

## Real Berlusconi Scandal Buried By Tabloid Journalism

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One must dig through the Internet to find information about Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's comment on immigrants. I refer to the comments as "Walking through the streets in the centre of a city like Milan, and I do, it does not seem to be an Italian or European city with the number of non-Italians, but an African city". Offending both Africa and immigrants in Italy, the Italian leader somehow got away with it while the international press desperately focused on the risqué photographs of him with several women, published in El Pais, a Spanish daily newspaper.

Niche websites like Adnkronos reported the Berlusconi's outburst of racism, and rightly in the section 'politics'. (<http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Politics/?id=3.0.3397030373>) The Guardian instead preferred to focus on 'the tits', with a passing mention on its Website June 5, concentrated in an 11 lines paragraph. Apparently one of the most discriminating and racist comments released by a government leader are not 'sexy'; enough for The Guardian's audience.

The same Guardian, on the printed edition of the day after, recycled the same article in its section 'International' on page 24. The article, written by John Hooper and Giles Tremlett, gives details (possibly more than necessary since the images are widely distributed) about the apparently scandalous pictures unmasked by El Pais. The Guardian is all juiced up describing the photos of 'topless guests', 'one wearing a tanga', 'a naked man standing by a swimming pool in what appeared to be a state of sexual arousal', 'Berlusconi ... pictured walking, fully clothed, with an unidentified young woman, also clothed, (...)'; and 'poolside statues of naked sirens'.

I struggle to find anything scandalous in an almost naive not to mention private setting that for a media tycoon - such as Berlusconi first and foremost is - must be nothing but common life. With regards to the claims that Berlusconi was using state planes to fly his guest to his Sardinian villas, at today they just remain speculations.

In the same article by The Guardian however, no mention at all is given to Berlusconi's attempt to defend its remarks about Milan being an African city. Remarks that are reported, though, by the non mainstream website Life in Italy (<http://www.lifeinitaly.com/node/5956>):

'Piero Fassino of the opposition Democratic Party (PD) slammed the premier's comments as "disconcerting". "The premier should know that many immigrants live, work and contribute to the richness of the region," he said. Milan Provincial President Filippo Penato, also of the PD, said Milan wasn't "the capital of Burundi", but nevertheless agreed that there was a high percentage of immigrants in the city. "There are certainly too many Roma (gypsies) and illegal immigrants and in these years Milan's right-wing council has not done enough to stop it," he said. But Milan Deputy Mayor Riccardo De Corato laid the blame at the feet of the former centre-left government. "We have undergone an influx of migrants who were scientifically desired by the centre-left," he said. De Corato praised Berlusconi for his comments, saying this showed he "doesn't live on the moon but walks around Milan".

This is the second time in two weeks that Berlusconi has said Italian cities seem more African than European, but last week he blamed poor upkeep for the comparison. "It's painful to wander around cities like Rome, Naples and Palermo and see that with the graffiti and the filth on the streets they seem more like African cities than European ones," he said in a radio interview.

This is what one would call journalism, as opposed to 'infotainment'. So the international press maybe should catch up on Italian politics rather than focus on 'tits', otherwise one may even start to listen to Berlusconi's conspiracy theory and blame the international press 'for putting up anti-Italian campaigns,

with the support of their correspondents who get their information from the Italian left wing&rdquo;.  
(<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2009/06/05/berlusconi-nuovo-attacco-repubblica-su-milano-sembra.html>)

If we can talk of left wing at all. But maybe anybody who would seriously consider himself/herself a &lsquo;leftist&rsquo; would not allow a few innocent pictures to make headlines the world over.

It is also to wonder why this treatment was reserved to Berlusconi and Italy when in November 2007 reactions to supposed racism had been noticeably different. In the &lsquo;Morrissey case&rsquo;, when the ex Smiths singer who currently lives in Rome was asked if he would ever relocate back to the UK, for example. Morrissey was quoted as saying &ldquo;...the higher the influx into England the more the British identity disappears...If you walk through Knightsbridge you'll hear every accent apart from an English accent.&rdquo; Reactions from the British press had been vehement, with a noticeable follow up of debate and controversy. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/nov/30/timjonze>).

The same happened when in November 2008 the same Silvio Berlusconi commented that the newly elected Barack Obama was &ldquo;young, handsome and tanned&rdquo;. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/06/italy-barackobama>)

One is left to wonder why this has not been the case with the latest of Berlusconi&rsquo;s statements.

Was the temptation of &lsquo;the tits&rsquo; so strong to be resisted after all? Why did the press worry about racism in the cases mentioned above, but the same press forgot about racism when it was address to immigrants and ... an entire continent, defined &lsquo;filthy&rsquo;?

If I have to be ashamed for being Italian, let this be for nothing else but the right reason at least.

(Berlusconi photo: Ricardo Stuckert, Agencia Brasil via Wikimedia)