

## The Dark Heart of Motherhood in Italy

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### Maternal Ambivalence in Contemporary Italian Film

*In a country where the maternal instinct is still considered a conditio sine qua non of being a woman, maternal ambivalence is one of the ultimate taboos. But Italian filmmakers are trying to change that. Four recent Italian films—Lo spazio bianco by Francesca Comencini (2009), Maternity Blues by Fabrizio Cattani (2011), Quando la notte by Cristina Comencini (2011), and Tutto parla di te by Alina Marazzi (2012)—use everything from single motherhood and postpartum depression to infanticide as a lens through which to approach this “unspeakable” topic. This article demonstrates how the archetype of the loving, self-sacrificing mother that lies at the heart of the Italian identity is also the source of its twenty-first-century motherhood crisis and that Italian women’s ambivalence about motherhood is paralleled by a national one: a deeply rooted contradiction between private worship and public lack of support.*

A remarkable number of twenty-first-century Italian films have focused on the subject of motherhood, reflecting not only its enduring centrality in the national imagination but also a growing tension around the shifting roles of women and mothers in Italian society. As film critic Marco Giusti writes:

Maternity, the inability to procreate and the crisis of being a mother seem almost obsessive subjects of recent Italian cinema, especially women’s films, as though the profound crisis of Italian society, which is more or less Catholic, were tied to the crisis of the very foundations of the family. The inability to procreate or the refusal of motherhood blatantly proclaims the cultural sterility of a country deeply scarred by its own fears and contradictions.

In fact, four of these films—produced in quick succession by established directors and distributed nationally—form a subcategory devoted to the topic of maternal ambivalence: Francesca Comencini’s *Lo spazio bianco* (2009), Fabrizio Cattani’s *Maternity Blues* (2011), Cristina Comencini’s *Quando la notte* (2011), and Alina Marazzi’s *Tutto parla di te* (2012). I argue that the appearance of these films represents an urgent, if ultimately ghettoized, feminist response to the motherhood crisis in Italy. This response involves dismantling the archetype of the benevolent self-sacrificing mother that remains at the heart of the Italian identity and shifting the responsibility of parenting off the shoulders of individual women in the private sphere to the collective shoulders of the public.

I begin by addressing the role of the mother figure in the Italian imagination and what appears to be a paradox—that a culture centred on the veneration of mothers is witnessing a dramatic rise in the number of women refusing to become them—but what actually represents cause and consequence. After briefly contextualizing the films in question within recent film and feminist theory, I examine how they look at the subject of maternal ambivalence through the lens of various experiences, from single motherhood and postpartum depression to infanticide. I show how, in so doing, these films collectively propose an antidote to the patriarchal, one-dimensional, and objectifying good-mother trope by foregrounding complex, subjective motherhood experiences. Finally, I discuss the interrelated themes that emerge when the films are viewed together, including solitude and unspeakability, and how these point toward solutions to the motherhood crisis. Indeed, they underscore the need to publically support mothers in a tangible way—not by placing them on pedestals and worshipping a traditional idea of their role but by acknowledging their problematic contemporary reality and giving them a voice.

### The Mother Figure in Italy: Rhetoric versus Reality

Italians are known the world over for their worship of *la mamma* and their prioritization of familial bonds. Sociologist Janet Finch has explained the phenomenon in the following way:

To Italians, relationships with both relatives and friends form a much more integral part of daily life than elsewhere. They are more likely to share a home with their relatives and also to have relatives living nearby. They are more likely to visit or telephone relatives daily and also to be in daily contact with a “best friend.” Relationships between parents and children seem particularly important. (101)

Add to that the enduring predominance of the Virgin Mary and the almost total exclusion of women from public life and the result is a world-renowned devotion to the mother figure captured in the classic image of the adoring matriarch with childbearing hips sharing her culinary bounty with her family. This association is further supported by the international fame of Italian words like pizza, spaghetti, and mamma mia—one of the most commonly used daily expressions in Italy, which means “my mother,” and is used to convey everything from exasperation to surprise. John Hooper puts it as follows:

Whatever else may have changed, the cult of the mamma in Italy has shown itself to be extraordinarily durable. The respect shown towards mothers—or rather the lip service paid to motherhood—is well nigh boundless. And the importance of having—and enjoying—children is impressed on women at all turns. It begins in church, with the worship of Mary. Their elders, their peers, the advertisements girls and women see in magazines and on television and radio all reinforce the message that there is no more important job in life than that of being a mamma. Since it is tantamount to blasphemy in most circles in Italy to assert that children are anything but an unmitigated blessing and delight, a childless woman is usually an object of pity. (152)

Despite its cultural veneration of the mother figure, Italy is also renowned for having one of the lowest fertility rates in the Western world. As the lowest in the European Union (EU), Italy’s birth rate in 2015 fell to eight babies born for every one thousand residents, fewer than in any other years since the modern state was formed in 1861. Health Minister Beatrice Lorenzin has responded to the news by saying that if Italians do not do something to reverse the trend, they face a birth rate “apocalypse.” This “motherhood crisis” has conservative, Catholic Italians in particular wringing their hands, blaming individual women for selfishly shirking their responsibility to their country by choosing not to procreate. Countering this position are, on the one hand, populationists who naturally argue that no crisis exists and, on the other, feminists who suggest that the nature of the crisis should be thought of differently to help women become mothers, if they want to, by improving, for example, support for those who work outside the home. In her 2012 book *O i figli o il lavoro* (*Either Children or Work*), Chiara Valentini argues that women in Italy struggle to reconcile motherhood with work more than in any other European country. Silvia Ferreri’s 2007 documentary *Uno virgola due* (*One Point Two*) similarly addresses the appalling discrimination Italian women face in the workplace, including the widespread practice of hiring female employees on the condition that they sign undated letters of resignation—*dimissioni in bianco*—to

be filed and used in the future if they should ever become pregnant. The fact that Italian maternity benefits are some of the most generous in the world is precisely why women have such difficulty finding employers willing to hold up their end of that bargain. Furthermore, as Hooper points out, even a mamma who does manage to secure and keep a stable job, despite considerable social pressure to give it up after having her first child, “finds that the state offers her little help in balancing her role as a mother with her other duties at home and work” (Hooper 153). Not only are there very few private or publically funded daycare centres available (with child-related social spending in Italy at less than half the EU average [BBC]), but even when children grow up, mothers must figure out how to work around secondary school hours established back when most mothers were housewives. Perhaps worse still is the fact that, as Hooper puts it, “Italian husbands have proved deeply reluctant to share the burden of looking after the house” (Hooper 153). In *Ma le donne no (Women Certainly Not)*, Caterina Soffici explains that according to a 2009 study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, in Italy men have 81½ more minutes of leisure time a day than women—more than in any of the seventeen other countries analyzed. Adding the five minutes of extra time that they take for self-care (eating, sleeping, washing), which is also higher than in the other countries, it works out to nearly an hour and a half every day or two and a half months a year (Soffici 191-193).

According to Hooper, “There are few areas of [Italian] society in which the contrast between rhetoric and reality is so blatant: on the one hand, the glorification of the mamma and the worship of the Madonna, and on the other a society in which only children are becoming almost as common as siblings” (154). However, what appears on the surface as such a startling disconnect actually conceals a causal connection. The object of veneration—the archetypal perfect, self-sacrificing mother—is in fact one of the sources of the “motherhood crisis.” Hooper himself asserts that “the cult of the mamma ... provides employers with the ideal justification for getting rid of workers who would otherwise have to be maintained through their unproductive maternity leave” 152). Feminist author Giorgia Serughetti also argues that

The absence of government policies that seriously aim to promote the equal distribution of domestic and care duties is simply a perpetuation of the ‘good and loving mother’ model devoted to self-sacrifice that has conditioned the European culture for centuries.... The more that women are reduced to wombs, to “cradles for the future,” the less that educated, knowledgeable women who want to design their role in society themselves will be attracted by such an antiquated and penalizing model of reproduction and care.

