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Cannons and Rubberboats

Oriana Fallaci and the “Clash of Civilizations”

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Abstract

Written in October 2001 as a “gut reaction” to the attack on the Twin Towers, first as a long article in the daily *Il Corriere della Sera* and then in book form (in its original shape, twice as long as the article) in December 2001, Oriana Fallaci’s pamphlet *La rabbia e l’orgoglio* (Anger and Pride) was in its 26th edition when I bought it in September 2004. Its follow-up, *La forza della ragione* (The Force of Reason), has already sold 800,000 copies since its publication in 2004. ~~Ha~~ ~~other words,~~ Oriana Fallaci has emerged after 9/11 as the strongest and most vocal Italian representative of the “clash of civilisations” theory. This essay analyses the constitutive elements of her discourse (Italian nationalism, values instead of history and politics, and violent speech conflating Islam, terrorism and immigrants) and tries to understand its appeal and the sources of its authority in Fallaci’s career, in order to outline the specific Italian version of the clash of civilisations “theory”.

Keywords: Oriana Fallaci – Islamophobia – Contemporary Italy – rhetoric – clash of civilizations.

~~‘As Italians we should only thank you for having put on paper thoughts and feelings that are common to that silent majority which has not been newsworthy for some time now. Thank you Oriana for having drawn such a merciless portrait of the Islamic world as it really is. [...] Thank you Oriana for consistently and lucidly being non-conformist, avoiding easy *buonismi* and tactical positions which are so fashionable nowadays’ (Schiavone 2001).—~~

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~~I thank *signora* Fallaci for what she has said about Italy and for making me aware of what I always felt inside me, I am proud of being Italian, not because of some obtuse nationalism but because I know I~~

~~the son of a country which gave Leonardo, Galileo, Giordano Bruno, Fermi, Verdi to humanity, and
Corriere would not be large enough to name them all' (anonymous 2001).¹~~

There is a simple reason why we need to talk about Oriana Fallaci (1929-) and her booklet *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio* (*Anger and Pride*).² Written in October 2001 as a “gut reaction” to the attack on the Twin Towers, it was published first as a long article in *Il Corriere della Sera*, then in book form, twice as long as the original article and with a 50-pag preface, by Rizzoli editore in December 2001. It was in its 26th edition when I bought it in September 2004. Rizzoli, which owns the *Corriere della Sera*/RSC group and has been Fallaci’s publisher since 1953, proudly claims that *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio* has been the greatest non-fiction bestseller ever in Italy, selling more than a million copies in the first ten months of publication, and has marketed the book relentlessly. Its follow-up, *La Forza della Ragione* (*The Force of Reason*), has already sold 800,000 copies since its publication in 2004, and the two books are sold together with a self-interview as a trilogy, advertised as a “gift package”. Its French and German translations also made it to the bestseller list, and by 2002 the book had been translated and published in Spain, Portugal, Holland, Hungary, Israel, Poland, Romania and Korea, and the US. *Anger and Pride* provoked a furore in Italy on its publication, as we will see, and in France its publication by PLON was followed by widespread accusations of racism by “red fascists” and the “Parisian press” (Fallaci’s words, Fallaci 2002b: 1). While *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio* appeared after a ten-year long silence,³ since 2001 Fallaci has made several appearances in print and on Italian television, intervening famously against the anti-global meeting held in Florence, her native city, in November 2002, against the referendum to reform the existing restrictive legislation on artificial insemination and, most recently, on the London bombings of 7 July 2005 (Fallaci 2005).

¹ *Corriere della sera*, 2 October 2001, id.

² Translated into English by the author herself as *The Rage and the Pride*, it was published by Rizzoli New York in 2002. There exist also several web translations, e.g. by Letizia Grasso to be found at http://www.borg.com/~paperina/fallaci/fallaci_1.html, by Chris and Paula Newman at http://www.travelbrochuregraphics.com/extra/oriana_fallaci_anger_and_pride.htm, and at <http://italian.about.com/library/fallaci/blfallaci23.htm>.

In other words, Oriana Fallaci has emerged after 9/11 not only as the strongest opinion maker in Italy on the “clash of civilizations” theory, but her success and the support from readers indicate that she gives voice to sentiments which find widespread support in Italy’s silent majority. Although the question of Islam divides Italians in a way that cuts across traditional political faultlines, and although Fallaci’s polemic is stridently against *all* existing Italian political forces, nevertheless its appeal to a proud national identity and the defence of Italian territory against immigrants from Islamic countries echoes a discourse on the defence of Italy’s, and Europe’s, “Christian roots” that finds favour among wide sections of the Italian clergy (including the current Pope, Benedict XVI), the Northern League and other members of the Centre-Right coalition and, most importantly, among many Italians.

This essay will investigate the roots of Fallaci’s authority and popularity in the persona she has built up over the years through her previous books and articles. It will then analyse the ideological discourse and powerful rhetoric of *La Rabbia e l’Orgoglio*, paying special attention to its articulation of national identity. My analysis will follow the development of her arguments as they appear in the book, since the *structure* of her polemic is functional to its content. What is particularly pertinent for us to ask is what particular ideological configuration the clash of civilisations theory takes on in Italy and what contingent conditions and Italian identity it is predicated upon. Finally, in the light of the readers’ responses and letters sent to the *Corriere della Sera*, I will seek to assess the purchase of Fallaci’s anti-Islamic tirade ~~in the light of~~ and what it can tell us about Italian attitudes towards immigration and Islam.

