

Tribute to Valeria Solesin

Valeria Solesin died in the 13 November 2015 terrorist attacks on the Bataclan concert hall. Her friends at INED pay tribute to her.

A trained sociologist and demographer, Valeria Solesin was starting the final stage of her PhD on contemporary fertility behavior in Italy and France.

She proposed to look more specifically at the birth of the second child: while most couples in these two countries want to have at least two children, the transition from first to second child is much less common in Italy.



A young researcher ...

An Italian national, Valeria Solesin pursued most of her higher education in France. She was first enrolled in a double license, "Society, Politics and European Institutions" at the University of Trento (Italy) and in sociology at the University of Nantes (2009). The following year she joined the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) in Paris. Her work carried out during her Master diploma in "Sociology and statistics" focused on "*factors that influence fertility planning [in] a comparative approach between France and Italy*" (2011). The following year she enrolled at the Institute of Demography at the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (IDUP). Her research topic becomes clearer and her second Master dissertation, in demography this time, is titled: "*Having two children in Italy? Constraints and Opportunities*".

With her knowledge of the Italian context, but also of family and fertility policies in both countries, and trained in sociology and demography methods, she embarks on a more ambitious doctoral research on "*One or two children? An analysis of the determinants of fertility in France and Italy*". These countries, although close in several respects (geographically, culturally and from a certain demographic point of view) are nevertheless opposed in terms of fertility and female activity rates, "*the total fertility rate is 2 children per woman in France versus 1.4 in Italy. As for the employment rate, it is higher than the European average in the first country but lower in the second*". Based on this observation, she focuses more specifically on the transition from the first to second child: "*we study the impact of a first birth on women's activity in order to look at the fertility intentions of couples who already have a child.* »

To carry out her research, she received a doctoral fellowship from the National Family Allowances Fund (CNAF) in 2012. Enrolled in the graduate school of geography and member of the Institute of Demography research center at the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (Cridup), she was also hosted at the French Institute of Demographic Studies (INED). Firmly

rooted in a gender perspective, as evidenced by some of her work [\[1\]](#), she questions the norms and representations of family in both countries, and places at the heart of her reasoning the role of social and family policies and their historical context. In order to do this, she adopts a multidisciplinary approach based on the critical analysis of policies, the exploitation of French and Italian statistical surveys and the carrying out of interviews in each country. She aims at establishing a dialogue between the statistical objectification of fertility behavior with the words of couples faced with the decision of whether or not to have a second child, so as to analyze the impact of their family and union trajectories, as well as the social and political contexts in which they live. Her approach seeks *"not to reduce qualitative analysis to a kind of "support" of quantitative analysis (...) but demonstrate that standardized responses [to a questionnaire] are not the appropriate tool when seeking to understand a complex decision such as having children (...) and when studying the decision-making process, the disagreements and the negotiations"* among couples. She carries out around thirty interviews in France (Marseille and Nantes, mainly) and around forty in Italy (Venice, Florence and Naples).

The differences in behavior observed through the stories she collects in the three Italian regions, led her to look more closely at the evolution of regional disparities in fertility in her home country. Using the Moran indicator (which measures the similarity between neighboring geographic areas), she shows that *"the very strong spatial correlation of Italian regions in the early 1980s gradually declined until the 2000s. Since then, the correlation tends to rise again but at a significantly lower level than in 1980. The rate of convergence to the national fertility rate was faster in areas where the delay of the first birth was had taken place earlier"*. She won the 3rd prize of the University of Paris 1 scientific posters for this study on « Disparités régionales de fécondité en Italie. Peut-on parler "d'une" fécondité italienne ? » [\[2\]](#).