In fact, in a 2004 University of Florence statistical study on Italian women without children, representing about 20 percent of the country's female population, only a small percentage of those who were childfree by choice said they would have made a different choice had better public policies supporting motherhood been in place. A full third of the women, on the other hand, said they chose not to have children because of the excessive sacrifice required of them, including having to bear the full weight of childcare and experiencing a loss in status and rights both within the couple and within society (Mencarini and Tanturri). The sacrifice and responsibility that mothers in Italy are expected to bear alone are inherent in the archetype of the selfless good mother who puts her family's needs ahead of her own. And this figure is intertwined with the idea that woman equals mother. Literary scholar Adalgisa Giorgio explains the relationship this way:

In the past one hundred and fifty years the cult of the Madonna has developed in parallel with economic, social, political and cultural changes which have assigned women the roles of procreators, carers, and educators of children, and of custodians and transmitters of the highest moral, religious and patriotic values.... Womanhood has been erased by motherhood, and motherhood has primarily meant generating and nurturing the male child.... Within this set-up, the daughter has no independent status: she is trained to become the mother/wife of the son/husband. Any Italian daughter searching for autonomy and individuality must negotiate this powerful maternal imaginary. (120)

In a culture that leaves women to deal with motherhood alone and psychologically isolated, is it any wonder the country is suffering a "motherhood crisis"? To counter this toxic, one-dimensional caricature of what mothers are "supposed to be," the four films discussed in this article share personal, multidimensional, and realistic perspectives on what mothers are. They also indirectly propose that one solution to Italy's current identity crisis, disguised as a motherhood crisis, is to pull the mother figure off her pedestal—or in other words, to give her dimensions and complexity, to stop objectifying her, to perceive her as a thinking being, and to listen to her personal experience. Such a proposal would shift the public rhetoric from what women can do for society to what society can do for women.

### Recent Women's Cinema in Italy: A Quiet Revolution

The efforts of the films in question to prioritize and give voice to maternal

subjectivities in Italy fall in line with a cinematic trend identified by Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo—a “quiet revolution” to “reframe” the Italian experience from a woman’s perspective. Of the five trends they identify in recent Italian women’s cinema, three relate to motherhood: the reconfiguration of the mother-daughter relationship; the reinvention of mothers through the gendering of history and memory; and women negotiating the contemporary workplace. Motherhood is indeed such a popular filmic subject that over the last ten years, in addition to the four films discussed here, it has been the focus of another twenty Italian films directed by both women and men.<sup>2</sup>

The cinematic trend identified by Luciano and Scarparo echoes the recent Italian feminist theory developed by philosophers and literary critics such as Luisa Muraro, the Milan Women’s Bookshop Collective, and Diotima. Luciano and Scarparo explain that in the last thirty years such writers “have theorized the need for women to (re)discover and/or (re)create their subjectivities in a search for a female genealogy.” Setting aside the one film in the group directed (albeit sensitively) by a man, the achievements of the remaining three films in question are summarized in Stefania Benini’s discussion, in her review of Luciano and Scarparo’s book, of what unites contemporary Italian women directors:

They put marginal characters and points of view at the center of a feminized space, a space notable for its peripheral and domestic character. They shift the old patriarchal axis and neorealist anxiety around fatherhood, creating a feminine dimension of the narrative and of the landscape.... At the same time these cinematic endeavors become a political project, which reads the maternal as a powerful foundation for women’s status as subjects. This undertaking is all about owning the mother and letting the mother own herself, reestablishing her authority, freedom, empathy and understanding.

Luciano and Scarparo contend that although these Italian women directors are not overtly feminist—they view themselves more as working out of post-feminism—their oeuvre “increasingly foregrounds a desire to engage, create, and conceive of female subjectivity on screen” (Luciano and Scarparo).

Before discussing how these four films, though not explicitly feminist themselves, nevertheless represent a feminist response to the motherhood crisis, I take a look at how each one approaches the subject of maternal ambivalence.