An eye-witness to history

If I may start on an autobiographical note, I remember reading Oriana Fallaci’s books avidly as a teenager in Italy. I think that *Intervista con la Storia* (1974, 400,000 copies) was the first book on

³ Her previous reportage for *Corriere della Sera* had been on the Gulf War in 1991.

contemporary history and international politics that I ever read. Then came her book on the American space mission (*Se il sole muore*, 1965), followed in succession by her gutsy, prize-winning reportage on the Vietnam war (*Niente e così sia*, 1969, Bancarella prize, 430,000 copies), her heart-wrenching *Lettera a un bambino mai nato* (1975, 1,250,000 copies) on her naturally aborted baby, and the quasi-novel *Un uomo* (820,000 copies, 1979), her declaration of love for Alexis Panagulis and political exposé of Greece under military rule.⁴ Every book contributed, as critics have pointed out, to the creation of an autobiographical persona which has been, in writer Michele Prisco's words, her most successful literary creation, i.e. the gutsy, tough war reporter who brings the same toughness to anything she writes about, the young woman who dares to enter men's world, become a professional journalist and question the most powerful men on earth, and at the same time who is not shy to explore new sexual and emotional territories in ways that seemed to mirror the feminist movement of the 1970s.ADD A FOOTNOTE OR REFERENCE TO MICHELE PRISCO? This reputation for toughness, for brutal sincerity (brutal *hence* sincere) and for being an eye-witness has remained with her. Together, these qualities make up her *auctoritas*. As in her other texts, in *La Rabbia e L'Orgoglio* both the main text and the preface begin with a self-reflexive, autobiographical *incipit*.

To the Readers:

I had chosen silence. I had chosen exile. Because in America, and the time has come to shout it loud and clear, I live like a political refugee. I live in a political self-exile that I imposed on myself, at the same time as my father, many years ago. That is, from the time when we both realized that to live side by side with an Italy where ideals lay on the rubbish heap had become too difficult, too painful, and disappointed/offended/wounded we left behind the great majority of our fellow citizens. (Fallaci 2002a: 7)

⁴ Her novels, including *Penelope alla guerra* (1961), *Gli antipatici* (1963) and *Insciallab* (1990) were, at least initially, less successful, though *Insciallab*, which was first serialized in the *Corriere*, won the SuperBancarella prize and has sold 600,000 copies (Zaccuri 1997).

The first part of the main text continues with her personal anger at the many people (?) in Italy as well as Palestine who toasted the attack on the Twin Towers. It was this deeply-felt indignation which prompted her to “break her silence”. Personal reaction and strong, gut feelings are two of the basic ingredients of the heady mixture of Fallaci’s writings.

Another source of her appeal, again thinking back to my teenager self, also lay in the fact that, in an age when political debates and arguments were always couched in an extremely abstract and abstruse language (“politichese”), Fallaci wrote clearly and directly and made politics a matter of personalities. We must remember that media interviews then were not the ubiquitous phenomenon they are now. It gave a rare *frisson* to read her direct questioning of Henry Kissinger, Golda Meir or Yasser Arafat, hammering them until she either got replies or else showed that her subjects were shying away from “the truth” she was after. Fallaci came to the political leaders she interviewed with the common person’s distrust of power and lack of interest in political ideologies. Her politics was made of bold and simple ideals—freedom, democracy, the fight against dictatorship and injustice. Much was made in those interviews, and in later ones with Khomeini after the Iranian Revolution and with Ghadafy, of the difficulty in getting to the interviewee, of the dangers she exposed herself to, her “toughness” in not giving up and standing her own ground. In her interviews with Arafat, Khomeini and Ghadafy Fallaci was never interested in their ideological arguments— for her they were either fighters (“guerrigliero” is the most generous term she used for Arafat) or dictators, and as such to be despised and exposed as ruthless and, ultimately, vain.⁵ The only powerful people she took to were either women leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Golda Meir, who unlike male leaders were open with her about their personal lives and with whom she developed an empathy apparently based on their common struggle and success in a men’s world, or men who were able to convince her that power was not what they were after— “gentlemen” like Norodom Sihanuk or the Italian Socialist Pietro Nenni— often elderly men with a touch of failure or tragedy about them.

⁵ For the interview with Arafat, see *Intervista con la storia*, pp. 145-60; the interview with Khomeini was published in *Corriere della Sera*, 26 September 1979, and that with Ghadafy in *Corriere*, 21-24 April 1986.

“Toughness” (lit. “balls”, *coglioni*), “truth” and “courage” are the badges Fallaci wears proudly in *La Rabbia e l’Orgoglio*, the qualities on which she bases her authority and her arguments (she’s been there, seen it in person): ‘what I am saying is a tough and uncomfortable truth’, she often repeats, and the fact that she gets attacked so violently and still says it *proves* that it must be true. The back cover of *Oriana Fallaci intervista Oriana Fallaci* declares it to be ‘the self-interview of a woman who has the courage to write the truth about herself and others’, and this is a claim that many of her readers and fellow-journalists readily subscribe to. ‘Thank you for being an authoritative source’, wrote one reader after the 2001 article, ‘because, unlike many who these days claim to be experts on Middle Eastern affairs and pontificate and speculate on such tragedies and draw from them profit, fame and personal advantage, you have seen certain realities, you have touched them with your own hand and you are ready to pay the price in person’ (Schiavoni 2001: 14).⁶

Fallaci’s rough rhetoric

‘I like the way she writes. I like her as a journalist’, Giovanni Agnelli, Mr Fiat and one of the most powerful men in post-war Italy, is supposed to have said when looking for Fallaci’s books at a book fair (Zaccuri 1997). Fallaci’s writing style, direct and rhythmic, is another important source of her widespread appeal. A populist as well as popular writer, she appeals both to readers who have no previous knowledge of the subject as well to those who may question her facts but are nonetheless seduced by her style.⁷ An excellent essay on Fallaci’s “rough rhetoric” points to the predominance of the affective over the argumentative style (*movere* over *docere*, according to classical Latin rhetoric), her copious use of *idées reçues* and of examples rather than arguments, and her use of enumerative figures of

⁶ Giuliano Zincone, a columnist for *Corriere della Sera*, has spoken of her “explosion of sincerity”, by someone “who has seen many countries and many wars” (Zincone 2001: 16).

