collective action formations and follow what they termed as 'the logic of collective action'. The final category is represented by the 'institutionally-enabled networks', exemplifying the tension between the two logics.

Bennet and Segerberg's theorization enjoys wide popularity. Many have built upon their work to argue for the advent of new forms of social mobilization on digital media platforms. For example, Papacharissi argued that affective communication via social media platforms is a key element in the work of present day social movements (Papacharissi, 2015). Via group-based mechanisms of validation, people participating in a connective action jointly frame the message of their movement ('collective framing' (Meraz and Papacharissi,

2013)) and jointly select the opinion leaders most apt to circulate it ('networked gatekeeping' (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008)) without necessarily building any formal structure. Given the importance of affect in this form of social mobilization, Papacharissi (2015) terms these groups 'affective publics'.

Others have cautioned against overly-enthusiastic approach towards the role that social media can play in favoring public mobilization. Fuchs, for example, has recurrently argued for the continued relevance of collective action because of the highly unequal distribution of visibility in online spaces (e.g. Fuchs, 2011). Fuchs contends that production and circulation of information on commercial social media is largely dominated by the entertainment industry, with political debate being very much on the sidelines. Even within the niche of online political debate, those actors that enjoy visibility are not those that rise to prominence through group-based systems of validation, but rather individuals that happen to have preferential access to visibility because previously endowed with a disproportionate share of material, symbolic, and discursive resources (Fuchs, 2013). In a relatable although less skeptical vein, Gerbaudo

(2012) argues that social media have indeed changed the way in which social mobilization takes place, but haven't necessarily removed the need for institutional brokerage. In his view, most present day forms of social mobilization take place thanks to the work of some hidden 'choreographers' (i.e. movement leaders) that set the scene for others to perform their protest. That is to say, social media have certainly offered new spaces of visibility where individuals can voice their grievances without formal adherence to a movement. However, these spaces of visibility are almost invariably produced by some behind the scene brokers.

In light of the above, celebrating social media because of their potential to fuel 'revolutions' would probably be throwing the baby away with the bath water. However, it would be equally wrong to deny that commercial social media have opened now possibilities for the public to perform resistance. Building on Bennet's and Sagerber's model, Kelsey and Bennet (2014) have offered an understanding of social media as spaces where it is possible to witness the interplay of power and resistance in terms of panoptic (Foucault, 1977), synoptic (Bauman and Lyon, 2013) and omnioptic (Jensen, 2007) surveillance/resistance. In other words, commercial social media are platforms where surveillance can be exerted by the few onto the many, by the many onto the few, and by the many onto the many. In this context, they have advanced the concept of 'synoptic resistance' to refer to those instances where 'the many' (e.g. individuals) use social media platforms to voice their dissent and thus perform discursive resistance to the narrative advanced by 'the few' (e.g. the government, the media industry, etc.).

Methodology

This paper offers an overview of the public response to the last episode of *Parliamone… Sabato* as voiced by users of the social media platform Twitter via the official hashtag of the show #ParliamoneSabato during the two weeks following the announcement that the show would be cancelled (20 March – 2 April, 2017). The corpus of data under scrutiny comprises 17,450 between tweets and retweets. The material was retrieved through the NCapture function of the NVivo 11 software for qualitative analysis.

The objective of the paper is to interpret the event in object through the above developed theoretical framework and therefore assess the extent to which the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato can be said to be an act of synoptic resistance. To do so, this paper adopts a methodology inspired by Androutsopoulos' (2008; 2013) Discourse-Centered Online Ethnography (DCOE). The overall narrative emerging from the corpus of messages tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato is scrutinized in light of contextual elements gathered through screen-based observation during the days in which the protest unfolded as well as broader ethnographic engagement. DCOE can be a particularly suitable approach for the study of the relationship between social media and public mobilization because of its devotion to context beyond a strict focus on text as circulated on a given online platform. Discourse analysis can shed light on the extent to which framing of the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato can be said to be spontaneously crowdsourced or institutionally brokered. Screen-based observation can shed light on the features of the public that participated in the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato. Offline engagement can place the campaign in its broader context and point out the presence or absence of a group of 'choreographers' that might or might not have set the scene for the protest to take place.