## The Films

Francesca Comencini’s 2009 film *Lo spazio bianco* (*The White Space*) is based on eponymous book by Valeria Parrella and tells the story of an adult edu-

cation teacher in Naples named Maria, who winds up single and pregnant. Her daughter is born three months early, and most of the film depicts Maria's struggle to simply wait and see if her baby lives or dies. The white space of the title is at once the white intensive care unit and the psychological blank slate with which Maria is presented.

This film portrays the ambivalence of an accidental single mother in her forties who feels no connection to children and chafes against the loss of her freedom. As critic Natasha Senjanovic points out, the movie takes for granted that there is nothing wrong with an independent woman spurning motherhood and does not judge her for her lack of maternal instinct. It is a quiet, contemplative film, with much conveyed through Maria's facial expressions and only a modest amount of dialogue. As a poetic evocation of the fear, discomfort, exasperation, and insecurity that mark the transition into motherhood, it successfully conveys that warping of time with the interminable stretches of monotony, and what can for some women feel like a torturous relinquishment of everything they knew themselves to be. This is, of course, all part of becoming a mother and all necessary. As psychiatrist Gabriella Giustino writes, "The little one that the protagonist takes into her arms [at the end of the film] is finally 'her' daughter. Maria has learned to love-her/hate-her amidst a thousand uncertainties." This moment is moving and a tender tribute to the highs on the rollercoaster ride of new motherhood that can make the lows worth it.

The 2011 film *Maternity Blues* by Fabrizio Cattani, the only male director in the group, is based on the play *From Medea* by Grazia Verasani about the lives of four women—Clara, Eloisa, Rina, and Vincenza—who are hospitalized in a psychiatric institution on the coast of Tuscany for having murdered their own children. We see them go about their daily lives, in group therapy sessions, doing laundry duty, and confiding in one another. The four women represent classic female archetypes: the seemingly perfect wife and mother hiding severe emotional instability, the rebel-slut, the devout mother figure, and the naïve ingénue. But what more than makes up for the poor character development is the respectful and delicate approach the film takes to its horrifying subject matter. Without judging or forgiving, Cattani puts a human face on a monstrous act by providing context for the moment each woman snapped, which underlines their lack of support. As film critic Alessandra Pagliacci points out, Cattani implies that the problem in these cases is not the depression in itself but rather the psychological solitude. And statistics bear this out: in a 2013 study that examined the cases of thirty-six mothers who committed infanticide in Italy between 1992 and 2010, all thirty-six had underestimated psychopathological disorders and only six had been regularly treated (D'argenio, Catania, and Marchetti).

*Quando La Notte* (*When the Night*) by Cristina Comencini, also from 2011 and based on Comencini's popular novel of the same title, tells the story of Marina, a young mother whose husband has sent her to the mountains of Piedmont for a month alone with their two-year-old son. One night, during another bout of incessant crying, she screams at him to stop and throws him to the ground before collapsing to the ground herself. Her neighbour Manfred breaks down the door and brings the boy to the hospital, and Marina eventually confesses to him what happened. Marina and Manfred's obvious attraction for each other is left unconsummated until Marina returns to the mountains fourteen years later to reconnect with Manfred, and they engage in a short-lived affair.

Although the cinematography is beautiful and the setting is exploited well for dramatic effect, this is the weakest of the four films. Marina's character is flat, and Manfred is an unsympathetic, abusive misogynist whose sins Comencini seems to equate with those of Marina. The director's attempts to symbolically portray Marina's ambivalence are hit or miss. Showing her bus entering a tunnel just as a child starts to cry works well, for example, but the child's drawing Manfred finds with the words love and hate scrawled across it is regrettably facile.

Alina Marazzi's *Tutto parla di te* (*All About You*) of 2013 centres on the friendship between an older woman, Pauline, and a younger woman, Emma, who meet at *a casa maternità*—a community center for new and expecting mothers—in Turin. By helping Emma work through her postpartum depression and recognizing her own mother's struggle in what Emma is going through, Pauline learns to forgive her mother for having killed her younger brother and abandoned her when she was a child.

