

“Foreigner, Go Home”—But Don’t Count on It

Judith Harris (April 17, 2012)



On April 14, Nazir Rafiq Ahmad was returning home via the subway when, between Rome's Terminal Station and Piazza Cavour, he was assaulted by a young man screaming racist insults, the kindest of which was “Go home, foreigner.”

ROME – Born in India, Nazir Rafiq Ahmad, 50, teaches English in three schools in Rome, where he has lived since 2001. On April 14 he was returning home via the subway when, between the Terminal Station and Piazza Cavour, he was assaulted by a young man screaming racist insults, the kindest of which was “Go home, foreigner.” To stop the beating Ahmad was defended by others in the subway car and, when he collapsed bleeding onto the floor, a young woman doctor, Italian, rushed forward to help him. This attack was hardly on the level of the xenophobic Norwegian slaughter of seventy-seven people accused of opening the gates to Muslims. It is, even so, a reflection on Italian attitudes



and a harbinger of things to come, even without the neo-Nazi slogans.

But the situation is complex. Just off the isle of Lampedusa, five bodies of Libyan illegal immigrants were recovered just one month ago.

They have good reason to be concerned: last year at this time some 2,000 immigrants landed in a single day on the island that is home to only 5,500 Italians. Lampedusan authorities fear a repetition of last year’s flood of illegal immigrants as soon as the seas are calm and the weather is warm. Last year the money-earning tourism that had been traditional to the island fell by 70% over the previous year.

The sad truth is that the island is even less equipped than last year to deal with the predicted influx because one of their two reception centers was burnt to the ground by Tunisian immigrants last Sept. 20, and has not yet been rebuilt, even as just last week fifty illegal immigrants arrived. “We can’t just leave people in the middle of the road,” said Bernardino De Rubeis, mayor of Lampedusa. “We have asked for the center to be rebuilt and reopened as soon as possible. We also count on assurances [from the Government] that within 48 hours the illegal immigrants will be sent elsewhere in Italy.”

The Northern League of Umberto Bossi has been the Italian political party most identified with exploitation of anti-immigrant politics. However, scandals have literally hacked off much of the party leadership, from Bossi himself and his sons to Rosi Mauro and other party administrators accused of dipping into publicly provided party funds for their personal gain (only the latest: the accusation in the Italian press that a certain raven-haired woman known as “la Badante”—i.e., Rosi the Caretaker, who is also Vice President of the Italian Senate and as such third in line to succeed President Giorgio Napolitano in an emergency—acquired \$130,000 worth of diamonds and gold ingots with party funds. The result is a wave of reformism within the Northern League, with a document circulated asking for an end to the party’s xenophobic rhetoric. Whether or not a new party majority may accept this is yet to be seen, however.

Again in the North, the Milan registry office ignited a firestorm of news reports and phone-in chat shows when it revealed that, according to its latest statistical analysis, three out of every ten babies born in Milan—the very cornerstone of League support—has a Chinese name. In other words, Lombardy, the cradle of Italian manufacturing, finance, fashion and advertising, will be 30% Italo-Chinese by birth within the next decade, as Italy’s birth rate continues to decline. Officially Milan has some 80,000 Chinese, but in fact more since not all are legally registered. Already, and this is the most important statistic, 12% of all of Italy’s gross domestic product (GDP) is the product of regularly registered, legal immigrant labor.

It is all a ticklish business, as was seen in the Northern border town where police legally withdrew passports from immigrants for checking, and—so as to make sure they gave the right passport back later in the night—wrote ID numbers of immigrants’ hands. The reaction from other Italians was swift: memories of World War II Nazi tactics are still too fresh, even though the border police explained that, when they had previously given the immigrants’ paper slips with numbers, the slips were lost.

Muslim immigration is a separate chapter. The Northern League two years ago presented a bill before Parliament calling for the arrest of women wearing the veil. But if accepting the newcomers is difficult, so is their being forced to accept the Italian way of life, at least for some. At least two young women were murdered in recent years by Muslim family members who felt that their daughters and sisters had strayed too far into Italian mores, dressing like Italian women and being courted by Italian boyfriends.

At the same time, according to Magdi Allam writing in *Corriere della Sera* some time back, anti-Semitic hate videogames are on the web, and are aimed at Muslim immigrant children. The website www.awladnaa.net [2], which is still on line and still managed by the Fratelli Musulmani (Muslim Brotherhood) in Arabic, teaches children—including in Italy, according to Allam—that “the Jews assassinated 25 prophets of God, and their history is full of criminal homicides and corruption.”



Another phrase would have it that, “The Jews instigate the whole world against Islam and Muslims with the pretext of combating terrorism....”

To see clips in Italy of the positive side of the story, see the three-part series produced by Il Sole-24 Ore on immigrant entrepreneurs Margarita Sanchez, Xu Qui Lin, and Nelu Mega at:
<http://karimamoual.blog.ilsole24ore.com/> [3]

That Italy needs the regularly registered immigrant workers and business entrepreneurs like them is plain, just as it is plain that more clandestine immigrants will arrive. They must be legal, registered and their identities clear, though this is difficult when passports are intentionally thrown away. Nevertheless, Italy will have to bite the bullet sooner or later, and the sooner the better.

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[1] <http://ftp.iitaly.org/files/emigrazionelampedusa1334675263jpg>

[2] <http://www.awladnaa.net>

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