



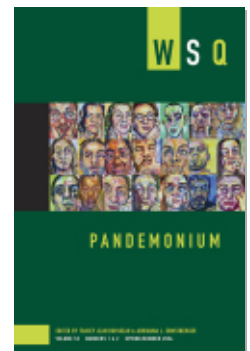
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Resisting the Epistemic Straight Gaze in the Anti-gender
Era: Italian LGBTIQ+ Studies and Scholars, 2013–2023

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Resisting the Epistemic Straight Gaze in the Anti-gender Era: Italian LGBTIQ+ Studies and Scholars, 2013–2023

Massimo Prearo

Abstract: This article discusses the challenges faced by scholars involved in gender and LGBTIQ+ studies and research, within a context of increased attacks by anti-gender coalitions of social movements and parties. It highlights the precarious and vulnerable position of gender and LGBTIQ+ scholars in an academic environment set by neoliberal agendas and anti-gender rhetoric. The contribution reflects on the role of academic institutions in reinforcing dominant power structures and the resistance efforts by LGBTIQ+ scholars against this backdrop. The study underscores the importance of understanding these dynamics for the future of LGBTIQ+ studies and the broader context of academic freedom and knowledge production in Italy and beyond. **Keywords:** LGBTIQ+ scholars, anti-gender movements, academic freedom, neoliberalism, Italy

In recent years, attacks on gender studies in Europe have been part of a broader trend of targeting gender politics as “symptoms” of the diffusion of the so-called gender ideology (Datta and Paternotte 2023; Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). Within academia, this criticism also extended to alleged radicalized and politicized scholars (Paternotte and Verloo 2021). In addition to the increase in attacks on gender studies, the populist and radical right wing sought to repress academic freedom, as in the Hungarian case (Lombardo, Kantola, and Rubio-Marin 2021; Grzebalska and Pető 2018; Pető 2020). Furthermore, the rise of a neoliberal agenda within academia and scientific research has significantly affected all European universities, especially since the Bologna Process started in 1999.

Within this historical and political framework, Italy represents an interesting case study for understanding the effects of intersecting factors: on

the one hand, a significant presence of gender scholars combined with a lack of institutionalization of gender studies—as a recent report has shown (Barilà Ciocca et al. 2022)—and, on the other, a prevailing anti-gender context (Prearo 2024).

In Italian academia, gender studies and gender scholars have become the target of a wide range of political and social actors, including anti-gender movements, right-wing parties (although not limited to them), anti-progressive and conservative media, and even academics (Möser et al. 2022). Recently, groups of feminists identifying as gender-critical have joined the battle on this anti-gender front—although drawing on a different theoretical and political background (Prearo 2023; Biagini 2021).

This contribution is divided into three main sections. First, I describe how the anti-gender mobilization created a discursive and political set of opportunities for the attacks against gender and LGBTIQ+ studies and scholars. Then, I reflect on the experience of precariousness and vulnerability in the context of these mobilizations in Italian academia. Following up on that, I explore the role of academic institutions in maintaining a straight gaze that reinforces dominant power structures and, lastly, the condition of resistance to it from the perspective of an LGBTIQ+ scholar.

Anti-gender Mobilizations as Discursive and Political Opportunities

Anti-gender campaigns in Italy started in the summer of 2013 with the emergence of *La Manif pour Tous Italia*. However, radical Catholic and anti-choice activists had already begun disseminating and mobilizing tools against the “gender ideology.” At the time, the Italian parliament debated three significant bills: one against LGBTIQ+ hate crimes, one on gender education in schools, and one on the legal recognition of same-sex couples (Donà 2021; Ozzano 2020). A conservative front was formed, initially bringing together anti-gender movements and right-wing parties, and mobilizing in the street and within institutions. A few years later, in 2021, this religious and right-wing front succeeded in stopping the anti-hate crimes bill (Bernini 2021; Feo 2022), partly due to the mobilization of a branch of Italian feminism opposed to non-sex-based gender-affirmative approaches to gender identity (Ashley 2023) and to the legitimation of surrogacy (Ammaturo 2020).