The following elements were taken into consideration for this paper. First, the dataset was ordered in such a way as to display the most popular tweets by number of retweets in a largest-to-smallest fashion. After a first screening of the accounts that happened to be most popular in the discussion, five broad categories of accounts participating in the discussion were inductively developed. These are, namely: 'satirical' accounts, accounts belonging to 'news outlets', 'feminist' accounts, accounts belonging to 'politicians', and 'anti-equality' accounts. Second, a visual representation of the relationship between the users producing original content to those retweeting said content was produced through the Nodes XL software. This served the purpose of visualizing what users occupied central positions in the discussion and what users remained on the margins of it. The ten most popular accounts from each category were color-coded in order to facilitate visualization.

Third, the 5,976 original tweets (i.e. not re-tweets) gathered for this study were made object of word frequency analysis in order to detect broad topics of discussion in the corpus. Finally, the 915 original tweets retweeted twice or more were made object of in-depth critical discourse analysis. Particular emphasis was devoted to strategies of nomination, predication, and argumentation as outlined over time in the work of Wodak (e.g. Wodak, 2009). Attention was also devoted to strategies of legitimization/delegitimization following the framework by Van Leeuwen (2007).

Network analysis

Some 17,000+ messages were tweeted or retweeted at #ParliamoneSabato during the timespan under consideration. These messages were produced or retweeted by a total of 10,114 unique users. Once that is narrowed down to the 5,976 original tweets contained in the corpus, the user base participating shrinks to 3,739 unique users. Narrowing down again to the 915 tweets retweeted twice or more, the users producing original content are as few as 643. These numbers alone can provide a sense of how wide the public participating in the protest actually was and inform any further claim about the relevance of social media mobilization in obtaining the cancellation of the show and a public apology by RAI.

A closer look at the most retweeted messages in the dataset shows strong homogeneity among the producers. Satire dominated the discussion. The three most popular tweets were all from satirical blogs or commentators (@PamelaFerrara, @_the_Jackal, and @GianniCuperloPD), and so was the sixth most retweeted one (by @pisto_goal). Mainstream news outlets also enjoyed fairly broad popularity in terms of retweets, producing the fourth, eighth, and tenth most retweeted posts in the corpus (respectively by @raiofficialnews, journalist @fabiofr, and @republicait). Three other actors entered the top ten of most retweeted posts, each of them coming from a different group. The fifth most retweeted post was produced by the (at the time) Speaker of the lower house of the Italian parliament Laura Boldrini (@lauraboldrini), one of the most visible political figures in Italy as well as one of the most active on social media. The seventh most retweeted tweet was produced by the official account of the Italian feminist movement Non una di meno (@nonunadimeno). Finally, the ninth most popular tweet was produced by an anti-equality blogger (@cris_cersei), who exploited the visibility of the issue at hand to advocate against a possible law on surrogate motherhood.
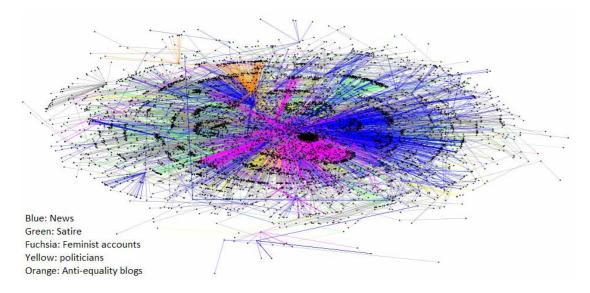
Chart 1: top tweets by number of retweets

rank	username	user category	# of RTs
1	PamelaFerrara	Feminist/journalist	573
2	_the_Jackal	Satirical blog	362
3	GianniCuperloPD	Satirical blog	331
4	Raiofficialnews	Mainstream news	278
5	lauraboldrini	Politician	217
6	pisto_goal	Satirical blog	194
7	nonunadimeno	Feminist movement	184
8	fabiofr	Journalist	178
9	cris_cersei	Anti-equality blog	172
10	Republicait	Mainstream news	170

As a matter of fact, the dataset shows a quite strong degree of homophily. That is to say, users with similar characteristics tend to cluster around each other rather than communicating and sharing information with users having different characteristics and points of view. Once the relationship between tweet producers and those retweeting their content is visualized on a scatter plot, it is immediately manifest that the discussion was mostly dominated by mainstream news and satire, with feminist accounts, politicians, and anti-equality bloggers occupying separate niches that overlap with either news or satire but not with each other.