⁷ Franco Cardini, a Catholic writer on the Middle Ages who belongs to the Centre-Right but believes that the enmity between Europe and Islam is a historical misunderstanding, wrote in his review of *La Forza della Ragione* that most of what Fallaci said was factually incorrect, ‘but she writes it with her heart, she writes it with extraordinary power, she writes (despite the occasional lapse, displaying extraordinary stylistic effectiveness. Oriana is not great for what she says because, as I tell her affectionately, she doesn’t get anything right really.

speech (*anaphora*, parallelism with *climax* or *anticlimax*).⁸ This style was already displayed in her previous writings, but in *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio* and her subsequent writings on Islam it is put at the service of a politics of hate. Warning Italians about the possibilities of an Islamic attack, for example, she uses repetition and enumeration to evoke the beautiful treasures of Italy, memories of Nazi outrage, and after a touch of irony shifts the register to that of a street fight:

~~... I am Italian and I think of the Sistine Chapel and St. Peter's Dome and the Colyseum, of the Bridge of Sighs and St. Mark's Square and the palaces on the Canal Grande... I am from Tuscany and I think even more of the Tower of Pisa and the piazza dei Miracoli, of Siena's cathedral and piazza del Campo, of the etruscan necropolis and the towers in S. Gimignano. I am from Florence and I think even more of Santa Maria del Fiore, Giotto's tower, the Battistero, the Palazzo della Signoria... and the Ponte Vecchio which is also the only ancient bridge left because the one at Santa Trinita is a reconstruction. Bin Laden's grandfather i.e. Hitler blew it up in 1944.... I think of the Accademia Galleries where Michelangelo's David is. (Scandalously naked, God forbid, thus especially detested by the followers of the Quran)... And if the f... sons of Allah were to destroy even one of those treasures, even one, an assassin I would become. So listen to me carefully, followers of a god who urges eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth. I am no longer young, I was born in the war, I grew up with the war and I know a lot about the war. And I have more balls than you do, who in order to find the courage to die must kill thousands~~

Oriana is great for how she can say such things, for the force she puts in, for the pride and the *fascinating violence* she is able to express' (Cardini 2004, emphasis added).

⁸ Some examples of *idées reçues*:

Americans: all efficient (Italians: the opposite of the Americans) (Fallaci 2002a: 23, lines 4/5);

Americans: all patriots (Italians: the opposite) (Fallaci 2002a: 23,5; 24,1),

America: a young country; in the 19c it was still building its identity (Italy is an old country; its identity can no longer be modified) (Fallaci 2002a: 26,2);

~~Omit this reference to Islamic Paradise?~~

~~*Islamic Paradise*: "where heroes enjoy shagging houris?" (Fallaci 2002a: 23,1).~~

~~*Ancient Romans*: "they enjoyed watching Christians being mauled by lions", PS: "but a long time has gone by and we have become a little more civilized" (Fallaci 2002a: 25,4);~~

~~*Christians*: "enjoyed watching heretics being burned at the stake";~~

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including four-year-old girls. You wanted war, you want war? As far as I'm concerned, let's have it. War to the last breath (Fallaci 2002a: 34-35).

The register, openly colloquial, suggests a kind of rough frankness (Andreotti 2002), while her frequent use of expletives and insults is reminiscent of the Northern League's political rhetoric. Insults not only show the high level of passion (her 'fascinating violence', as Cardini calls it) but also that she has torn [down](#) the "veil" of hypocrisy and political correctness. In this way, gut feelings become equated with high morality rather than with base reactions.

Hyphenating sentences when she parodies others, confessional and proud when talking about herself and her family, "masculine" and not shying away from abuse and obscene words to signify her disdain or the barbarity of others, the style of *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio* has the urgency of war reporting and is a very powerful style indeed. As one journalist commented, the force of her rhetoric aims and succeeds at shaking the reader out of complacency or cynicism. Indeed, the continuous use of military metaphors and the praise for men (and women) with "balls", the aggressive and abusive tone and the attitude that "you can't argue with these people" all push towards a confrontational attitude and a military resolution. In a word, Fallaci's is an example of what Kumkum Sangari [haas](#) called the "rhetoric of incitement", a form of indirect agency in which a woman berates men for their supposed effeminate hesitation to fight and claims she will fight instead ([Sangari 1999: 364-489](#)).⁹

Proud of being Italian

Though inseparable from the rhetoric they are [cou](#)ched in, it is to her arguments and ideas that we must now turn, for they too aroused a powerful echo in her readers.

Islamic immigrants: "some of them" work, "because Italians have become so spoilt" ("signorini") (Fallaci 2002a: 26,1). Andreotti (2002) documents some uses of her language; see also Daniele Sclea, 'Il piccolo breviario dell'odio'.

⁹ [Sangari 1999: 364-489; Sangari writes in the context of Hindu right-wing mobilization in India, led by "sadhus" or holy women who perform this leadership function.](#)

The genealogy that Oriana Fallaci claims for herself, and for the Italy she claims to speak for, is nationalist and libertarian—it is a *secular* and *heroic* line that joins Risorgimento with antifascism. In the Preface to *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio* she calls herself a “political self-exile” in New York in the footsteps of Garibaldi and of Piero Maroncelli, Federico Confalonieri and other “Patriots” before him, and of antifascist intellectuals like Gaetano Salvemini, the historian who warned Americans against the threat of nazi-fascism in a speech in New York in 1933. The parallel is made explicitly: just as Salvemini warned Americans in 1933, she is now warning the West about the danger of Islam. New York is of course a powerful location to be writing from in September 2001, but her invocation of Italian political exiles lends her the peculiar authority of a misunderstood prophet, though as we have seen her self-imposed exile is due to her moral disgust towards post-war Italy (?) rather than to any actual political persecution.¹⁰ In this respect, Fallaci’s nineteenth-century patriotism differs from other “long-distance nationalisms” in that it is not the product of a diasporic community longing for an imaginary homeland.