Thus, the mobilization of new Catholic movements in the public arena, which first positioned themselves as moral entrepreneurs of the anti-gender

cause (Lavizzari and Prearo 2019), has benefited other and quite different actors, producing opportunities which are at once discursive and political (Edenborg 2021; Norocel and Szabó 2019). Firstly, they are discursive because the anti-gender rhetorical device at the center of the struggle against gender ideology (Garbagnoli 2016) has introduced a new conceptual framework and vocabulary to challenge gender and LGBTIQ+ studies and politics. The new language of opposition has a secularized form and substance that purports to be grounded in science, citing fields such as biology, medicine, or anthropology. Therefore, it moves beyond the confines of the Vatican and the Catholic Church, where it originated (Paternotte 2023), and becomes a discursive tool available in the public domain for institutional, political, and social actors, including the media (see the insightful work on this topic by Pető and Kováts 2017). These tools function as discursive “ready-mades”: objects created to define—and contest—gender and LGBTIQ+ studies and policies as public threats. They are perceived as weapons used by international lobbies aiming to destroy humanity in favor of a new transhumanism, primarily targeting children and their identity (Righetti 2021).

Secondly, such opportunities are inherently political. Owing to their adaptability and powerful rhetorical nature, the anti-gender campaign has become a public and conflicting issue. It has given rise to a new agenda of opposition to gender and LGBTIQ+ studies and policies. This agenda has found support amongst conservative and populist radical right parties in Italy (Ozzano 2019; Pirro 2023; Trappolin 2022). These parties have used it to rekindle a political divide, presenting it as a conflict between, on the one hand, progressive stances promoted by supposedly radicalized minority groups and, on the other, conservative positions guided by a “common sense” that rejects the anti-naturalist proposal of gender and LGBTIQ+ studies (Norocel and Paternotte 2023). This is also why gender and LGBTIQ+ politics have become a central conflict between libertarian or democratic positions and traditionalist and authoritarian positions. Libertarian and democratic positions are inspired by the principles of freedom, equality, and justice and propose social transformation through legislative innovation, such as the recognition of the rights of same-sex couples and gender self-determination. On the other hand, traditionalist and authoritarian positions propose restrictive and repressive policies aimed at limiting sexual rights (Dietze and Roth 2020). This has become particularly evident in Italy with the rise of far-right leader Giorgia Meloni in 2022 (De Giorgi et al. 2023), whose government seeks to repress the emancipation and freedom

of LGBTIQ+ lives—cause for concern, given Italy’s low level of legal protection for gender and sexual minorities (Santos 2013).

This is the context in which we must situate gender and, even more specifically, LGBTIQ+ studies and scholars in Italy. The attacks and repression they face are not solely the result of a persistent heteropatriarchal configuration that feeds and sustains socially widespread representations and practices of sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or LGBTIQ+phobia. They are also the consequence of anti-gender and anti-LGBTIQ+ mobilizations.

Experiencing Precariousness and Vulnerability

In 2017, as I sought contracts that would enable my continued work in academia, I came across an opportunity to join a research project titled *Subjects of the Law and Vulnerability* as a postdoctoral researcher. Given my expertise in LGBTIQ+ activism in Italy, I pitched a project on and with LGBTIQ+ migrants to better understand the governance of LGBTIQ+ migration and LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers’ requests in Italy. As part of this research, I conducted a political ethnography within LGBTIQ+ migrant support organizations (Prearo 2021). In 2018, in response to a need expressed by the associations I was working with, I proposed a one-day workshop of study and training activities on LGBTIQ+ asylum at the University of Verona’s Department of Human Sciences—where I had previously been and currently am employed. However, when the local radical right heard of the event, it triggered an intense dispute involving proponents of the workshop, its opponents, and the university’s administration. I quote here the account that the director of the PoliTeSse Research Center at the University of Verona, co-organizer of the event, gives of the affair:

In May 2018 “Forza Nuova” [a neofascist group] announced that it was ready to prevent “also by force” the holding of the conference titled “Richiedenti asilo: Orientamento sessuale e identità di genere” [Asylum seekers: Sexual orientation and gender identity], which [the research center] PoliTeSse had organised together with the Hannah Arendt Centre for Political Studies, the departments of Human Sciences and Legal Sciences of the University of Verona, and three associations supporting migrant and LGBTIQ+ people, ASGI–Association for Legal Studies on Immigration, Association PINK and Arcigay Pianeta Milk–LGBT* Center. The rector of the University of Verona, Nicola Sartor, reacted by suspending the conference and releasing an equivocal note to the press, in which instead of simply condemning

the neo-fascist group's threats, he covertly scolded those who had organized the initiative, placing Forza Nuova on the same level as the advocacy groups involved. The note stated that the event, dedicated to "politically and ethically controversial issues," had "abandoned the scientific sphere to become a terrain of confrontation and, above all, of search for visibility for different activists from a range of positions." The rector's decision was quickly followed by a broad-based local, national, and international mobilization. A vigil was organized in Verona outside the Administration building to protest against the canceling of the conference. Many associations and university research centers from all over Italy released public statements. An open letter was published in the French newspaper *Liberation* and in the Italian newspaper *Il Manifesto*, which had very quickly gathered the signatures of more than 150 academics of international fame—among them, Etienne Balibar, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Christine Delphy, Éric Fassin, David M. Halperin, Paul B. Preciado, Chiara Saraceno, and Joan W. Scott. The rector, now obviously fearful of losing face, quickly announced that an initiative centered on the same issues would be planned for September. The associations instead organized the same conference, though smaller, without university funds and outside of it altogether, on the day initially established, 25 May. (Bernini 2021, 17)

This was not the first, nor the last, attack that we, researchers at the PoliTeSse Research Center at the University of Verona, have faced. As another example, Lorenzo Bernini was even the subject of a parliamentary question by Massimiliano Fedriga (former MP and now president of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region):

Fedriga pointed out that "Lorenzo Bernini," in addition to being "a researcher in political philosophy who writes about gender studies and queer theories (according to which there is no single way of being men and women, but a multiplicity of identities and experiences)," is also "a fixed presence at many gay prides." (Bernini 2021, 17)

In reflecting on the nature and impact of these events, I observe two dimensions characterizing them: the political moment and the context-defining conditions. On the one hand, there is the immediate situation marked by events, pressures (sometimes repression), and the resulting resistance. In response to this attack, the Research Center PoliTeSse called for an assembly aiming to bring together all the people inside and outside the Italian university working in the broad field of gender studies. Within a few weeks,

we organized the first Congress of Gender and Sexuality Studies in Italy at the University of Verona in June 2018, attended by about 150 people from all over Italy. This congress was the first step in the process of collective construction that led in March 2019 to the establishment of the Italian Network of Gender, Intersex, Feminist, Transfeminist, and Sexuality Studies (GIFTS). At the same time, the international conference of ultraconservative forces, the World Congress of Families, was being held in Verona (Pavan 2020).

On the other hand, as LGBTIQ+ scholars focusing on LGBTIQ+ issues and working with people and communities, we are often represented and objectified as uncomfortable or unwanted subjects within the institution (Ayoub 2022). This occurs even before political forces, groups, and movements of various kinds single us out for attack. The stigma associated with LGBTIQ+ issues and people tarnishes our identity and professional standing. For us, the vulnerability generated by the physical and symbolic violence shaping the lives of LGBTIQ+ people is not simply an object or a variable to consider in research. Anti-LGBTIQ+ stigma is a factor that produces social positions subjugating individuals who find themselves living or inhabiting those positions at a given time in a given context. Although, as academics, we are in a position of social privilege, as LGBTIQ+ scholars, we share that vulnerability and stigma with those who participate in our research. We must also grapple with doubts regarding our scientific rigor because of our close identification with or proximity to our field of study—this only exacerbates the prevailing stigma. Conservative and anti-gender factions frequently leverage this argument to undermine research on same-sex families and in the realm of trans studies and issues.

