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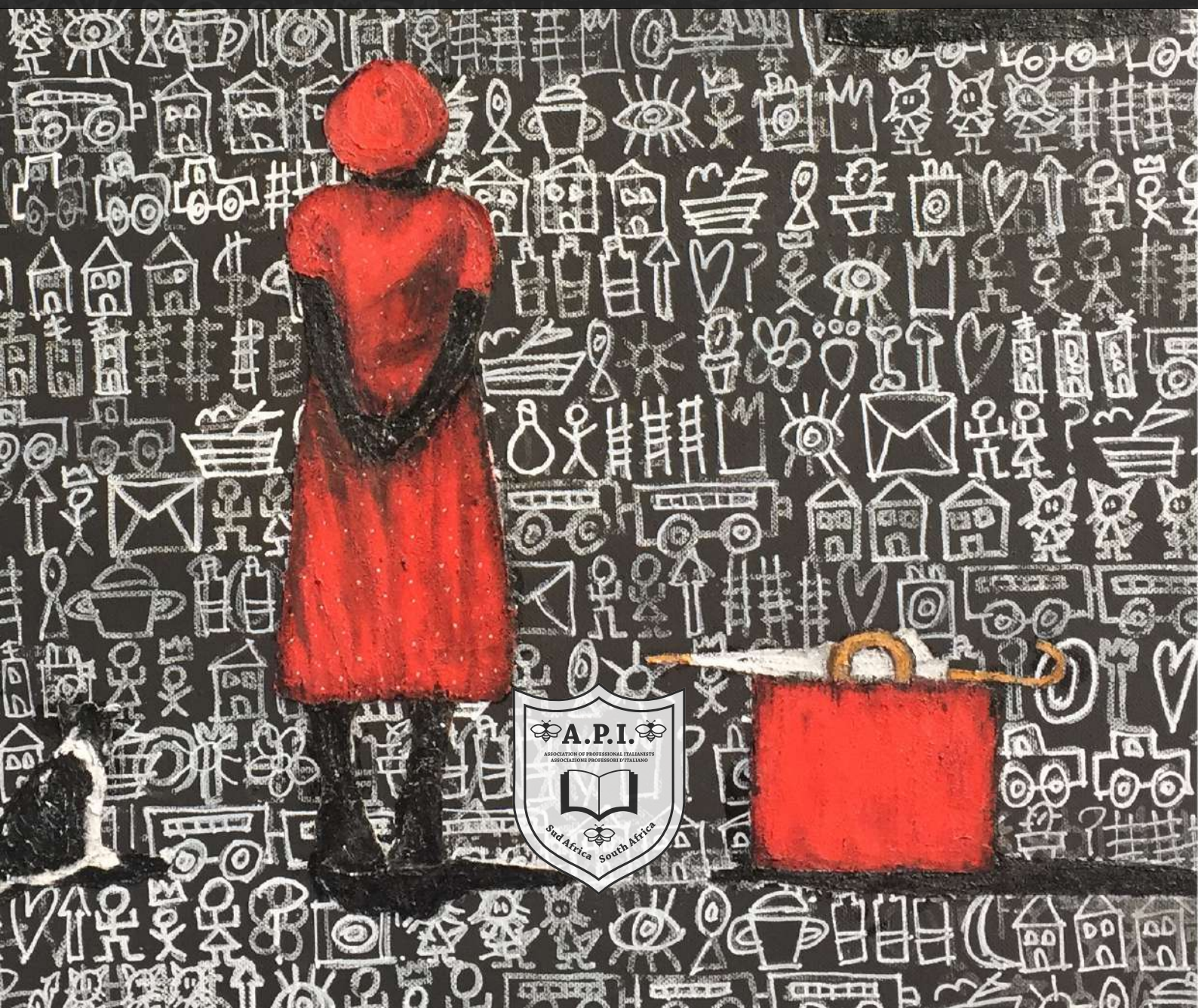
STUDI D'ITALIANISTICA NELL'AFRICA AUSTRALE

ITALIAN STUDIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA



STUDI D'ITALIANISTICA NELL'AFRICA AUSTRALE
ITALIAN STUDIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

NUMERO SPECIALE / SPECIAL ISSUE:

DIVERSITÀ, DECOLONIZZAZIONE E STUDI ITALIANI /

DIVERSITY, DECOLONISATION AND ITALIAN STUDIES

A cura di / Edited by:
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Italian Studies in Southern Africa