Image 2: network visualization

Blue: News
Green: Satire
Fuchsia: Feminist accounts
Yellow: politicians
Orange: Anti-equality blogs

Word frequency

An exploratory look at the most frequent words in the corpus shows what follows. Besides the obvious primacy of the hashtag #ParliamoneSabato as the most recurrent world in the corpus, there is a clear prominence for the name of the TV network RAI (either as 'RAI', appearing 1,102 times in the corpus, or as '#raiuno', appearing 340 times in the corpus) and for the TV hostess running the show Paola Perego. Indeed, 'Perego' features 626 times in the corpus, her twitter handle @paolaperego appears 342 times, the hashtag #paolaperego appears as many as 336 times, and her first name 'Paola' appears 213 times. In light of the above, it is possible to speculate that the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato strongly emphasized the impersonal responsibility of the TV network RAI. Even more prominently, the public seemed to hold TV hostess Paola Perego personally responsible for leading a show in which sexist and racist content was unproblematically presented to as many as 1.5 million viewers.

Chart 2: 20 most frequent words in the corpus

Rank	Frequency	word	Translation
1	5,976	#ParliamoneSabato	#Let'sTalkAboutItOnSaturday
2	1,102	RAI	
3	714	Est	East
4	626	Perego	
5	625	Donne	Women
6	419	Programma	TV Show
7	342	@peregopaola	
8	340	#raiuno	
9	336	#paolaperego	
10	319	Chiuso	Shut down
11	279	Chiude	Shuts down
12	256	TV	
13	227	Dopo	After
14	216	Donna	Woman
15	213	Paola	
16	209	Chiusura	The shutting down
17	202	Chiudere	To shut down
18	195	Motivi	Reasons
19	187	Solo	Only
20	182	Servizio	Service

The list of most frequentwords in the corpus contains some noteworthy homogeneity for what concerns verbs. There seems to be a strong emphasis on the action of 'shutting down', either as an adjective (*chiuso*), as a substantive (*chiusura*), as an infinitive (*chiudere*), or at the present tense (*chiude*). The centrality of the gesture of 'shutting down' the TV show might hint to a strong prominence of descriptive action in the corpus, possibly in the form of journalistic reportages on the final act of the scandal: the shutting down of *Parliamone… Sabato* on Monday, March 20th.

Critical discourse analysis

a. Satirical accounts

A large portion of the dataset was dominated by relatively few satirical accounts that mocked *Parliamone… Sabato* by comparing the infographic on Eastern European women to a wide range of other lists of imagined reasons to be romantically involved with other categories of people. Looking back to the original list, it is self-evident that the message therein contained constructed 'Italian men' as the ingroup of its narrative. Conversely, 'Eastern European women' were constructed as a passivated object group upon which the ingroup 'Italian men' would predicate the action of 'choosing'. Furthermore, the original infographic backgrounds 'Italian women' as a group of passive bystanders that happen to be unfit for the 'choosing' of 'Italian men'.Most of the ironic takes on the original list aimed at subverting the narrative therein implied, often by changing the positionality of the actors involved. For example, the most popular tweet in the dataset (553 retweets) saidthat:

> The public awaits the sequel "reasons to choose [an affair with] an African [male] lover"… #ParliamoneSabato, Rai Uno

(@PamelaFerrara, satirical blogger, 20 March 2017)[2].

In open polemic with the male-catered infographic presented in the show, the producer of this message projects the image of an active ingroup of 'Italian women' that 'awaits' a follow up episode of *Parliamone… Sabato* in which they would be finally presented as the agents having reasons to 'choose' and African [male] lover for an affair. Formerly the ingroup, 'Italian men' are now backgrounded as passive bystanders who fail to live up to the higher (implicitly sexualized) standard of African men and thus remain unfit for the 'choosing' of 'Italian women'.