Moments and conditions that generate vulnerable scholars in the specific field of gender and LGBTIQ+ studies are structured around another constitutive dimension: precariousness. As David Paternotte points out,

it must be stated that, despite the existence of vibrant professional organizations such as Atgender (the European Association for Gender Research, Education, and Documentation), gender studies is poorly consolidated as a field of study in Europe. In many countries, such as Italy or Poland, there are no specific masters or other academic programs in gender studies, and where these do exist, most are fairly recent, as in Belgium or France. Moreover, few independent gender studies departments exist in the region, and almost no institution awards PhD degrees in the field. Therefore, the situation differs significantly from that in the United States: while European

gender scholars have been carrying out gender research for decades, they are still struggling to institutionalize their field of study. Attacks on gender studies in Europe target a precarious field of research. (Paternotte 2019)

As LGBTIQ+ precarious workers involved in LGBTIQ+ studies, we experience double vulnerability. In the Italian case, prolonged precariousness, short-term contracts, and unstable selection criteria and methods—subject to continuous reform—define incoming university careers. When I faced those attacks, I was in a condition of professional precarity—hired on a temporary contract that put me in a situation of integral subjection. Amongst the uncertainty surrounding one's future, and the conditionality of a possible contract renewal, resisting as a LGBTIQ+ scholar was a challenging condition.

In other words, the constitutive precariousness of the researcher's position in a neoliberal university system goes hand-in-hand with a permanent condition of risk related to the potential consequences of our desired or performed resistance. Although resistance is a necessary and empowering response to attacks and pressures, it must be enacted strategically. Resistance is undoubtedly a courageous act rooted in the long history of LGBTIQ+ struggles and mobilizations, but it can also be risky and comes with serious potential consequences (Ayoub and Stoeckl 2024). While not all LGBTIQ+ researchers may identify as activists, working on and with LGBTIQ+ issues, people, and communities implies a stigmatized and discriminated position within the academic space. Then the question is: how can one effectively defend oneself against such attacks while facing the challenges of vulnerability and precariousness as an LGBTIQ+ researcher?

Under the Straight Gaze of the University

My research focuses on the historical, political, and social aspects of LGBTIQ+ politics, studied from various perspectives, such as those of LGBTIQ+ mobilizations and movements, LGBTIQ+ migration, anti-gender and anti-LGBTIQ+ movements, and, more recently, LGBTIQ+ political careers. This scientific work is inherently coproduced in collaboration with LGBTIQ+ individuals involved in the research process, from data collection to analysis to dissemination and communication of results. As such, I consider myself as a researcher involved in the co-production of scientific knowledge that is not separate from the social context and the

individuals participating in the research process. From this perspective, the research work and the reality it studies exist in a continuum, which can take on different forms depending on the situation; from an open communication space to one for exchange, sharing, and even conflict. But what lies on this continuum is not only the object of knowledge but also the social context of LGBTIQ+ scholars and lives, including their stigma and the intertwined state of risk, precariousness, and vulnerability they share. LGBTIQ+ scholars working on and with LGBTIQ+ issues, people, and communities grapple with potential hazards related to their stance within academia and the broader public domain. The development of LGBTIQ+ studies and their dissemination in both the scientific and public spheres involve a complex interplay of conflict, particularly in the current historical moment marked by an unprecedented assault that not only questions their scientific validity but also their legitimacy (Paternotte 2018). This assault has even gone as far as attempts to ban these studies from the university and school systems. As such, the intertwined logic of risk, precariousness, and vulnerability determines and hinders the agency of LGBTIQ+ scholars.