INTRODUCTION / INTRODUZIONE

DIVERSITY, DECOLONISATION, AND ITALIAN STUDIES

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In recent years, an academic debate has arisen regarding the need to diversify and decolonise the curriculum and to revise the criteria by which academic productivity and achievements are evaluated. Publications such as Jonathan D. Jansen's *Decolonization in Universities* (2001), Ramón Grosfoguel, Roberto Hernández and Ernesto Rosen Velásquez's *Decolonizing the Westernized University* (2016), and Gurminder K. Bhambra, Kerem Nişancioğlu and Dalia Gebrialc's *Decolonizing the University* (2018a) have investigated and proposed ideas and practices to decolonise higher education. To mention relevant examples in the field of Italian Studies, a symposium on 'Diversity in Italian Studies' was organised at the Calandra Italian American Institute at the City University of New York in 2019, and

major Italian Studies associations such as the Society of Italian Studies in Britain and the American Association of Italian Studies in the United States respectively promoted an equality, diversity and inclusion working group and a forum called 'Confronting Structural Racism in Italian Studies'. Moreover, in the 2019 and 2020 USA academic job market listings, two tenure-track positions in modern Italian Studies were devoted to Transnational Italian Studies and Italian Studies/Race and Diaspora Studies, and other advertisements for positions in Renaissance included issues of migration and/or race in their job advertisments[1]. As will be evident in this introduction and in the 24 contributions that follow, this volume accepts from the contributors and offers to the readers terms related to decolonisation in a very broad and performative sense. Colonisation refers not only the historical actions of colonising nations, but the residual and/or the more recent systems of language and representation whose strictures or practices result in categorising, limiting, stereotyping, etc., of the non-mainstream other. Thus, decolonisation refers here to the interrogation and removal of the structures of thinking, words, action, and policy that support those strictures, whether they were imposed politically, culturally, academically, or in some other way. The examination and acceptance, rather than the erasure or denial, of diversity is seen as key to decolonisation conceived in this broader context.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's work on "racism without racists", which is also the title of his 2017 book, can be employed to analyse what is traditionally excluded from the category of Italian Studies. Although Italian American Studies has repeatedly stressed the complex processes of whitening undergone by Italian-American communities, Italian Studies has historically marginalised such a discussion. Recent transformations in Italian culture brought by immigrations to the peninsula have been looked at with suspicion as 'outside' of the traditional enclave of Italian Studies. We need to do better and follow Salvador Vidal-Ortiz's invitation to revise those "inhospitable sites" of academia and make room for an "academic transformative

[1] Similar conversations have occurred in the fields of French Studies (with a conference at the University of Lausanne in 2020 organised by Siham Bouamer and Loic Bourdeau) and German Studies (with conferences organised since 2017 by the collective Diversity, Decolonization, and the German Curriculum). This conference was then turned into a volume. See Criser and Malakaj, 2020.

engagement" with diversity that is a practice and does not remain an abstract claim of inclusivity (2017:np). The terms 'diversity and inclusion' are often used to mean a direct engagement with an attempt at modifying the way we practice our own field of research. We need to demand change by allowing a plurality of voices to speak. "Whiteness talks", adds Vidal-Ortiz, "and it does so in silence, as the norm" (2017: np). It is Kimberly A. Bates and Eddy Ng who articulate the direction in which we should change our often too insular research fields. They invite us to stop being "gatekeepers" who are "complicit in reproducing whiteness and what makes us comfortable" because that "reinforces our privilege" (2021:1). It is time to admit and set aside our "white fragility" and it is "time to listen", add Bates and Ng, because "the future of academia as a catalyst for progress and change lies squarely in our own hands" (2021:1).

Informed by this body of work, we facilitated a series of six roundtables in order to discuss how the concept of diversity has been applied to Italian culture, how the Italian curriculum can be diversified and decolonised given the "postcolonial" (Ponzanesi, 2012) and "transnational" (Bond, 2014) turns in Italian Studies since the 2000s, and the specific contributions that Italian Studies can make to the debate about diversity. Thus, we welcomed proposals that aimed to re-evaluate the methodologies through which we research and teach, as well as to examine how Italian Studies can become more inclusive and reflective of today's multicultural Italian society and the diversity of students of Italian. The proposals that we received from scholars based in North America, Australia, Asia, Europe, and Africa approached these broad aims by analysing a wide array of interrelated topics. They include: racism, white supremacy and processes of racialisation; intersectional perspectives on discrimination and normativity in terms of race, class, sex, gender, sexuality, ableism, and mental health, among others; a transhistorical reassessment of the Italian curriculum and the Italian canon from the perspectives of decolonial, postcolonial, and transnational studies; inclusion of diversity workers, including scholars, in the University; linguistic diversity and accented forms of expressions; collaboration beyond academia and participatory approaches to scholarship and teaching; social and environmental activism and academia; the future(s) of Italian Studies as a discipline.