Not only does this film address maternal ambivalence in the most comprehensive way of the four, it is also the most successful. Like Francesca Comencini, Marazzi takes a lyrical, experimental and, in her own words, "feminine" approach to the subject by using various languages to tell the story (Marazzi). Interspersed with the narrative about Emma and Pauline's relationship are black-and-white home movies and stop-motion animation, which represent Pauline's past, as well as real interview clips with mothers at *a casa maternità* who are struggling or have struggled with so-called baby blues. These poignant interviews, which betray Marazzi's background in documentary filmmaking, form the beating heart of the film.

### Peeling Back the Mother Mask

All four of these films fight the widespread belief in Italy that the maternal instinct is the "sine qua non of being a woman," as film critic Edoardo Gheci puts it. Cristina Comencini similarly insists, "No woman is equipped with



the *senso di maternità* [maternal instinct] ... it's something you learn by living alongside your own baby" (qtd. in Severin). Cattani writes in the notes to his film that "The idea that there's this natural bond between mothers and children that originates in birth ... a bond that many deny exists between fathers and children, is for all intents and purposes a myth" (qtd. in Santoni). Indeed, as film critic Pagliacci says with reference to Cattani's film, "The refusal to examine the ambivalence of human feelings and the assumption that motherhood is natural are precisely what spark the tragedy." This damaging assumption goes hand in hand with the perfect mother archetype. As the editors of an online Italian magazine for mothers put it, "The radiant, confident, protective mother, the perfect incarnation of a natural, infallible maternal instinct is a deeply rooted myth in Italy" (*Tutto Mamma*).

Consequently, women in Italy who choose not to have children, who experience postpartum depression, who feel conflicted about motherhood, who deeply mourn the loss of their autonomy, or who do not otherwise joyously celebrate bringing a child into the world are made to feel unnatural, deviant, and alone. Psychologist-photographer Gisella Congia, who in 2011 launched a multimedia project on maternal ambivalence called "Chiaroscuri nella maternità" (Darkness and Light in Motherhood), blames the Italian media for portraying motherhood without a hint of nuance. She argues the following: "The images at women's disposal are part of a continuum that goes from the perfect mother to her opposite, mothers who commit infanticide. The media completely overlooks images and information that strike the heart of [maternal ambivalence] and represent most women" (qtd. in Colmi). Feminist author Loredana Lipperini warns that reducing women to their role as breeders is one more way of perpetuating their objectification:

Day after day, it seems every issue related to women is always traced back to their body, to be covered or uncovered, and above made to be made fertile, and once again women seem able to be nothing but flesh; they seem, in that flesh, to be nailed up, and it doesn't matter if the body in question is the desirable one of the girl or the venerable one of the mother. There is never a head, on this body.

The films discussed here fight this kind of flattened view of the mother figure by providing a more realistic and multidimensional picture of motherhood than Italians are used to seeing. In so doing, they defy a cultural habit of sweeping family problems under the rug by publically acknowledging the challenges of becoming a mother and the complicated, human ways women can react to the experience in a country where that identity is pregnant with contradictory cultural expectations.

## Solitude, Unspeakability, Solutions

A few themes emerge when the films are viewed together that collectively point the way toward solutions to the “motherhood crisis.” The predominant thread is the solitude of the mother protagonists—not only the total absence of blood relatives (besides children) but also a psychological solitude. The films directed by women all use setting to portray this, either showing the women alone among many inside a bustling city—Naples in *Lo Spazio Bianco* and Turin in *Tutto parla di te*—or physically alone on the top of a mountain in *Quando la notte*. In the latter, Marina’s solitude is contrasted by Manfred’s sister-in-law, whose husband catered to her in early motherhood. Cattani, on the other hand, rarely shows his four protagonists alone; instead, he refers to the prior solitude that, much like Marina’s case in *Quando la notte*, led to their horrific crimes. At one point, the psychiatrist treating them explains to a conference audience that when women commit infanticide “they’re often in a trance, dismayed by a deep sense of solitude.” At the end of *Tutto parla di te*, once Emma has started recovering from her depression, she says to Pauline about her baby, “I realize I could have hurt him.” And Pauline says, “No, you weren’t left alone like my mother was.” However, even as a single mother by choice, Maria in *Lo spazio bianco* is made to feel isolated when the office clerk at the birth registry insists on labelling her child “illegitimate,” as though hers cannot be considered a “normal” family.