In a similar fashion, Satirical group The JackaL (@_the_jackal) produced a mock infographic outlining six 'reasons to choose an Italian boyfriend'. The infographic was attached as a picture to a tweet saying 'Here is a preview of the new inquiry by Paola Perego at #ParliamoneSabato', and listed the following as reasons:

▶ If you show them as little as one boob, they'll do whatever you want
▶ With that belly, no one will take him away from you
▶ They usually do not notice if you cheat on them
▶ You can make them believe they are in charge
▶ You won't ever have to iron, wash, or cook: their mom is there to take care of that

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2 The dataset under scrutiny was compiled by the author. For purposes of intelligibility, tweets from the dataset will be cited in the following format: (@[TwitterUserName], [description], [full date]). Directly cited tweets by users with less than 5,000 followers who do not describe themselves on Twitter as public figures were anonymized and referenced in the following format: (@[PrivateUserNumber], private user, [full date]).

▶ They wine, cling, and hold grudges, but only when their football team loses a match. (@_the_jackal, satirical blog, 20 March 2017)

As it was the case with the post above, The JackaL is imagining a future episode of the show in which the ingroup endowed with the power to perform the action of 'choosing' is 'women' (perhaps 'non-Italian women'). The passivated object of the action of choosing is 'Italian men'. Differently from the original infographic or the previous example, however, no group is clearly present in the background as bystanders unworthy of being 'chosen'.

It is worth reflecting on the gendered and sexualized features ofthe groups constructed in these lists. Firstly, the original list as well as the two examples above imply heterosexuality as a feature of ingroup and outgroups alike. Secondly, all the examples assume romantic relationships to be formed on the basis of a unilateral 'choice' operated by whichever groups is presented as agentic rather than as a shared decision jointly undertaken by all the actors involved. What's more, romantic relationships are constructed a 0-sum games in which one of the parties benefits from being deceitful towards the other. Cheating with impunity is implied to be proof that the ingroup is 'winning' the game. Thirdly, 'Eastern European women' as well as 'African [male] lovers' are presented as a romantically/sexually appealing 'others' on the basis on sexist and racist stereotypes to the benefit of the broader ingroup of 'Italians'. Finally, the construction of Italian men in the latter example is still dependent on intergenerational sexism towards a passivated category of women: their mothers. In sum, protest through irony and satire in the case of #ParliamoneSabato is not immune from sexism and racism on a part with the sexism/racism that triggered the tweeted protest in the first place.

b. Mainstream News Outlets

Mainstream news outlets, journalists, and more or less independent bloggers featured largely among the most active and popular users tweeting at #ParliamoneSabato during the sampled timespan. While their voices were prominent and widely retweeted, their messages were fairly dry. For example, the official Twitter outlet of the RAI public broadcasting network drily commented on the issue by stating that:

> #ParliamoneSabato shut down: 'it contradicts the mission of public broadcasting service' [follows link to news article] (@raiofficialnews, mainstream news outlet, 20 March 2017).

In a similar vein, Rome-based and left-leaning newspaper *La Repubblica* tweeted that:

> #Rai shuts down the show #ParliamoneSabato because of the episode on the 'six reasons to choose an Estern European woman' [follows link to news article] (@repubblicait, mainstream news outlet, 20 March 2017).

In both these cases, the action 'shutting down' is central to the narrative, to some extent confirming the impression that much of the reporting on the issue focused on the final act of the scandal. The show *Parliamone… Sabato* is in these examples the object upon which the action of shutting down is predicated. In the former example, the subject perfuming the shutting down is some implicit authority that, after performing the action, is also granted the authority to speak with its own voice: it is in fact quoted while presenting reasons to legitimate the action. In the latter example, the subject performing the action

is the RAI television network: the impersonal authority responsible for airing the show in the first place and thus also in charge of taking it off the air.