The options are either to surrender or quit, which unfortunately is the only possible path for many who face unsustainable precarity and vulnerability, or to defend oneself and resist. However, the latter requires individual and collective resources, including financial ones. It also entails taking on the risk of moving between the inside and outside of the university. In fact, the visibility of stigma can be generative of proud alliances and creative strategies as a “queer art of failure” (Halberstam 2012), but it also exposes the researcher to anti-LGBTIQ+ violence. To clarify the idea of a bodily state defined by the risk of violence, I would like to refer to a passage from Elsa Dorlin’s book on the philosophy of violence:

Enduring violence generates a negative cognitive and emotional attitude that determines the individuals who experience it as always on the lookout, paying close attention to the world and others. They live in a state of “radical anxiety,” and it is exhausting to have to deny, minimize, defuse, endure, reduce, and avoid violence, to have to take shelter, protect yourself, defend oneself. This means developing a series of rationalizations in order to understand others and to make your own actions seem reasonable and normal, for instance movements, attitudes, and actions deployed to avoid irritating others or to not encourage or trigger their violence. It also means living with affects and emotions (which, although nearly imperceptible, are constant) and getting used to their violence, desensitizing yourself

and accepting it. “Concern for others” here has nothing to do with *doing* something to help, care for, comfort, reassure, or protect them; rather, we are concerned for others in order to anticipate what they want, will, or can *do to us*—which might devalue, exhaust, insult, isolate, injure, worry, deny, frighten, or de-realize us.

... Such attention could just as well be described as a long labor of denial, avoidance, and defusing; it is also a way of maintaining distance (maintaining safety), or fleeing, or even of preparing for conflict, for combat. ... The kind of attention required of the dominated consists of always projecting yourself onto the intentions of others, melting into their representations as a way of defending yourself. This is a product of the dominated’s knowledge—their incredibly in-depth knowledge—of the dominant group. (Dorlin 2018, 172–73)

Building knowledge on the dominating power object constantly casts LGBTIQ+ scholars in a light of precariousness and vulnerability. Dorlin describes this process as a specific form of technology of power that creates risk for the subject, who becomes a visible body of stigma. This body must forget, deny, conceal, omit, or suspend its situated subjectivity to navigate between the inside and outside of the university space. Not as a subject for itself, but rather as a bundle of knowledge radically oriented towards others. To anticipate their moves. The panopticon eye monitors every movement, every action, and even every desire of LGBTIQ+ scholars, measuring their deviation:

The subject’s work in paying attention to their objects is exhausting: the level of attention must be high to gain the knowledge needed for self-defense. This intense focus occurs continuously and without interruption, or almost. The need to be on the alert nearly every instant leads to exhaustion and prevents subjects of knowledge from paying attention to themselves. Their own representations, impressions, desires, intentions, and emotions take the back seat, where they are treated as if they were doubtful, fantastic, false, trivial, insignificant. ... Put differently, the ceaseless effort to know others as well as possible in an attempt to defend ourselves from what they might do to us is a technology of power that manifests through the production of ignorance—and not ignorance of ourselves but of our power of action, which we come to see as alien and alienated. Authentically modest, witnessing, submissive, drained, and docile, the dominated are assigned to a cognitive relationship and alienating gnosological work. They develop a knowledge about the dominant, which constitutes an archive of

the ways the dominant are phenomenally and ideologically all-powerful.
(Dorlin 2018, 173–74)

This permanent state of attention applies to every aspect of a LGBTIQ+ scholar's body and subjectivity: when they speak within the institution, whether in an internal meeting, during a seminar or conference, or even in a friendly gathering of a standing group on gender and politics, where LGBTIQ+ scholars may be welcome but still somehow regarded as “strangers.” It also applies to irritated reactions when they speak out at public events, present their work, or give interviews to the media. A simplistic view of the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ scholars working with LGBTIQ+ issues, people, and communities would reduce it to mere exclusion or repression. However, in the context of the neoliberal governance of the university, the situation is much more complex and insidious. Sara Ahmed argues:

I became co-director of the Institute for Women's Studies at Lancaster University in 2000. I began to attend faculty meetings. I was the only person of color at these meetings. It is important to note that I noticed this: whiteness tends to be visible to those who do not inhabit it (though not always, and not only). During the discussion of one item at a faculty meeting on equality, the dean said something like “race is too difficult to deal with.” I remember wanting to challenge this. But the difficulty of speaking about racism as a person of color meant that I did not speak up during but after the meeting, and even then I wrote rather than spoke. Saying that race is “too difficult” is how racism gets reproduced, I put in an email to the dean. The belief that racism is inevitable is how racism becomes inevitable, I pointed out. (One of the favorite arguments made by senior management was that the university was “very white” because of geography—and that you can't do anything about geography.) Do something about it, he replies. It shouldn't be up to me, I answer.