The taboo nature of maternal ambivalence causes and compounds the isolation of these mothers. “Why didn’t anyone ever tell me how hard it was going to be?” is the new mother’s refrain heard throughout the films. During a Q&A following a screening of her film in Florence on 15 April 2013, Marazzi referred to this phenomenon as a form of *omertà*—a family-based code of silence—between women: “Maybe you forget or maybe it’s a protective instinct towards daughters who will be mothers.” All four films underscore the need to emotionally support new mothers by allowing them to talk about their experience and be reassured that they are not alone. In *Quando la notte*, Manfred’s sister-in-law—the embodiment of the *buona madre*—tells Marina as she expertly stirs a giant pot of polenta that motherhood can drive her a bit crazy too, and a weight visibly lifts from Marina’s shoulders. Feminist activist Lea Melandri has praised Comencini for using her film to speak about the unspeakable: “Removing, censoring, pretending that anger, unlike tenderness, has no place at home, is surely no more educational than opening our eyes to that ‘emptiness,’ interrogating it, and ceasing to call it ‘inexplicable.’” Cattani is in full agreement:

It’s essential that we talk about women’s psychological issues such as

this one. From the various encounters I have had with psychological professionals I have seen that women who commit infanticide and women who are abused are united in the silence and the context of solitude in which they live.... Few counsellors or help centers exist in Italy. We need to incentivize the opening of more, because through support and talking with experts and also other mothers we can attack that sense of inadequacy and the depression that can lead a woman to commit an extreme act against herself or the ones she loves most (qtd. in Poli).

Congia says that the taboo is a deeply rooted cultural issue in Italy, unlike “other European countries [where] support services are borne precisely to receive [this feeling of] ‘I can’t do it,’ which is viewed as legitimate and worth defending” (Colmi).

The films also honour the idea of friends as surrogate family members, even as preferable to immediate family in supporting women who struggle with motherhood. *Tutto parla di te* shows how helpful centres, such as the one portrayed in the film, can be for mothers who may not get the support that they need from their family. “Many of the women that I interviewed [for the documentary parts of the film] would start crying when I asked how things were with their [own] mother,” said Marazzi at the aforementioned Q&A. She explained she wanted to “tell the story of the relationships young mothers can have to help them escape difficult situations.” Older and wiser than the other protagonists, Maria in *Lo spazio bianco* deals with her ambivalence in the healthiest way by, primarily, confiding in her best friend Fabrizio. The importance of solidarity, the sense of not being the only one to feel conflicted about motherhood, is similarly central. One of the women interviewed by Marazzi in *Tutto parla di te* tearfully confesses that she now understands what can lead some mothers to hurt their own children. Indeed, a central aim of *Maternity Blues* is to remind us that everyone has a dark side and that confiding in others and getting support can help prevent bad things from happening. Analytical psychologist Barbara Massimilla explains such support as follows:

Motherhood is an event that forces your identity to undergo a profound reorganization. The psychic work that accompanies each procreative phase, from planning for the child to gestation to birth, necessitates an internal listening on the parts of not only the future mother but also her family and the society she belongs to.... Although it is an individual experience, motherhood therefore needs to be shared, with one’s partners and with society, since bringing a child into the world is also a community responsibility.

Congia says that she was inspired to continue her project documenting maternal ambivalence among Italian women because of how therapeutic it was for them to share their stories with her, free of judgment. She says that it works for both the confessors and those listening: “They’re not just telling us about themselves, they’re interpreting aspects of the stories of many women who might recognize themselves and therefore feel normal and legitimate” (qtd. in Colmi).