In the former example, the shutting down of the show is justified with a vaguely worded mismatch between the content of the show and the mission of public television service. In the latter, this mismatch is qualified with specific reference to the content of the last episode of the show. In both cases, the topos of reality is deployed to justify the decision. That is to say, action (i.e. the shutting down of the show) is justified in light of the fact that reality (i.e. the mismatch between the content and the mission of the show) happens to be the way it is.

c. Feminist networks and activists

The Italian feminist movement has experienced a fairly vibrant season since the beginning of October 2016, when most of its voices unified under the collective banner of a new network named 'Non una di meno'. The network successfully gathered 200,000 people in the streets of Rome for a rally on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Violence against Women in 2016. Since then, Non una di meno efficiently mobilized analogically and digitally on several occasion, also initiating several hashtag campaigns on Twitter. The movement participated in the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato with several tweets, the most popular of which was the following:

> After censoring the women's strike, Rai performs sexism and racism #ParliamoneSabato
> (@nonunadimeno, feminist movement, 20 March 2017).

This message hints to several features of the movement as well as to the stance of the movement towards mainstream media. Ever since its earliest public document (a call to join the above mentioned rally in Rome), the movement consistently presented itself as the voice of an collective'us' made of 'women' standing up to the systemic oppression performed upon them by an 'other' made of governmental and social 'institutions', including public media broadcasting (Non una di meno, 2016). Furthermore, the movement has consistently taken a pro-migrant (especially migrant women) position, grounded in the recognition that the oppression experienced by women and the oppression experienced by migrants is performed by the same structural forces. In light of the above, calling out the RAI network because of its institutional position and its role in performing and reproducing sexism and racism is part of the very mission that the movement took upon itself. Reference to censorship has also been recurrent throughout the lifespan of the movement. Non una di meno often lamented poor or non-existent coverage of their activities on behalf of public and private media broadcasting sources alike.

A self-identifying feminist activist loosely affiliated to the movement tweeted through her account another popular post that echoed the message of the movement by saying that:

> @RaiUno I present you the "submissive" women of Poland, on strike to defend their right to abortion. October 2016. #ParliamoneSabato, you are disgusting! [hyperlink to a picture of women protesting in Warsaw]
> (@PrivateUser1, private user, 20 March 2017)

This tweet is particularly strong because of the use of the first person, with the author taking it upon herself to perform the action of 'presenting' the 'women of Poland' to the RAI TV network. While positioned as object of the action of 'presenting', the women of Poland are arguably constructed as agentic, insofar as they are portrayed while performing the action 'striking for their right to abortion'. The presence of a picture of the strike complements the text of the tweet, further reinforcing the agentic position constructed for the women of Poland. Reference to the shared oppression of women worldwide is one of the recurrent tropes of Non una di meno, implicitly or explicitly tied to the well-known discourse of 'global sisterhood' (see for example Predelli and Halsaa, 2012). Conversely, the RAI conglomerate is fully passivated, insofar as it receives the 'presenting' performed by the author and is also the object of the descriptive action in the final part of the tweet, where it gets labeled as 'disgusting'.

A semi-structured interview with one of the activists involved in administering the official Twitter handle of Non una di meno highlighted that the movement did not orchestrate the tweeted protest at #ParliamoneSabato. However, it emerged during the same interview that the movement immediately reacted to the event by staging a sit-in outside the RAI headquarters in Rome. The sit-in was advertised on commercial social media with the hashtag #ParliamoneSubito ('let's talk about it now'): a play on words suggesting that a hypothetical 'Saturday' is too late to discuss sexism on public TV.

d. Politicians

At the time of this writing (January 2018), the realm of parliamentary politics in Italy wasmore or less evenly split between three main currents covering most of the political spectrum: the center-left Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD), a collection of so-called 'moderate' center-right forces, and the non-aligned populist party Movimento 5 Stelle (5 Starts Movement, M5S)[3]. Politicians from all currents voiced their concern over the episode. Speaker of the lower house of parliament Laura Boldrini (Sinistra Italiana, left-of-center) voiced her disbelief in a post stating that:

> There ought to be an immediate sanction from #Rai to the #ParliamoneSabato show. Never again can #women be treated on tv as if they were pets
> (@lauraboldrini, at the time Speaker of the House, 20 March 2016)