... The dean spoke to the director of human resources. She got in contact with me, offering an invitation to become a member of the newly formed race equality team responsible for writing our university's race equality policy. There were two academics on the team, both people of color. There are problems and pitfalls in becoming a diversity person as a person of color. There is a script that stops anyone reading the situation as a becoming. You already embody diversity by providing an institution of whiteness with color. (Ahmed 2012, 3–4)

Ahmed's concern about being “stuck *in* institutions by being stuck *to* a

category” (Ahmed 2012, 4) is something precarious researchers do not have the privilege to care about yet. Writing that letter for an LGBTIQ+ precarious scholar would be too risky. The point, however, is a different one. What does it mean to embody the stigma behind the straightness of the institution?

For a long time, my research on LGBTIQ+ politics has preceded my queerness; no need for me to come out, because my work outed, and continues to out, me constantly. Not because of the naive assumption that working on LGBTIQ+ issues requires being LGBTIQ+. But instead because of my epistemological and methodological choices, my stance towards the communities and people I work with, my way of addressing the LGBTIQ+ stigma and sharing it with research participants, and my primary interest in the circularity of knowledge between academia, social movements, and the public arena. Each of these factors puts me on the continuum of the LGBTIQ+ risk, which is much more than mere community membership, affective bonding, epistemological empathy, or programmatic or ideological convergence. It is a social and political field of care, struggle, and conflict that precedes both me and my work. It is the historical here and now that encompasses the reality of homo-lesbo-bi-transphobia; it is the political regime of heterosexuality (Wittig 1992). Thus, being constantly out in a closeted straight institution means being constantly stuck to a liminal position between inside and outside—not just of the category or my queerness, but of the institution itself.

Toward an Epistemic Resistance

In April 2023, the Italian newspaper *Il Manifesto* published an interview with me about the Italian anti-gender and pro-life movements, coinciding with the International Trans Day of Visibility. In the interview, I discussed my recent observations on the extent of anti-gender mobilization and the convergence of goals between ultrareligious movements, so-called radical feminism (or radfem groups), and a new form of anti-trans activism. I then mentioned organizations like GenSpect in the UK, Observatoire de la Petite Sirène or Ypomoni in France, and GenerAzioneD in Italy that have emerged in recent years. They perform a kind of “anti-gender” activism that does not share the religious genealogy of the anti-gender movements of the 2010s (such as La Manif pour Tous) and that is closer to the “gender-critical” claim of trans-hostile feminism. Scholars of anti-gender politics and mobilizations

have observed and are studying this relatively new phenomenon, which emerged unexpectedly within the field of anti-gender campaigns (Cabral Grinspan et al. 2023).

Anti-trans, trans-hostile, and gender-critical groups intercepted my interview and used it to mobilize activists and trolls on social networks to discredit me. They portrayed me as a mere activist or an academic impostor who is “obsessed” with anti-gender issues or, more trivially, as an idiot. While I take comfort in saying, “Haters gonna hate,” these campaigns and attacks do not simply aim to discredit me. Instead, they plan to undermine scholars perceived as “radical transactivists” or “transideologists,” precisely like anti-gender (religious-based and right-wing) actors mobilized against scholars identified as “gender ideologists,” “LGBT ideologists,” or “woke” activists. Beyond the targeted scholars, these attacks seek to demolish a specific way of knowledge production that embodies the LGBTIQ+ stigma and positions itself in the LGBTIQ+ continuum. More than just a simple ethical or epistemological choice, I define this LGBTIQ+ continuum as a standpoint, an epistemic state that concerns the empirical construction of knowledge and thus the material condition of being an LGBTIQ+ scholar working on and with LGBTIQ+ issues, people, and communities (Browne et al. 2010).