The reference to her childhood in a ferociously anti-fascist home is a recurrent *topos* in Fallaci’s texts, in her interviews as well as the more recent pamphlets. *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio* is dedicated to her parents, Edoardo and Tosca Fallaci, ‘who taught me to tell the truth’, and to her uncle Bruno Fallaci, a journalist and editor of the magazine *L'Europeo*, who first introduced Fallaci to journalism ‘and taught me to write the truth’. ‘Exile requires discipline and consistency’ (Fallaci 2002a: 13), she writes, two virtues she inherited from her parents. Invoking her loyalty to her parents and their political morality becomes a way for Fallaci to claim an unbroken line between those moral values and her own current standpoint, bypassing any ideological inconsistency or in fact any change of mind that may have intervened and that may be apparent to critical readers. (As Neelam Srivastava’s article points out, the Italian Resistance, especially on the Left, was deeply sympathetic to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist

¹⁰ Her statement that ‘to live side by side with an Italy where ideals lay on the rubbish heap had become too difficult’ is somewhat cryptic (Fallaci 2002a: 12). The “moral question”, i.e. the critique of corruption and other signs of moral degradation in the Italian body politic, has a very long history in Italian politics, not least within the long-ruling party, Democrazia Cristiana. It is therefore amenable to be read from many political viewpoints.

movements). Less critical readers, however, accept the moral passion at face value, ‘a testimonial of the highest moral sensitivity’ in the words of one reader (Albert 2001: 14).

The heroic, sober and high-minded Italy of the Risorgimento and the anti-fascist Resistance, Fallaci’s argument goes, lost out after the war to the “other” Italy, the Italy of “trasformismo” and opportunism, of self-interest and narrow-mindedness. While we would expect the barb to be directed at the erstwhile ruling party, Democrazia Cristiana, Left-wing intellectuals (“deluxe cicadas”, Fallaci 2002: 40-41) come in for much criticism, too. Above all, they are guilty of “buonismo” and of short-sighted sympathy towards Palestinians and immigrants. In fact, Fallaci is explicit in her disdain for Berlusconi and for Bossi’s Northern League, guilty of rubbishing the nationalist ideals of Risorgimento embodied in the nineteenth-century tricolor flag ridden with bullets and smeared with blood that she keeps “for company” in her Manhattan flat.¹¹

As the above makes clear, Fallaci’s political position cannot be defined in clear party terms and it reinforces the perception that hers is a discourse of values, not of politics. Values, needless to say, are much more amenable to be neatly divided into simple binaries, good vs bad. As all her critics have observed, Fallaci’s views are simple and manicheistic: good vs bad, freedom fighters vs authoritarian dictators, etc. Historian Luciano Canfora’s critical pamphlet on the limits of the rhetoric of democracy observes that one of the inherent “problems” of democracy is that it is a complex system while those who vote often prefer matters to be plain and simple and have little time for complexity (Canfora 2002). Many of Fallaci’s readers identify her with the spirit of the late Indro Montanelli and praise their ‘free, liberal spirit which knows how to break the *buonismo* of a Left which is too often disconnected from reality’, as one reader put it. ‘Yesterday, when communism was a concrete danger, Montanelli was not afraid of being called a fascist; today, when in the new international order the world is divided between those who are in favour of terrorism and those who are not, Fallaci is not afraid of being called a racist. Her article — a visceral shout — is a well of truth’ (D’Elia 2001: 14).

¹¹ Despite this, the Northern League has passionately championed Fallaci’s book, to the point of distributing it free during a demonstration in Milan on 6 November 2003 against the proposal to give immigrants legally resident the vote in local elections, see <http://www.stranieriinitalia.it/notiziario2/n3880.html>.

Fallaci's discourse of values (instead of politics) is clear above all in her treatment of the United States. ~~The US~~America is a nation "born out of the idea of freedom" (Fallaci 2002a: 71) and it has taught the idea freedom to the rest of the world. ~~The US~~It is a "young" country which has provided a haven and redemption to the working masses of the world. The "Liberated Masses" are the ~~US~~ great strength of the United States, argues Fallaci, because no one can beat down the energy of a people made up of working men who have achieved their goals (Fallaci 2002a: 75). This is why Americans are able to unite and strive together, and the flag is the symbol of their unity of purpose.¹² ~~The~~ US, America, in other words, is what Italy could be, but never quite manages to. And it is the Italians' proverbial lack of love for their flag and their tendency to criticise one another even in times of need that condemns them to failure. This "difficult patriotism" is an important point and worth spending a few words on here, since it emerges also in readers' responses to Fallaci.

Mussolini's roaring nationalism and Italy's aggressive warfare were subject after the war to several kinds of critical distancing. While in terms of the ruling class the post-war regime under Christian Democratic rule represented a significant continuity with fascism, ideologically the new Republic was vehemently anti-fascist (as inscribed in the new Constitution). The experience of the Resistance was appropriated as the national foundation myth, so that the new Republic could view itself as having fought *against* Mussolini and having won freedom along with the Allied armies. The values of the Resistance were, especially as filtered through the literature of Beppe Fenoglio and Italo Calvino, the oral histories of Nuto Revelli and the films by Roberto Rossellini and Carlo Lizzani, decidedly anti-heroic and anti-nationalist. Italian comedy (and later a film like Fellini's *Amarcord*) made fun of fascist nationalism, espousing instead the allegedly Italian values of individual self-preservation and indifference to all patriotic appeals as our saving grace: *Tutti a casa* ("All home", Comencini, 1960) was the title of a film on Italian soldiers deserting at the end of the war. In a similar process of critical distancing through comedy and satire, Italians were represented as not having been as anti-Semitic as

¹² Fallaci's hero in October 2001 is New York's major Rudolph Giuliani, another Italo-American "with balls", Fallaci 2002a: 65.

the Germans nor as snobbishly racist as the British (“Italiani brava gente”), a myth that Fabrizio del Donno explodes in his contribution to this issue.