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, the “revolution” identified by Luciano and Scarparo remains truly quiet. With their work ghettoized as “women’s film,” few of today’s Italian women directors—who make up just seven percent of all directors in Italy—are known outside specialist circles (Zangarini). In the case of the four films discussed here, although all were screened at international festivals, not one was distributed outside Italy and only one (*Quando la notte*) could be considered big budget. The lessons contained in the films have, therefore, remained under the radar and generally unheeded. Certainly, Italian Health Minister Beatrice Lorenzin has paid no attention. In August 2016, a desire to defend against the birth rate “apocalypse” led her health ministry to produce a disastrous series of images to promote its Fertility Day campaign with insulting, infantilizing messages exhorting the nation’s women to breed. The campaign stubbornly ignored both the urgent need in Italy to improve public support for mothers and the harm that comes from reducing women to their wombs. Incensed, Italian women and men immediately took to social media in droves to criticize the campaign with such intensity that it was withdrawn within days. As Serughetti contends, not only was it misguided, but it was also counterproductive:

Stigmatizing the choice or the condition of not being a mother, reminding women of their duty to their country to be fertile, blaming women for their own infertility, for having waited too long to want a baby: these messages not only erase women’s freedom and responsibility in their procreative decisions, but paradoxically work to produce precisely the opposite result.

Although the campaign may seem anachronistic in many ways (including clear echoes of 1930s fascist slogans entreating women to produce children for the fatherland), it sadly represents what remains a mainstream view, according to which women are selfish, *donne a metà* (“half women”) if they choose not to have children. Writer and radio host Giulia Blasi says that “the problem is

not just the posters but the mentality that made them seem appropriate, well done and not at all offensive; the same mentality that has made motherhood undesirable for millions of women, whether or not they possess any maternal instinct.”

For some reason, the Italian government is still unwilling to hear what women are saying: that they do need to breed: to be heard; to be seen as more than just mothers; to be allowed to contribute equally to society and the public good inside and outside the home; to have more *case maternità*, more daycare options, equal pay for equal work, policies against workplace discrimination, and incentives for men to contribute their fair share at home. However, there is one bright side to the Fertility Day fiasco that leaves cause for hope: the fact that Italian writers such as Blasi independently caused this gaffe on the health minister’s part to go internationally viral—when it could just as easily have remained a minor national news item—demonstrated the thrilling potential of social media’s impact on social change when paired with feminist activism. It also confirmed that motherhood really is a subject that is worth everyone’s collective effort to support, whether they want to become parents themselves or not.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise specified, all translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup>Daniele Vicari’s *Sole Cuore Amore* (2016); Roan Johnson’s *Piuma* (2016); Luca Lucini’s *Nemiche per la pelle* (2016); Marilisa Piga and Nicoletta Nesler’s *Lunàdigas* (2016); Fabio Lovino’s *Mothers* (2016); Mario Balsamo’s *Mia madre fa l’attrice* (2015); Nanni Moretti’s *Mia madre (My Mother)* (2015); Nefeli Sarri’s *Incinta (Pregnant)* (2015); Alessandra Bruno’s *Stato interessante* (2015); Michele Placido’s *La scelta (The Choice)* (2015); Emanuela Cau and Gisella Congia’s *La mamma è il posto fisso* (2014); Daria Menozzi and Elisabetta Pandimiglio’s *Sbagliate* (2014); Saverio Costanza’s *Hungry Hearts* (2014); Claudia Cipriani’s *Lasciando la baia del re (Leaving King’s Bay)* (2011); Maria Martinelli and Simona Cocozza’s *Over the rainbow* (2010); Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel’s *Non è ancora domani (La Pivellina)* (2009); Andrea Zambelli’s *Di madre in figlia* (2008); Alessandro Capone’s *L’amore nascosto (Hidden Love)* (2007); Silvia Ferreri’s *Uno virgola due* (2007) and Kim Rossi Stuart’s *Anche libero va bene (Along the Ridge)* (2006). Here and elsewhere, translations are provided in parentheses only for those films with official English titles.

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