Inspired by the conference, this special issue offers resources for scholars in Italian studies and beyond both to explore the coloniality from which certain contemporary pedagogical and scholarly practices emerged and to rethink the ways in which education and research is produced. We consider Italy in its 'transnational' dimension, following previous scholarly efforts in this direction, in particular Charles Burdett and Loredana Polezzi's description of this field as progressively becoming more diversified and detached from its national (and nationalistic) origins:

> The field of modern languages is structured by multiple layers of well-established narratives [...] for the most part, modelled on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century maps of the world: French studies, German studies, Italian studies and so on. These are traditionally Eurocentric [...] and based on a strong, homogenizing association between nation, territory, language, and culture. All of these assumptions have come under intense scrutiny and are, if not outdated, at least under pressure [...] by greater as well as faster connectivity across physical and virtual spaces, by the need to decolonize the curriculum, and by environmental concerns which transcend any geographic or political border. (Burdett & Polezzi, 2020:1)

This special issue engages with some of the questions that Burdett and Polezzi ask their readers to consider when revisiting the disciplinary context:

> Are we looking at Italian culture from the viewpoint of an insider or an outsider? From a position of cultural and geographical proximity or distance (whether real or perceived)? Do we identify with it, directly or indirectly (for instance, through family heritage and personal connections), or not? (Burdett & Polezzi, 2020:2)

Burdett and Polezzi's suggestion urges us both to unthink the Eurocentric standard through which we conceive the field, and to question the norm of whiteness with which the study of Italian language

and culture is usually associated. We are aware that the fact that three of the roundtables' four organisers and facilitators are white academics reflects the unspoken and invisible white norm that has so far characterised Italian studies. This special issue attempts to question this norm by urging to adopt a more pluralistic and contextualised model of knowledge production.

The study of Italian language and culture has been deeply influenced by coloniality, and education had a key role in colonialism and in spreading racist ideologies both in Italy and in the colonies (Carini & La Cordara 2014; McLean 2018; Gabrielli 2015). Even language teaching – which has been traditionally thought of as exclusively instrumental and based on a specific set of rules – was influenced by the colonial legacy. For instance, an Italian textbook, Telis Marin and Sandro Magnelli's *Progetto Italiano* (2006), presents a chart associating a national flag with a person's name and his or her portrait (2006:6)[2]. Italy is associated with Paolo, a man whose skin colour is darker than Hamid's, the man who is representing Morocco. This strict association between language, nationality and race can be seen as manifesting the legacy of racialised discourses typical of European colonialism[3]. Such a way of presenting a language cannot be seen as inclusive, especially for L2 learners who might be interested in living in Italy. Language acquisition and textbooks are pivotal to propose an idea of Italy not only abroad, but also in Italian schools in Italy. For example, an Italian textbook for second grade students in Italy featured a black character who spoke Italian incorrectly, causing protests and accusations of racism, because it racialised linguistic correctness (Venturi, 2020). Learning a language can be a way to overcome physical and personal frontiers only if we recognise the role that languages can play in denying rights to people who do not belong exclusively to one specific language and nation (Fortier, 2021; Gramling, 2016; Polezzi, Anguri & Wilson, 2019; Yildiz, 2012).

As these examples show, it is impossible to dissociate the language we use from the (racialising) culture from which it emerged. If this point is valid, multilingual education is key to diversifying and decolonising

[2] This example was selected to show an essentialist tendency in textbooks rather than to point to a specific and isolated instance.

[3] On the development of these racialised discourses in Europe, see De Donno (2020:141-178) and Olender (1992).

the curriculum. Learning about another language/culture can be a way to see reality from a different perspective and to challenge established cultural norms. In particular, as Jennifer Burns and Catherine Keen have argued, "Italy's position as a crossing-point along global axes of encounter turns research in Italian Studies into a particularly productive site for the analysis of the intersection between geographical, cultural, social, political, and economic experiences of movement in both space and time" (2020:140).

One of the reasons of both why it is so fascinating to learn about the notion of diversity in Italy is that Italians themselves were not considered as quite white in Northern Europe (Luzzi, 2008) or North America (Guglielmo & Salerno, 2003; Petrovich, Njegosh & Scacchi, 2012) and that southern Italians were considered as Africans by Northern Italians (Brunetti & Derobertis, 2009; Forgacs, 2014; Gramsci, 1966; Scheneider, 1998; Dickie, 1999; Moe, 2002; Lumley & Morris, 1999; Polizzi, 2021; Teti, 2011; Wong, 2006). Yet Italians were also European colonisers and contributed to theories of "scientific racism" (Burgio, 1999; De Donno, 2006; Giuliani, 2015; Giuliani, 2018; Giuliani & Lombardi-Diop, 2013; Pesarini & Tintori, 2020). Studying critical race studies by looking at the Italian case can be a way to bring a more multifaceted and complex ideas about race than the one generally presented in the Anglophone academic institution. In addition, placing diversity at the centre of Italian study would help give a platform and valorise works otherwise marginalised in Italian Studies.