Nationalism in post-war Italy found legitimate expression only in sport, until Bettino Craxi as Prime Minister in the 1980s revitalized national pride as a legitimate feeling— significantly also through the Italian “peace-keeping” mission in Lebanon that Fallaci celebrated in her novel *Insciallah*. After Craxi, it fell upon his acolyte Silvio Berlusconi to transform football’s national pride into a political slogan (“Forza Italia”). National pride is a leading principle of Forza Italia, shared in the coalition of the Casa della Libertà (House of Freedom) ruling Italy until recently only by the Right-wing party Alleanza Nazionale, while the third coalition member, the Northern League, has long called for regional autonomy. Thus, Oriana Fallaci’s declared patriotism, the “knot in the throat” she feels on seeing the flag (Fallaci 2002a: 136) and her call for patriotism — in terms of mobilization against a common threat and of pride in Italy’s distinguished past— invoke a sentiment which has had little public legitimacy in the past decades and which, judging from the readers’ responses, seems to have left a gaping hole, a need in many an Italian.

“Them”

All Islamic states according to Fallaci harbour terrorists, and if they are not obviously fundamentalist dictatorships they are so just below the surface (“gratta gratta”, Fallaci 2002a: 118). The enumerative style is put to effective use to suggest that the totality of countries where Muslims live as a majority are all equally undemocratic, undoubtedly for the same reason: ‘[f]rom Afghanistan to Sudan, from Indonesia to Pakistan, from Malaysia to Iran, from Egypt to Iraq, from Algeria to Senegal, from Syria to Kenya, from Libya to Chad, from Lebanon to Morocco, from Palestine to Yemen, from Saudi Arabia to Somalia’ (Fallaci 2002a: 23). The list is compelling, and to the reader overwhelmed by news of bombs and unrest in all these countries it will be convincing enough. After all, it is only ‘the so-called experts who pontificate’, as one reader put it, who will insist that each country is a particular case, that some are not Islamic states at all, that each makes a different political use of Islam, etc.

Usama bin Laden and the Talebans are only the most recent manifestation of a reality which has been going on for the last 1400 years. (Fallaci 2002a: 117)

Originality is *not* the most striking characteristic of Fallaci's attitude to Islam. We have all heard similar statements in the past four years. What is striking is how she fuses together very different entities: secular fighters-turned-political leaders like Arafat, fundamentalists like Khomeini and the Taleban (one Shia, the other Sunnis, by the way), "radical" leaders like Ghadafy, and *all* Muslim immigrants into Italy and all Muslims worldwide. They are *all* dangerous, all real or potential terrorists *because they believe in Islam*. This is the most obvious "orientalist" quality of her discourse, the idea that Islam as an essentially and unchangeably barbarian religion that motivates all its believers into a fanatic hatred for the West which overrules all other possible impulses.¹³ What is peculiar to her argument is the *tone* and the *retrospective view* on all the Muslim personalities she met and all the Muslims she ever encountered or read about, and how they connect with attitudes to Muslim immigrants to Italy, whether clandestine or lawful and working residents. It is an attitude which Fallaci speciously refuses to accept as racist "because you cannot be racist against a religion" (Fallaci 2002a: 80)._—

~~—— The tone. It is not minorities who stand for Bin Laden, it's millions and millions all over the world with their 'Hosannas to their merciful and irascible God and their bawls of Allah [o] Akbar' (Fallaci 2002a: 24). Bin Laden's sisters 'let themselves be photographed in London or on the Côte d'Azur with their faces and heads uncovered and with their fat breasts and huge bums well visible under their too-revealing tight T-shirts and trousers' (Fallaci 2002a: 63). 'I am, thank god, an atheist. An atheist beyond redemption. And I have no intention of being punished by those barbarians who instead of working and contributing to the progress of humanity always have their bums up in the air, i.e. praying five times a day' (Fallaci 2002a: 79). 'What is there behind [their] culture, the culture of the bearded guys with their petticoats and turbans?' (Fallaci 2002a: 87). 'To reason with them is impossible.~~

~~To treat them with lenience or tolerance or hope is suicide' (Fallaci 2002a: 91).~~ This tone, used with the authority of someone who has 'been there' and is 'never afraid to speak the truth', lends legitimacy to the common anti-Islamic rant of the "man-in-the street" and makes any kind of nuanced or measured assessment look like a well-meaning ("buonistic") sham. The boundaries of licit political discourse are shifted in the process, and what was unspeakable or could be said only among like-minded people can now be *written* on the pages of the most illustrious Italian daily.

The retrospective view. Arafat, Khomeini and Ghadafy are all alike in *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio*, all examples of bloodthirsty, ruthless and fanatical Islamic dictators. Despite the alleged consistency, this is not what even Fallaci herself wrote in her original interviews. Islam is *never* mentioned in the 1972 interview with Arafat. Rather, the contrast between them is between "an Arab who believes in war and a European who no longer does so", between an atheist who is nonetheless 'steeped in Christianity, in its hatred for hatred' while Arafat is 'all wrapped up in his law of retribution, eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth' (Fallaci 1991: 148). In *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio* Arafat becomes the bawling and saliva-spitting precursor of today's Islamic terrorists. Addressing him directly in the text, Fallaci now responds to the claims Arafat had then made about his superior culture taking arithmetic as an example, a claim Fallaci rubbishes (Fallaci 2002a: 87).¹⁴ Arafat was not only discourteous to Fallaci but also seemed to her to personify the aggressive, ignorant, "macho" and obscurantist Islamic leader/terrorist (though he himself was the leader of the non-Islamist, secular group al-Fatah). Palestinians are fixed in her mind once and for all as those who "toasted" when bombs exploded in Lebanon killing hundreds of Americans and French, and who toast again when the Twin Towers fall.¹⁵ Duplicitous and arrogant, they are the insidious enemies the brave Italian soldiers of the peace corps in Lebanon were called to defend (and the Italian Left's sympathy and support for the Palestinian cause thus becomes a shortsighted and hypocritical (if not suicidal) choice.) Either Fallaci's view of Arafat and of Palestinians

¹³ It was the sweeping quality of her belief that alienated even someone like Magdi Allam, vice-editor *ad personam* of *Corriere della Sera*, who otherwise admired her and felt honoured by her friendship (Allam 2005).