Valeria presents her work on the birth of a second child in France and in Italy at numerous conferences: « *L'arrivée d'un deuxième enfant : une transition moins fréquente en Italie qu'en France* » [\[3\]](#), the Congress of the International Association of French-speaking Demographers (AIDELF) in Bari in May 2014; *"More than one child? Constraints and Opportunities in France and Italy"* [\[4\]](#) during the Giornate di Studio sulla Popolazione (Popdays) in Palermo in February 2015. Her research on fertility also leads her to question the *"meaning that young couples give to marriage and cohabitation" in Italy, a country where cohabitation developed relatively late compared to other countries in Europe* "(work presented at the conference of the French Sociological Association in 2015 [\[5\]](#)).

After teaching in different Parisian universities (University Paris Est-Créteil, University Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint Denis), Valeria Solesin joined the teaching staff of IDUP as a temporary teaching and research assistant in September 2015. Very involved in research networks, she was a member of the French Sociological Association (AFS), the International Association of Association of French-speaking Demographers (AIDELF) and the Italian Society of Statistics (SIS-SPIA). She also co-organized a PhD seminar at INED in May 2014 and was involved in organizing an international "young researchers" conference scheduled for September 2016.

A colleague and friend ...

Valeria moved colleagues who have met her by her determination in work and dynamism in everyday life. She was enthusiastic about writing her PhD dissertation, encouraged by her supervisors, Virginia-Barrusse Luca (IDUP), Arnaud Régnier-Loilier (Ined) and Benoît Céroux (CNAF), all of whom showed her great confidence.

She was both in love and critical of her two countries. She was saddened about the state of family law and family policies in Italy, and hoped that her thesis would inform debates on this topic. She was so perfectionist, that she did not share her texts before she was fully satisfied with them, even with her supervisors. Thus we have too little of them today. However, she surely would not have liked that we keep a smooth image of a "perfect student" of her. She assured jokingly that she dreamed of a "government job with nine weeks of vacation". And she mocked her own situation of PhD student, complaining to friends that she had to "close the INED rather than nightclubs like when she was a teenager!". She would say this particularly when she doubted. And her own way of doubting was a comfort to others. Valeria was frank, unruly, and rebellious. She was clumsy, generous. *Solare and testarda*. But she was above all beautiful, intelligent, unifying, funny, strong, lively and courageous.

She poetically reappropriated the French language, giving life to literary creations every day. She loved the language. She was the only one who knew that "lustre" meant "five years". She liked to tell, we loved to listen. She had a way with words: "The thesis, a pleasure without end", "That's the thesis. By the time you finish it, you won't even want to write a shopping list". Erudite and a remarkable expert in her disciplines, she was able to scream in anger against a badly constructed variable that "broke her balls." She loved this expression as it was full of imagery.

Athletic, she organized a team at INED for the race "La Parisienne". A vital force. Rugged. A free electron with no taboo. As ready to party as she was to work.

Valeria was as determined in her personal as professional life: she wanted to finish it, this "*poutain* de thèse"!

Her friends at INED

November 2015

Selected Bibliography

[1] published in 2013 in Neodemos [«Allez les filles, au travail !»](#)

« *Opinion sur les rôles dévolus aux hommes et aux femmes et comportements d'activité : peut-on parler de conciliation ?* » présenté au colloque de l'association française de sociologie à Nantes (France) en 2013

2014, colloque « Districare il nodo genere-potere. Sguardi interdisciplinari su politica, lavoro, sessualità e cultura » de l'università degli studi di Trento (Italie) (résumé page 47): « [Asimmetrie fuori e dentro il mercato del lavoro. Una comparazione tra Francia e Italia sui ruoli di genere e l'attività professionale](#) »

[2] She has presented these works the following year in *Giornate di Studio sulla Popolazione* (Popdays) à Palerme (Italie) : « [Regional differences in fertility in Italy. Can we speak of an "Italian" fertility?](#) »

[3] Colloque Aidelf 2014 (Texte à paraître en 2016)

[4] Giornate di Studio sulla Popolazione (Popdays) à Palerme en février 2015, [More than one child? Constraints and opportunities in France and Italy](#)

[5] Colloque de l'Association française de sociologie , 2015 "[Se marier ou cohabiter en Italie ? Les couples face au projet d'enfant](#)"