Diversity and Decolonisation: Two Contrasting and Multifaceted Terms

By associating 'diversity' and 'decolonisation', this special issue puts together two terms that have been considered as poles apart. 'Diversity' is a neoliberal concept, which emerged in a context in which the relevance of knowledge is defined by neoliberal parameters and by their profitability: promoting a more pluralist model of knowledge production can give an advantage to universities competing to attract foreign students from abroad. As Angela Last (2018:3) argues, "university managements themselves have become invested in diversifying the curriculum, albeit with a focus on expanding the market towards overseas and ethnic minority students". 'Diversity' is often

considered to be a performative slogan which characterises top-down discourses that combine corporate goals with a supposedly progressive agenda (Moore, 2015:20). The diversification of academia in recent years has contributed to show the continued "whitewashing" of European knowledge, or "the strategic non-recognition of contributions to Western knowledge production by non-Euro-American or non-white intellectuals" (Last, 2018:212). Yet, diversity has often been accused of tokenism or interpreted as an addition to the existing (Eurocentric) system, rather than a demand for a structural change.

While diversity has at times implied maintaining existing academic structures, decolonial approaches question the meaning of scholarly works and the context in which they emerged (Last, 2018:217-218). By recognising the difference between decolonisation and diversity, Dalia Gebrialc argues that

> decolonisation is about recognising the roots of contemporary racism in the multiple material, political, social and cultural processes of colonialism and proceeding from this point; this involves the laborious work of structural change at several levels of society – a far cry from the administering of welfare and representation services that has typically been the response to racialised grievances. (Gebrialc, 2018:29)

Decolonisation implies an "epistemic revolution" and, as the Charter of Decolonial Research Ethics rightly recognises, a more democratic and contextualised model of knowledge production (Decoloniality Europe 2013). Decolonisation can be seen as breaking with the current "curricula, employment regimes, teaching standards as well as methodological considerations" (Ziai, Bendix & Müller, 2020b:1). According to Gurminder K. Bhambra, Kerem Nişancıoğlu, and Dalia Gebrialc, decolonisation has a contested and multifaceted definition, but can be described by using its two constitutive landmarks:

> First, it is a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study; it re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a

> context where their role has been systematically effaced from view. Second, it purports to offer alternative ways of thinking about the world and alternative forms of political praxis. And yet, within these broad contours, 'decolonising' remains a contested term, consisting of a heterogeneity of viewpoints, approaches, political projects and normative concerns.
>
> (Bhambra, Nişancıoğlu & Gebrialc, 2018b:2)

Decolonial approaches insist on positionality and pluralism, maintaining that it is necessary to decenter and provincialise the dominant position that Western university have had in creating knowledge in a world shaped by the legacy of colonialism. Moreover, they stress the key role that universities play in producing colonial knowledge and urge for a decolonial reparation:

> It becomes difficult to turn away from the Western university as a key site through which colonialism – and colonial knowledge in particular – is produced, consecrated, institutionalised and naturalised. It was in the university that colonial intellectuals developed theories of racism, popularized discourses that bolstered support for colonial endeavours and provided ethical and intellectual grounds for the dispossession, oppression, and domination of colonised subjects [...]. The foundation of European higher education institutions in colonised territories itself became an infrastructure of empire, an institution and actor through which the totalising logic of domination could be extended; European forms of knowledge were spread, local indigenous knowledge suppressed, and native informants trained.
>
> (Bhambra, Nişancıoğlu & Gebrialc, 2018b:5)

Overcoming the coloniality from which academia emerged means challenging the idea of neutrality that traditionally characterises the production of scientific research. As Daniel Bendix, Franziska Müller, and Aram Ziai argue

> the privilege to conceal one's own identity as "neutral", the privilege to be considered an expert and the privilege to engage in knowledge production on whatever context, unbeknownst of one's individual entanglement with said context. This obstructs comprehension and analysis of social reality from a plurality of perspectives and promotes a false objectivity and universality.
>
> (Ziai, Bendix & Müller, 2020b:4)

Because of this reason, collaborative practices within and beyond academia (and not only within and beyond disciplinary boundaries) might be key to decolonise the academia, as dialogue between scholars and artists, practitioners and activists can show the situated nature of cultural productions[4]. Decolonisation means refusing practices for which no "sharing, negotiating and other forms of communicative togetherness" is possible, advocating for a positioned and participative forms of scholarly production (Last 2018: 222). In other words, these demands are not limited to academia, but they involve a broader societal, economic and political change (Bhambra, Nişancıoğlu & Gebrialc, 2018b:10). Colleagues and activists who propose decolonising academia urge the changing of criteria through which achievements in research and teaching are determined. Academia evaluates productivity in terms of numbers of publication and the symbolic capital of the venues in which these publications appear rather than looking for the impact they have for social transformation.