¹⁴ For a detailed reply to Fallaci's assertions, see Sherif El Sebaie, "Zero" in *storia alla Fallaci*, 1 May 2004, taken from <http://www.kelebekler.com/occ/fallaci.htm>.

in general changed after Lebanon—and she claims that her 1990 novel *Inciallab*, though a novel, ‘is based upon historical reality’ (Fallaci 2002a: 118)—or in 1972 it was not licit to use this kind of language. Her claim that ‘I’ve been shouting this for twenty years’ (Fallaci 2002a: 79) indeed suggests that Lebanon was the turning point.

The 1986 interview with Ghadafy, amply reported over four days, was all about the vanity and almost deranged ruthlessness of a dictator who believes he is the saviour of his country and finances all sorts of international terrorism, yet there is no mention of Islam. Interestingly, when Ghadafy tries to mention Italy’s colonial invasion of Libya, Fallaci is not prepared to listen (‘but that was 70 years ago!’) (Fallaci 1986: 14).¹⁶ In *La Rabbia e l’Orgoglio* her interviews with Arafat, Ghadafy and Khomeini are quoted in support of her view that “Islamic leaders” are all the same, either misogynist or lecherous or both.¹⁷

Art as value

In *La Rabbia e l’Orgoglio*, Fallaci engages directly with the “clash of civilizations” theory. As a matter of fact, she rejects the term since she cannot countenance ‘putting them both on an equal footing, as if they were two parallel realities of equal weight and measure’ (Fallaci 2002a: 85). Instead, as if weighing the “two civilizations” on a scale, she puts on one side Greek civilization (Homer, the Parthenon, the philosophers), ancient Rome, even Jesus (‘who taught us the concept of love and justice’). She reluctantly includes the Church, for despite the Inquisition and her own anticlericalism it cannot be denied that the Church also produced all those wonderful churches and paintings. Western classical music, science and technology complete the score (Fallaci 2002a: 86). And on the other scale, in ‘the

¹⁵ “Toasting to the horror”, like Marie Antoinette’s *mot* about *croissants*, is a recurrent urban myth: Italians also are said to have rejoiced in a similar way, a falsehood that was pointed out by another participant in the debate, Dacia Maraini.

¹⁶ The quotation is from part 3 of the interview, Wednesday 23 April 1986, p. 14.

¹⁷ See her description of the Taleban Minister of Justice, Motawakil. Italian feminists are berated for failing to see this point: “Have you all fallen in love with the charming Usama Bin Laden and his Torquemada-like large eyes, thick lips and what he carries under his *sottanaccia*? Do you find him romantic, do you all dream of being raped by

other civilisation of guys with frocks and turbans? ‘After much searching here and there, one can only find Muhammad and the Quran, Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Omar Khayyam the mathematician and poet. ‘Stop bawling’, she now addresses Arafat directly, ‘your grandfathers only gave us a few beautiful mosques and a medieval religion’ (Fallaci 2002a: 88).¹⁸ The Taleban’s destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas (“my Buddhas”) is taken as exemplary of what Islam does to art. And then we are back to the Palestinians in Beirut again: ~~“I’ve seen them sully the Madonnas and piss on the altars and turn them into latrines” (Fallaci 2002a: 118) — and their desecration of Christian holy objects, as it is all~~ faithfully “described” in her novel *InciAllah*.¹⁹

~~As Luciano Andreotti has astutely points out, ‘Fallaci’s method of presenting “our civilization” through indiscriminate lists of great names in a way that suggests only occasional familiarity’ recalls Furio Jesi’s definition of what he called the “exoteric” or “profane” Right’s approach to art. For the “profane Right” artworks and authors do not provoke problematic self-questioning or critical approaches. They are “valuable stuff” (“roba di valore”), before which~~

~~... one feels the ideological need to flatten all the differences that history sets out in the past and to avail oneself of a compact, uniform and fundamentally undifferentiated value. [...] Cultural elements are as if homogenized in a pulp that is declared to be precious. [...] This commonplace language... does not bear any relationship either with reason or with history: it originates in “valuable stuff” that is called the past, but which is so historically undifferentiated as to freely circulate in the present. It is characterized by the repulsion for history that is camouflaged as veneration for a glorious past. (Jesi 1979 in Andreotti 2002) —~~

him? Or do you not care a shit about your Muslim sisters because you consider them inferior?” (Fallaci 2002a: 105).

¹⁸ Sherif El Sebaie, in ‘L’arte fallace di cancellare la Storia’ carefully refutes the claim that Islamic culture contributed nothing to Italy by pointing to the many catalogues of Islamic artifacts in Italy; see <http://www.kelebekler.com/occ/fallaci04.htm>.

¹⁹ ~~As Luciano Andreotti has astutely pointed out, ‘Fallaci’s method of presenting “our civilization” through indiscriminate lists of great names suggests only occasional familiarity’, and recalls Furio Jesi’s definition of what he called the “exoteric” or “profane” Right’s approach to art. For the “profane Right” artworks and authors do not provoke problematic self-questioning or critical approaches. They are “valuable stuff” (“roba di valore”), with~~

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~~In other words, both “our civilization” and “Islamic culture” are homogenous pulp with no internal, historical and sociological difference.²⁰~~

Fallaci’s argument about art serves not just to prove the superiority of Western civilisation but also as a point of connection with the second half of *La Rabbia e l’Orgoglio*. This is the violent reaction to the “threat” of mass immigration into Italy. The emblematic case (*exemplum*) she brings here is the sit-in organised by Somali (ex-colonial) immigrants in Piazza del Duomo in Florence to protest against the failed renewal of their residence and working permits and the denial of their right to bring their family members to Italy. ~~The protesters camped for several weeks, sullyng the square with the ‘yellow streaks of urine and their faeces’ and ‘polluting the air’ with their calls to prayer (Fallaci 2002a: 121).~~ Fallaci did her best then to urge the mayor and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to dislodge them, but though they privately agreed with her (she claims), they refused to act, paralyzed by the fear of being called racist. Fallaci finally called the Head of Police and threatened to go and set fire herself to the tent and its occupants. The Police dismantled the tent the next day. ~~This is the tone of her reaction: you can be as conservative and tyrannical and Islamic as you wish in your own country, but if “you” come and touch my art treasures I’ll shoot you (Fallaci 2002a: 35).~~