To conclude, I would like to emphasize two points. Firstly, it is important to note that it is not just gender or LGBTIQ+ studies, or critical studies more generally, that are under attack and at risk. Rather, it is a specific mode of knowledge production and circulation enacted by LGBTIQ+ scholars adopting an *epistemic queer state*, making them vulnerable within straight institutions. This vulnerability is inherently related to stigma and discrimination that doubles queer researchers’ precariousness and shapes their position as short-term, stigmatized, unexpected, and awkward and thus places them at risk. The epistemic queer state constitutes the spot where anti-gender and anti-trans actors and discourses converge in mobilizing and voicing an *epistemic straight claim* (see also, for a similar definition, Petrovic and Rosiek 2007). For anti-gender actors, this claim is the heterosexual and traditional defense of the natural order of the family rooted in the eternal “anthropological” truth of the sexual difference, while anti-trans actors refer to a theoretical matrix marked by a normative sex-based vision of gender. Both perspectives converge in their attempt to “naturalize” humanity, opposing social constructivist epistemologies.

The second point concerns the risk faced by LGBTIQ+ scholars working

on and with LGBTIQ+ issues, people, and communities in a context “under siege,” exhaustingly engaged in the labor of caring about what others could do to them. And thus, permanently worrying about the effects that these unpredictable “others” could have on their trajectory, career, or even life—as Elsa Dorlin notes. The in-depth knowledge this attention generates is also one of the forms of resistance against the epistemic straight gaze, which seeks to undermine the position of LGBTIQ+ scholars within the institution and discredit their voices in the public arena.

Far from any triumphalist rhetoric, it must be acknowledged that there is a profound *fatigue* related to this negative caring work, a fatigue of being permanently at risk, under attack. There is an unbearable, debilitating, overwhelming, and demoralizing fatigue of being constantly caught in the tension of mastering a dominant knowledge to strategically defend the minority knowledge we, as LGBTIQ+ scholars in an epistemic queer state, co-produce and embody (González 2020).

In my experience, I would never have been able to endure the weight of institutional precariousness and political vulnerability if I had not had the opportunity to work with an epistemic queer community to build academic networks of sharing, support, and positive care. These networks provided safe spaces within academic institutions and disciplinary areas. I would not have had the strength to resist the weight of stigma and the straight institutional and disciplinary gaze if the epistemic queer state of my research could not have found the caring attention of epistemic peers at specific and special conferences, seminars, and journals—and of course also within my own department and university. Unfortunately, LGBTIQ+ scholars working on and with LGBTIQ+ issues, people, and communities too often experience refusals and rejections that question the very premise of their research without bothering to go into detail. Too often they end up at academic events relegated to the limbo of indifference, because straight contexts can make it impossible to see the concrete reality, the saliency, or even the existence of LGBTIQ+ issues, people, and communities. Conversely, they may have been forced to play the role of the minority spokesperson to check the box of policy diversity-friendliness.

National and international networks of LGBTIQ+ studies and scholars, as well as national and international groups of LGBTIQ+ studies and scholars within professional associations, are crucial in creating conditions of resistance to the straightness of the academic institution. It is also important to have national and international scientific journals of LGBTIQ+

studies and scholars that are not merely embedded in the broader field of gender studies as a minority-plus. These networks, groups, and journals may provide spaces for LGBTIQ+ scholars working on and with LGBTIQ+ issues, people, and communities, to collectively assume the risk of being precarious and vulnerable within the straight institution and share the weight of the LGBTIQ+ stigma, to—eventually—resist.

Massimo Prearo is a political scientist and assistant professor at the Department of Human Science of the University of Verona, where he is also scientific coordinator of the Research Center PoliTeSse–Politics and Theories of Sexuality. His latest book is *Anti-gender Mobilizations, Religion and Politics: An Italian Case Study* (Routledge, 2024). He can be reached at massimo.prearo@univr.it.

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