We believe that decolonising knowledge means to be able to accept and work on contradictions. Although the influence of professors on society is increasingly limited, we have the power to decide what texts are worth reading, to define what culture is, to perpetuate or to challenge Eurocentrism. As Dalia Gebrialc (2018:19) argues, "the university is a site of knowledge production and, most crucially, consecration; it has the power to decide which histories, knowledges and intellectual contributions are considered valuable and worthy of further critical attention and dissemination". If we are concerned with social justice, we need to be able to speak two languages: the language of the institution we work for, and the language of activism where our

[4] On this topic see Badagliacca with Duncan, 2021; Brioni and Fazel, 2021; Coessens, Crispin and Douglas, 2009: Wall and Wells, 2020.

reflections about social justice have emerged. Above all, we need to examine the role that university has played and continues to play in creating and perpetrating systemic social, economic and political inequalities and to aim for a decolonisation of academia. We need to interrogate structural privilege in dialogue with the activist context. We need to ask ourselves if we are contributing to reproducing or challenging the status quo. We hope that this special issue will provoke further dialogue and discussion, as well as encourage solidarity about the need to decolonise Italian Studies and to "learn to unlearn", as Madina V. Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo (2012) put it, namely unthink normalised and whitewashed ways to conceive this discipline.

Structure of the Volume

We have decided to publish in *Studi d'Italianistica nell'Africa Australe / Italian Studies in Southern Africa* because we believe it is important to interrogate the centrality of Western knowledge production by encouraging publications from the global South. We believe, in other words, that in order to decolonise Italian Studies, we should also challenge what Angela Last calls "academic dependency" and "intellectual imperialism":

> Academic dependency is the dependence of academic spaces in the global South on the resources of global northern institutions for academic and financial support, while intellectual imperialism is defined as the colonization of the intellectual life of a colonized people by European social thought. (Last, 2018:239)

This special issue follows a thematic rather than chronological disposition, thus emphasising the transhistorical dimension of the topics that are discussed in this volume.

Contributions to this issue have arrived from international scholars working in Italian Studies and beyond, who live and work in different parts of the planet. We are particularly grateful to colleagues and activists who have contributed to this issue, especially those who currently do not have a permanent position. The format of this special edition is atypical, comprised as it is by six long articles and eighteen

short reflection pieces. In order to invite discussion and deliberation, we have organised the essays in terms of the meaningful connections that they establish. It is the editors' hope that this format will provide the reader with both substantive and scholarly analysis of some issues, and a more accurate survey of the many issues whose investigation lies within the purview of diversity and decolonisation.

The first reflection piece, 'Classics and Colonialism: An Outsider's Perspective' by Samuel Agbamu, asks and answers questions about the relevance of classical studies in the current debate at the centre of this volume. The author demonstrates how imperialism and racism are constitutive of a discussion of classical Roman culture as much as one of contemporary Italian society. For Agbamu, to decolonise the curriculum, we need to consider its cultural roots in Greek and Roman antiquity that have been used to support an oppressive status quo and the construction of a white supremacy.

Some of Agbamu's concerns are echoed in Akash Kumar's approach to a canonical figure, Dante. Kumar reads Dante's work as complementary to the writings of the Arab poet of medieval Sicily, Ibn Hamdîs, as both poets talk about the condition of being a migrant and a refugee. Moving away from a rigid concept of what Italian literature was and is, Kumar creates a dialogue between the past and the present as he examines how these two medieval poets write of experiences that are inherent also in modernity and post-modernity.

Both Agbamu's and Kumar's observations open the door to a more inclusive way of thinking about Italian cultural studies, as Elena Bellina discusses in her 'Creativity and Diversity: A Dialogue between Academic Work and the Performing Arts'. She focuses on the use of creativity as a fluid category in exploring issues of injustice and trauma in her investigation of Italian military captivity in Africa and the kind of creativity that incarceration engendered. The ways that experiences of World War II Italian POWs have traditionally been narrated silences the experiences that depart from that narrative. Bellina's research on the autobiographical pages written by Italian POWs in Africa uncovers the strategies they employed in order to survive the trauma of incarceration and defeat. Raised during a time of fascist propaganda that emphasised the power of Mussolinian virility embodied in the Italian soldier, POWs used theatre and opera to come to terms with the collapse of established values to re-build narratives about themselves outside of strictly fascist

parameters, and to interact with the 'enemy'. This examination might have been limited to one-way narratives by white soldiers had Bellina not also examined the ways in which East African native people portrayed the Italian prisoners. Her research uncovers a history of interactions and cultural exchange mainly through music.