In the first sentence of the tweet, Boldrini exerts her personal authority to compel RAI into issuing sanctions onto the show Parliamone… Sabato. The sentence clearly adopts the topos of urgency: action must be taken immediately in light of an event outside of the control of the speaker. The second sentence in the tweet presents several features that are equally interesting. The topos of urgency is possibly adopted again, with reference to the fact that sexism on public television can 'never again' be tolerated. The group 'women' is presented as the subject of a passive sentence in which the action of 'treating' is predicated upon them in the social space of tv broadcasting. Finally, women are also object of a simile that compares them to 'pets', thus highlighting the dehumanizing nature of sexist commentary.

In a similar vein, center-right MP and former Minister for Equal Opportunities Mara Carfagna commented that:

> #Rai should shut down #ParliamoneSabato after reportage that hinders the dignity of women and offends them. There must be

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3 General elections took place on 4 March 2018. While no single party achieved a majority, Movimento 5 Stelle and far-right party Lega Nord (Northern League) agreed to form a government. Partito Democratico is currently the main opposition party.

a prompt decision targeted towards the board of the show (@mara_carfagna, former-Minister for Equal Opportunities, 20 March 2017)

Once again, the personal authority of the speaker is summoned to suggest that RAI 'should' perform the action of 'shutting down' #ParliamoneSabato. The topos of urgency is deployed again: deciding on sanctions for the board of the show must be 'prompt'. The group 'women' is again presented in object position. It is their dignity that is receiving the action of 'hindering', predicated by *Parliamone… Sabato*'s reportage. Reference to dignity is resonant with the dehumanizing simile in the previous example, hinting to a shared feeling between the two politicians.

One further example is that of Roberto Fico (M5S, populist/non-alligned), who presided the Parliamentary Commission for the Monitoring of RAI Public Television at the time of the episode. His message stated that:

I'll soon summon the Office of the President of RAI to discuss what happened at #ParliamoneSabato (@Roberto_Fico, President of the Parliamentary Commission for the Monitoring of RAI Public Television, 20 March 2017)

The speaker is using his personal authority to convey a feeling of urgency. Differently from the previous examples, however, RAI is no longer the agentic actor. Rather, RAI becomes the object upon which Fico himself predicates the action of 'summoning' for the sake of discussing the content of the show. If the act of 'summoning' conveys a certain degree of urgency, the message by Fico differs from the previous examples insofar as it does not convey any clear call for action. The use of the future tense further diffuses the feeling of

urgency. While in the previous examples actions had to be taken 'now' or 'promptly', Fico's own action will happen 'soon'. The purpose of the summon, namely 'to discuss what happened', does not necessarily imply that sanctions will apply. Therefore, Fico's message can be said to be substantially less concerned with the event than those by his colleagues from different political formations.

e. Anti-equality bloggers

Pro-gender equality protests like the one in object are oftentimes accompanied by anti-equality voices that exploit the visibility of the protest to push their own agenda. The case of #ParliamoneSabato is no exception to this trend. An examples is a popular tweet by anti-equality blogger Roger Halsted, where he stated that:

Feminists [are] quacking [like ducks] because of #ParliamoneSabato but have nothing to say on the exploitation behind renting a uterus [Italian vernacular speech for surrogate motherhood] (@RogerHalsted, anti-equality blogger, 20 March 2017)

The speaker is here positioning himself as an observer that happens to be concerned by a scenario in which an outgroup of 'feminists' happens to show outraged for the content of *Parliamone… Sabato* while simultaneously being silent on supposedly more pressing issues such as the possible introduction of a law on surrogate motherhood in Italy[4]. Despite 'feminists' are foregrounded as the subjects of both clauses in this tweet, their voice is heavily delegitimized with an animalizing metaphor:

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4   At the time of this writing, surrogacy is fully illegal under Italian law, although it is not illegal for Italians to seek surrogacy abroad and register their childrenupon re-entry.

they are not endowed with the ability to speak, but only that 'to quack' as if they were ducks. Their point of view is further delegitimized by arguing that their concerns are misplaced: sexism in TV is, according to the author, a matter of no relevance when compared to a much greater threats to women's right supposedly represented by a law on surrogacy, defined through vernacular speech with the degrading metaphor of 'renting a uterus'. Thus, Roger Halsted takes it upon himself to judge the feminists protesting against *Parliamone… Sabato* as 'bad feminists' because of their misplaced anger.