“Cannoni o gommoni”

Perhaps the most significant point in Fallaci’s Italian tirade, then, is how the attack on the Twin Towers by a fringe of Islamic terrorists is linked not only to the unchanging and barbaric “sons of Allah”, but is also brought home as one and the same thing with immigration from the south and east of the Mediterranean. Once again, no distinction is made here in her enumerative list: Sudanese, Bangladeshi,

~~no internal, historical, or sociological difference. This attitude towards art “is characterized by the repulsion for history that is camouflaged as veneration for a glorious past” (Jesi 1979 in Andreotti 2002).~~

²⁰ As another critic has pointed out, while the comparably populist tracts of Michael Moore detail every source and are full of bibliographic references, Fallaci’s book has no references whatsoever. She often displays erudite knowledge about minute points of scientific or political history, but the lack of references ensure that even specialists of Middle Eastern history cannot answer back on her use of sources since none are given (Lia 2004).

Tunisians, Algerians, Pakistanis, Nigerians are all alike (Fallaci 2002a: 122). The discourse here becomes the familiar one of Northern League xenophobia. First, all these immigrants are criminal, and arrogant blackmailers to boot: if one objects to anything they do they say “I’m aware of their rights”. They are all terrorists (mosques in Italy are terrorist cells, and ‘behind every terrorist there is an Imam’). ~~And they breed too much~~ (Fallaci 2002a: 126).

Significantly, Fallaci even refuses to call them “manual workers” and to equate them with the scores of Italian immigrants to America at the beginning of the twentieth century, an important part of Italian historical memory. That was a ‘legal’ migration, she claims erroneously, this is illegal (Fallaci 2002a: 129). Moreover, now the border police which should send them back ‘welcome them with open arms, like Dame di San Vincenzo’ (Fallaci 2002a: 128). How can Fallaci praise the US as a crucible of peoples and then be so hostile to immigrants into Italy? Because whereas the US is a “young country” (she feels of course no need to mention Native American), Italy is “three thousand years old” and a mono-cultural country (Fallaci 2002a: 129-30). Immigrants by definition threaten its cultural identity. Far from seeking to accommodate them, the Italian government should just send them packing. As we shall see below, many of these arguments are part of the current Italian debate on Islam in Italy and echo feelings expressed by the Northern League and sections of the Catholic Church. —

Gaps, silences

Wordy and comprehensive, Fallaci’s apocalyptic sermon nonetheless shows several important gaps and silences. These gaps and silences mostly take us back to the lack of “colonial awareness” in contemporary Italy that the editors of this issue lament, and to the fact that the discourse of decolonisation was carried out only by the Italian Left (see Neelam Srivastava in this volume). —

Italians and Islam

Arguably, the connection between Islamic terrorism and immigration is a key to the pamphlet's success. As such, *La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio* is an intervention in the difficult and complex relationship between Italians and Islam. This final section presents a brief overview of the positions and players in the debate on Islam in Italy in order to understand where Fallaci is located and why she has gained such prominence.²¹

As a vehicle of cultural and religious difference, Islam presents a problem to Italian society, argues sociologist Renzo Guolo, and brings it back to other dilemmas: the still unresolved issue of Italian identity vs national identity, the approach a democracy should take when confronting individuals and groups carrying values which are potentially alien to its own, and so on. Islam—far from monolithic in Italy²²—divides the Left between universalists and multiculturalists, it divides the Church between supporters of Vatican Council II and traditionalists, and the Right between anti-globalists and Catholics (Guolo 2003: v).

Despite its many invasions, Guolo continues, or perhaps because of them, Italy is a culturally closed and fundamentally mono-cultural country. It has neither gone through wars of religion nor through the pacts that usually put an end to them. Therefore, it has not learnt to live with difference (Guolo 2003: v). Moreover, the short-lived colonial experience did not leave a mark, a memory of “other” cultures, apart from colonial stereotypes and ghettoization. Significantly, Italy's colonial experience has *not* produced the kind of “return migration” that other countries such as France and Britain have experienced — no less traumatic for national identity, but with more significant direct

²¹ This section is based on Renzo Guolo's excellent book *Xenofobi e Xenofili. Gli Italiani e l'Islam*, which deserved to be translated into English. Page numbers hereafter refer to his book and not Fallaci's.

²² Associations and centres are divided into those representing “state Islam” (mainly Saudi Arabia and Morocco), Islamist groups like the Muslim brotherhood, some Jihad groups which have used some Italian mosques and Islamic centre as a hiding place (as Fallaci also recounts), Italian converts to Islam who often play a prominent role in associations as they can be legitimate interlocutors for the Italian state, and finally “phantom” Islamic representatives (like the convert Adel Smith) who have been created by the media and acquired a fame disproportionate to their real significance. Guolo views most of the demands of organizations like the “Unione delle comunità e organizzazioni islamiche in Italia (Ucoii)”, i.e. freedom of religious practice, *halal* butchers, religious presence in army barracks and hospitals, the possibility for Muslim women to wear the veil in official (e.g. passport) photographs as unproblematic and easy to realise in practice. What he finds problematic are demands connected with family law (e.g. polygamy) and for community mediation in the relationship between the state and Muslim individuals, and the issue of representation (Guolo 2003: chapter 1).

links between the former colonies and the former “motherland”.²³ Thus initially Italy tried to blank out the reality of the new migratory waves and view them just as a temporary phenomenon. When it finally did focus on immigration, it was only through the lenses of Italian economy and internal security, i.e. no attention was paid to the cultural dimension of mass immigration. Migration, especially from Muslim countries, generated deep social anxiety, but because to raise the problem would have meant admitting that migrants were there to stay, the anxiety was not publicly and politically addressed (Guolo 2003: vi). As the number of migrants grew, Italians became divided between a large “party of exclusion” and a tenacious “party of inclusion”, a division that did not follow the usual political faultlines.