Bellina's interest in understanding how injustice is mediated complements Marta Cariello's observation on a more contemporary form of inequality taking place in the Mediterranean. Her 'Wasting the "South": Exploring Narratives of Italian and Mediterranean Dispensability' is an interdisciplinary exploration of the concepts of 'waste', 'discard', and 'dirt' in the context of the Mediterranean Sea and Southern Italy. While she examines the role of the Mediterranean in debates over the traditional separations between North and South, she moves move beyond colonial and racist paradigms about Southern Italy as a domestic Africa by investigating how such paradigms shift with the arrival of migrants.

Academic research on diversity and decolonisation informs our pedagogical approaches to teaching Italian culture and discussing what Italy is both inside and outside of Italy. Yet, in 'Making Italy Postcolonial, Challenging Regional Stereotypes', Valerie McGuire reminds us that the perception of North and South within Italy has yet to be completely confronted and is still grounded in colonial stereotypes. Instead of resolving this binary divide, Italy projected it onto international colonial conquests and only exported its approach to an 'inferior' south.

Lisa Insana adds to the plurality of definitions of what Italy is and is not by directing our attention to diaspora studies. Using her own experience as an example, Insana unpacks the identity of the professor in the class as a kind of entity, an entity that allows her to explore transnationality and the complexity of defining origins and identity. The goal is to question the concept of origin(s), their situatedness, impermanence, and porosity.

Loredana Polezzi's contribution, '(De)Colonial Memory and Linguistic Diversity: Reassessing What is "Italian"' comments on the status of Italian studies and the commercialisation of what is Italian. She laments that in order to appease the head counting performed by the college administrations, professors of Italian become diplomats who need to cater to a general perception of what Italy is. She proposes a

couple of alternatives to this cultural peddling that allows us to encourage our students to reach a more profound understanding of a complex culture. In particular, she talks about how the thorny issue of 'who is Italian' invites a more flexible interpretation of (trans)national identities that span continents.

Issues of decolonising pedagogy are also explored by Alessia Valfredini in 'For a Critical Pedagogy of Genuine Commitment to All Students in Italian Studies', where she considers what happens to racialised hierarchies filtered through the process of migration. In particular, she analyses racialised structures that inflected her Italian identity, showing that these needed to be interrogated once she migrated to the US. She recounts how rethinking categories typically taken for granted in a specific cultural context allows us to challenge traditional ways of teaching, learning, and engaging with students that reproduce white paradigms. She specifically criticises teaching in an 'exclusionary way' that replicates pedagogical structures models that allow for new forms of marginalisation to become codified in our teaching and learning processes. Valfredini proposes 'engaged pedagogy' as a way to combat rigidity in learning and facilitate knowledge in self-regulating classes that give more agency to the students and allow their experiences and languages to inflect the process of learning.

Clorinda Donato underscores Valfredini's observations by narrating her own experience with Spanish speakers who are often asked to 'forget' Spanish in order to speak Italian correctly. In her 'Imposture, Trauma, and the Positionality of Students and Instructors in the Italian Language Classroom', Donato recommends that instead of requiring a separation from a specific identity and a language, we should build a more congenial pedagogical strategy that avoids an estrangement from a language that shares so much with Italian. This approach allows for recognising who our students are, validating their stories, and facilitate a re-coding of their experience as they learn 'an-other' language.

Karina Mascorro's contribution to this special issue becomes especially relevant here, as she brings into the discussion her personal experience as a graduate student in Italian who had to contend with the privileged position assigned to Italian native speakers in doctoral programs. That a fetishised aura of cultural authenticity granted native Italians advantages was never recognised by the academic institution,

nor the fact that it privileged Italians and excluded students who embodied diversity and represented what a diverse population could contribute to graduate programs. She stresses that work still needs to be done to unpack race in Italian studies.

The authors of the short reflections in this special issue continue to push against the limits and boundaries of what has traditionally been considered the traditional modes of thinking Italy, Italian, and the culture that we teach. Donato invites us to teach Italian through the filter of another romance language, Mascorro stresses the importance of removing monopolies of authenticity, Jessica Harris expands the ways in which we understand the peninsula. In 'What is Black America for Italy? What is Italy for Black America?: Race and Culture in Transnational Exchanges Between Italy and the United States', Harris focuses on how Italians have portrayed African-American women in film in order to expand our understanding of what race means in the Italian cultural context. She is especially interested in how African-American singers and actresses have been inserted into the Italian public sphere of the entertainment business. Harris poses numerous questions concerning what Italy meant for these artists who chose mobility and travel in order to reinscribe themselves within an Italian way of life and (problematic) Italian relationship with race.