A remarkably similar structure with reference to surrogate motherhood was adopted by another anti-equality blogger (@cris_cersei) whose tweet happened to be the ninth most retweeted one in the dataset. His tweet will not be analyzed here for reasons of space; space that will be devoted to another interesting post by the anti-equality group 'Sentinelle in piedi' (literally, 'standing guards'). Sentinelle in piediisa group of loosely affiliated individuals who recurrently protest against virtually any public initiative in favor of the rights of sexual minorities and the recognition of non-normative family arrangements. Their official Twitter handle exploited the visibility of the protest at #ParliamoneSabato to argue that:

#ParliamoneSabato jokes on Estern European women and gets immediately shut down. When the women of #FamilyDay got humiliated on Mediaset no one flinched. (sentinpiedi, anti-equality group, 23 March 2017).

In the first clause above, the show *Parliamone… Sabato* is presented as an agentic subject. The content of the show is dismissed as 'joking'. Eastern European women are, perhaps unsurprisingly, positioned as the object upon which said joke is predicated. In

the coordinate clause, however, *Parliamone… Sabato* becomes the subject of a passive construction in which it 'gets shut down' but an unnamed authority. This transition sets the scene for the second sentence, in which 'the women of #FamilyDay' (an initiative in favor of traditional family formations supported by Sentinelle in piedi) are the subject on the receiving hand of a passive sentence representing them as 'getting humiliated' in an unspecified show aired in the past on Berlusconi-owned private TV network Mediaset. To add to the humiliation, Sentinelle in piedi seem to argue that in that unspecified case 'no one flinched'.

A key element in the argument contained in the tweet above is an overt complaint for double standards applied by the Italian public and Italian authorities when dealing with broadcasted messages offending different groups of women. That is to say, Sentinelle in piedi complain that a supposedly mild scant towards 'foreign women' (just a joke, as the tweet says) solicited massive public reaction. Conversely, a full-fledged 'humiliation' suffered by 'Italian women' was dismissed by the public as not noteworthy. Embedded in this narrative is the assumption that the Italian public and the Italian authorities operate reverse racism towards 'Italian women', who get no public attention despite allegedly suffering much more serious cases of broadcasted defamation.

Discussion

Through online and limited offline engagement, this paper gathered data to argue that the public reaction to the last episode of *Parliamone… Sabato* was not originally orchestrated by any behind the scenes 'choreographers' (Gerbaudo, 2012). Rather, the public that participated in the tweeted protest seems to have actedin a fashion that resembles the 'affective publics' theorized by Papacharissi (2015). However, the strong prominence of

opinion leaders that enjoyed visibility before the protest began hints to the fact that networked gatekeeping (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008) did not play a major role in shaping which users enjoyed public support. Rather, the popularity of entertainment-related accounts (satirical or journalistic) as well as that of public figures seems to offer ground to support Fuchs' (2013) theorization that social media happen to be spaces where visibility is unequally distributed on the bases of material inequalities. Despite the more or less spontaneous character of the protest, defining the public tweeting at #ParliamoneSabato in terms of a 'self-organizing network' (Bennett and Sageberg, 2012) would probably be too much of a stretch.

The protest was undeniably framed in terms of an act of resistance towards the discourses circulated by 'the few', in this case embodied in the figures of the RAI broadcast network and TV host Paola Perego, as highlighted in the word count analysis. In this sense, the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato might be said to have included an element of synoptic resistance (Kelsey and Bennett, 2014). Despite being aimed at 'the few', however, the very limited user base actively participating in the protest as well as the prominence of institutional voices in the discussion opens up questions regarding the extent to which it can be said to be an act of resistance staged by 'the many'. Once the number of active users participating in the protest by tweeting at #ParliamoneSabato (some 11,000 users) is compared to the 1.5 million viewers of the show on TV alone, the synoptic character of the protest becomes even more questionable.