Guolo is rather scathing of the “buonismo” of the multiculturalist Left, including Rifondazione Comunista and anti-global groups. In his view, their “spontaneous inclusivism” overlooks the real Other in the name of an idealised Other. It fails to recognize that individual Others may not want to integrate in the way the inclusivists suggest and that there is a big difference between internal minorities (social or ethnic) and external minorities. Further, “[n]aïve multiculturalism harms the Left, particularly in its relationship with society which does not identify with its well-meaning but ideologically integrationist messages” (Guolo 2003: 40). In the eyes of a society so afraid of the future as to become an “anxious society”, the Italian Left has become identified with the active and willing construction of a multiethnic society, and moreover in ways which will only benefit those who are not willing to give up their cultural identity, in this specific case “the Muslim” (Guolo 2003: 40).

‘On the Left, a phenomenon with such a problematic social impact as immigration’, he argues, ‘has been represented, almost obsessively, under the “reassuring” formula of the meeting of cultures, as mutual enrichment, as redemptive contamination. For the theoreticians of multiculturalism it was almost an unimportant detail that in the popular peripheries of Milan or Turin, or in the huge industrial periphery of the North-East, this meeting appeared neither enriching nor redemptive’ (Guolo 2003:

²³ Though after one of the Somali suspects of the London bombings was arrested in Rome, the local Somali immigrant community (overwhelmingly Christian) was keen to emphasise the different, and older, history of their

41). Multiculturalists superciliously dismiss phenomena of social rejection as “regressive”, often without analysing their motives. But actually anti-Islamic reactions, however pathological, reveal the contradictions within emerging multi-ethnic societies. They reveal the limits of Western universalism and the question of identity and bring us back to the crisis of public space. All elements related to globalization (Guolo 2003: 42).

The Italian Right has been ambivalent towards Islam. While Berlusconi welcomed Turkey's entry into the EU but claimed that “Western civilization is superior”, Forza Italia's Home Minister Pisanu sounded a lone note of pragmatism in his proposal for an institutional “pact” between the state and its Muslim residents (Guolo 2003: 48-49), and Alleanza Nazionale's Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini was the first to suggest that immigrants legally resident should be allowed to vote in local elections, creating a furore. But it is the third member of the coalition, the Northern League, which has turned xenophobia into a major political platform. In a critique of economic globalization that paradoxically brings them close to the Left-wing anti-globals, the Northern League culturally defends Italy's “Christian roots” and indulges in open racism. On the ground, it has led campaigns against local mosques, at times against the wishes of the local Church. Public pronouncements by Northern-League figures (“all foreigners are criminals”, “Muslim invaders”), often depicted as “amusing” or “outlandish” in the media, have produced a ‘huge linguistic and political break’ according to Guolo, legitimizing a kind of language previously shunned by all political elites, whether ruling or opposition (Guolo 2003: 70). It is a language very close to Fallaci's also in its use of the colloquial register and slang.²⁴

As for the Italian church, while Pope John Paul II favoured religious dialogue and many parishes have welcomed immigrants and tried to find accommodation and prayer halls for them, a less “open” line has been dominant at the top of the Italian clergy, especially in the influential person of

immigration — but also the fact that Christians and Muslims in Somalia lived together for centuries, explicitly offering themselves to Italians as models of peaceful coexistence; Rai 3 evening news, 6 August 2005.

²⁴ Guolo has a very interesting analysis of the Northern League's Islamophobia in its political homeland in the Italian industrial North-East, where entrepreneurs require immigrants for their workforce and where the League's critique of immigration and of the globalized economy which produces it goes against its own political and social base. Many former League voters have since moved to Forza Italia, but the League's still Islamophobia finds echoes within them and produces confusion in the local political system, while pragmatically local entrepreneurs

Cardinal Ruini, the President of the Council of Italian Bishops (CEI) and of Bologna's Cardinal Biffi, who has unequivocally denounced Islam as the "enemy of Christianity", suggested that Muslims embody a "different kind of humanity" and proposed that immigrants should be screened according to their religion (Guolo 2003: 87-92). The new Pope, already critical of the "ideology of dialogue" supported by Milan's former Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, has vocally articulated the need for Europe to return to its "Christian roots". Finally, among influential "opinion makers", the critics (Sartori, Baget Bozzo, Fallaci) are a majority.²⁵

This overview of the range of positions vis-à-vis Islam and immigration among the Italian Left, Right, the church and opinion makers helps us locate Fallaci's discourse and recognize how, if elements of it can be found elsewhere in the Italian political and cultural landscape, her combination is nonetheless original and powerful. The combination, especially of Islamic terrorism and immigration, has its own explanatory power, which may account for the fact that many readers wrote in saying that her article had "clarified their ideas" on the subject.

Bad language, familiar from Northern League discourse, is here "ennobled" by the authority of the speaker and the gravity of the event, so much so that readers spoke of "high moral sensibility" and hyperbolically called it "one of the most exceptional statements ever written on our world and on the West" (Albert and Rigoldi 2001). The venomous attacks on immigrants and on Left-wing "buonismo" feed into widespread social anxieties and anger at the Left's perceived naivety and culpable enthusiasm for a multi-ethnic society. The (atheist) defence of Italy's "Christian roots" has found favour among both Church and secular quarters, while her passionate patriotism fills a vacuum that political bickering and a long-standing suspicion of nationalism have left in many Italians.

need e.g. to build homes for immigrant workers, who in that work-rich region need houses more than jobs (Guolo 2003 76-79).

²⁵ For example Giovanni Sartori, professor of political science, is critical of multiculturalism and believes that acquiring citizen status does not automatically entail integration: instead immigrants should be "acculturated" into Western values, most realistically not in the first generation but in the second generation, through schooling (Guolo 2003: 101-4). The priest-cum-political scientist Gianni Baget Bozzo, instead, opposes Islam as an essentially anti-Christian religion (Guolo 2003: 108), a view shared by a significant part of the Italian church, as we have seen. A notable exception is the medieval historian and prolific author Franco Cardini, who believes that the enmity between Europe and Islam is a historical misunderstanding and that Islam can in fact provide an antidote to a secular West that is adrift (Guolo 2003: 114).

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