Travel and migration are also at the centre of Francesco Ricatti's 'Indigenous Sovereignty and Italian Transcultural Studies'. In contrast to Harris, Ricatti focuses on Italian migrants' complicity with the oppressive colonial system of Australia that coded them as whites. Italians did maintain their racial identity by joining the oppressors and that, Ricatti states, has to be recognised. He offers several guiding principles for Italian migrants, and especially Italian migrant scholars, in order to differentiate themselves from the oppressive practices of the first world. The goal is to develop a practice of decolonisation that transcends theoretical speculation and becomes an ethical system shared by educators, migrants, and scholars.

Eleanor Paynter's 'Writing Against Border Imperialism: Epistemologies of Transits' adds to the complexities of talking about 'migrants' as she contests the categories of 'migrant' or 'refugee' that have been used and taken for granted to define human movements. These are predetermined categories that limit discussions on

representation and replicate a border imperialism in the language used to talk about either economic migration or refugee status.

Shelleen Greene's thought-provoking 'Approaching the Archives of Italian Cinema' deepens our understanding of Italy's relationship with representations and constructions or racialised individuals. In order to correlate identity and visibility in Italian film history, she explores the absences, that is, individuals who participated in the making of films but remained uncredited. Greene asserts that a thorough effort of what she terms 'archival retrieval' is necessary to uncover what remained unmentioned and to analyse why it was considered unmentionable.

In 'São Paulo/San Paolo: Notes on a Transnational Approach to Italian Studies', Giulia Riccò tells how she arrived at her research circuitously: 'I arrived at Italy through Brazil'. The Italian community in São Paulo, she explains, is "the largest concentration of people of Italian descent outside of Italy", and her work on the construction of a racialised Italian identity in Brazil examines how São Paulo became the locus of a 'whitening' project that conflated *italianità* with Europeanness and modernity. Riccò's work interrogates this project and shows how Italian identity construction in Brazil "diverged drastically from the one endorsed by the liberal, fascist, and even democratic Italian national project". Her transnational approach to Italian identity construction serves to de-centre the privileged position that certain notions of 'Italy' have held in Italian Studies and relocates that discussion in a context that inherently involves plurality and diversity.

What emerges in all these reflections is the idea that difference must be treated as an expansive concept that is inclusive and attentive to the many iterations of what constitutes otherness. In this regard, Alberica Bazzoni's 'Changing Corpus, Changing Tools, Changing Affect: Feminist and Decolonial Revisions to the Italian Literary Canon' confronts canons, in particular Italian aesthetic canons and their cultural hegemonies. It is the problematic reinforcement of hegemonies performed by canons that, she states, must be challenged. According to Bazzoni, feminism offers valuable tools to recognise and deconstruct the male universal models perpetuated in traditional interpretation of Italian culture. This approach also opens the door to the possibility of multiple interpretative tools that strategically rewrite the role of affect in our cultural readings.

Derek Duncan enters this debate by observing that even today many of the syllabi in Italian classes list only Italian white and straight intellectuals as the resources for understanding a culture. For a student to learn about another cultural context through an interpretation based on practices of exclusion impoverishes the student's experience. Duncan encourages Italian academics to familiarise themselves with this outdated approach and also focus on the problematic tradition of Eurocentric languages and literatures. Duncan avers their decolonisation is impossible without moving beyond the 'natural' linguistic acculturation of students in American universities – the traditional Spanish, French, German, and Italian. Decolonising Italian studies thus means making room for other 'minor' languages whose position has been institutionally located at the margins.

Lorenzo Bernini complements Duncan's essay by reminding us of the importance of adding gender, but principally sexuality studies to the tools that we employ to explore the complex field that is Italian cultural studies. He places the body, sexuality, and sex back into the intellectual focus of scholars that marginalise such topics in their research as well as the individuals who represent such differences in the profession. He protests the emphasis on normativity and homolesbobitransphobic attitudes among academic peers.

Just as the eighteen short reflection pieces which begin this volume offer a sampling of the range of discussion directions, so the final six essays provide more in-depth analyses of specific issues from racialisation and the complexities of the colonial inheritance to cross-cultural aesthetics in multiple national contexts and the interplay of language and identity. The six full-length articles included here provide examples of the dialogue of diversity further developed by the tools of scholarship, sociological approaches, and theory.

Heather Merrill approaches the issue of how to decolonise Italian studies by way of considering the "habitual racial taxonomies" and "internal racialising colonialism" that are still felt at the foundation of today's Italian institutions. For Merrill, to decolonise Italian studies means to re-configure it for the purpose of re-existing. The representation of blackness in Italian society provides the critic with a prime example to think through such re-existing. In reflecting on her ethnographical field work on the topic, Merrill also employs critical work that examines experiences of African-origin people from British,

American, French, Senegalese, and Italian perspectives, including insights from Stuart Hall, James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, Ken Bugul, Igiaba Scego, and Antonio Gramsci. Merrill also analyses recent examples of racial reckoning in Italian culture, such as *Vogue Italia*'s cover photograph of the Senegalese-Italian model Maty Fall Diba and the television drama serials *Nero a Metà* and *Zero*. Ultimately, Merrill argues that "To decolonise Italian studies means to delink from common sense knowledge based on incomplete and distorted histories. And, to not just talk about this but to put our talk into action, naming talking a verb".