Setting aside these concerns and looking more closely at the language adopted in the tweets presented above, it emerges very clearly that gender equality happens to be a fairly divisive political issue in the current Italian political scene. The Twitter handles of mainstream news broadcasters somewhat dodged the political nature of the debate and hidbehind a mask of journalistic objectivity. Frequent recourse to the topos of reality, however, made it so that their narratives contributed to constructing a feeling that actions to shut down the show was justified by the status quo.

The posts by satirical accounts might be said to have highlighted the intertwining of migration issues with gendered relations in Italy. Through a wide array of intersectionally sexist and racist stereotypes, satirical accounts might have spoken to the fact that Italians are somewhat uncomfortable with mixed couples being an increasingly common reality. By humorously foregrounding and backgrounding one or another ethnically defined group of men or women, they might have outed the anxieties of the Italian public in the face of growing diversity.

In light of its recent successes, the Italian feminist movement Non una di meno sized the opportunity to participate in the tweeted protest. The movement crafted its message in such a way as to contribute to its broader narrative, in which a collective 'us' made of 'women' is speaking up against structural oppression performed by an 'other' made of 'institutions'. The collective 'us' of Non una di meno is inclusive of migrant women and women not living in Italy, as manifest in the recurrence of the narrative of global sisterhood (Predelli and Halsaa, 2012) oftentimes deployed by the movement and its activists. Noticeably, Non una di meno promptly brought the protest from the digital to the analog by staging a sit-in in front of the RAI headquarter in Rome, articulating a set of demands, and pressuring authorities into complying. While not being the choreographers that 'set the stage' for the protest at #ParliamoneSabato, Non una di meno's leaders might still be considered to be the 'choreographic leaders' of the network that therein emerged (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Politicians from all currents participated in the protest, stating that sanctions against *Parliamone… Sabato* were in order. In most cases, they summoned the authority of which they are invested to legitimize their claims (Van Leeuwen, 2007), and deployed the tops of urgency to legitimize the need to take prompt action against the board of the show. Animalizing metaphors and reference to human dignity were used to highlight the outrageous character of the content of the show and reinforce the call to action against those running it.

Finally, anti-equality voices attempted and somewhat successfully managed to exploit the visibility of the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato to advance their own agenda. The recurrence of animal-related metaphors in their narratives points to the fact that politicians were not far off the mark when protesting against the dehumanizing character of the discussion at *Parliamone… Sabato*. On the one hand, these voices attempted to shift the discussion away from sexism on television and towards a possible law surrogate motherhood, perhaps in response to the (at the time) recently passed law on same-sex civil unions. On the other hand, they complainedabout'reverse racism', pointing to a not-so-latent discomfort with growing diversity. Combining the two, anti-equality voices ultimately betray anxiety in the face of changes that they perceive as existential threats to the viability of their lifestyles.

Conclusion

The protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato emerged from the affective reaction of the public to what was perceived as a particularly outrageous case of sexism and racism on public media broadcasting. The protest seemed to hold RAI television network and TVhostess Paola Perego responsible, possibly characterizing it as a protest aimed at 'the few'. Despite this, the prominence of previously existing opinion leaders and the narrowness of the user base involved make it hard to interpret the protest as staged by 'the many' and thus as an act of synoptic resistance by a self-organizing network. The different actors involved in the protest deployed a wide array of strategies to argue for the shutting down of the show in object. Interestingly, many of these arguments betrayed the anxieties of the Italian public for growing diversity in the country, manifest in the intertwining of sexism and racism in commentary over gender issues in Italy. Finally, it is worth noticing that the protest might have originate online, but promptly traveled to the analogue realm with the staging of a physical protest orchestrated by the 'Non una di meno' network. Further research should explore the dynamic relationship between online and offline mobilization in the Italian context and beyond. In this sense, a methodology such as the one presented in this study can be one among many ways of approaching online text as a form of social mobilization without losing sight of the relevance of material structures and activities underlying and structuring its production, circulation, and reception. ◉

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