Kombola T. Ramadhani Mussa's article, 'Racialised Bodies, Vulnerable Subjects: The Italian Zigula' investigates the creation of multiple postcolonial and multicultural Italian identities in the case of the Italian Zigula. The author traces the history of the Zigula, from their migration from Tanzania to Somalia in the 18th century to their enslavement by the Somali and subsequent experience of Italian colonialism (which exacerbated their subordinate position). She further traces the conditions of the Zigula who fled the Somali civil war in the 1990s but are still living in refugee camps in Kenya, as well as the migrations of some Zigula since the 1970s who moved to a settled community in Emilia Romagna. In exploring the complex identity constructions of the Italian Zigula as a case of African diasporic identity formation, Ramadhani Mussa's article delineates two inter-related points: first, that the Italian Zigula colonial/postcolonial experience defies certain established definitions, and second, that "the Italian Zigula are vulnerable subjects who, because of their lack of recognition, constantly need to justify their presence in Italy". The author delineates how the complex history of the Zigula – their marginalised status in Somalia, the racialised inheritance of colonialism and their 'unbelonging' in Italy (despite owning Italian passports) – creates a "complex and ambiguous relationship with the idea of homeland". To illustrate the contested and complicated factors in Italian Zigula identity construction, the author includes excerpts from an interview with F., an Italian Zigula in her 40s who arrived in Italy at five years of age. F. was fostered and later adopted by a white Italian family from Faenza in Emilia Romagna and now has a government job teaching Italian language to migrants and refugees. F.'s experiences illustrate the complexities experienced by many Zigula children fostered or adopted

by white Italian families: the adoptive family's priority that the children 'assimilate' translated into an erasure of their memories, language of origin, experiences, and frustrated their ability to maintain relations with their biological relatives, as well as dismissing or ignoring what it meant to be Black in Italy. F.'s strategies for creating multiple identities, such as claiming Italy or Tanzania when asked where she is from (depending on what she wishes to communicate), or by reinventing family traditions (such as creating a 'Tanzaquiz' to share with her biological relatives when they meet on holidays) represent some of the ways the Italian Zigula children raised in predominantly white environments have constructed hybrid cultural identities. The case of the Italian Zigula exemplify Ramadhani Mussa's assertion that "the notion of Blackness in Italy is not a monolith" while simultaneously illustrating the continuing impact of Italian colonialism.

In 'Federico Fellini's 2020 Centennial Screenings in South Korea, Japan, and Mainland China', Hiju Kim, Hiromi Kaneda, Gaoheng Zhang provide a contextualised analysis of representative media depictions of the 2020 Fellini centennial screenings in Korean, Japanese, and Chinese-language digital materials. The authors contend that such media narratives reveal much about the personal, cinema-related, and social meanings that the three countries' netizens derived by viewing and discussing Fellini's films and by attending the centennial events. The article captures the experiences of a range of social actors, including movie-goers, film critics, cultural organisers, and government and commercial partners. A broad spectrum of digital media is also discussed, such as social media (and in the Chinese case, Chinese social media), film discussion blogs, and official websites of organising entities. For Kim, Hiromi, and Zhang, their article adds to the emerging scholarships on Italian cinema and media about Asia, as well as on Asian-Italian cultural mobilities and exchanges. Through enacting upon the critic Koichi Iwabuchi's concept of 'trans-Asia as method' by juxtaposing three countries in East Asia, they also claim to help forge a path for Italianists with non-traditional backgrounds in the direction of current transnational Italian studies. Co-authorship and the deployment of diverse linguistic and cultural capacities are another two ways of critically engaging with decolonial and transnational methods in Italian studies.

In her study, 'Inclusive Pedagogies in Italian Studies: Using Sociolinguistic Data to Decolonise the Curriculum', Maya Angela Smith begins with the important observations that structuring Italian Studies around the traditional canon has meant having our students engage almost exclusively with texts whose authors unquestioningly "form the basis of an Italian identity formation that presupposes whiteness", and the necessity of decolonising the curriculum involves more than just including texts by minority ethnic writers. She points out that, with the ever-increasing diversity of the American university student body with their own experiences of multiple languages and cultures, the urgency increases for teachers and scholars to create spaces that corroborates the benefits brought by students' diverse backgrounds, spaces that will give our students both 'the time and tools' to recognise and combat how language is often weaponised "as an othering force". To that end, Smith offers a pedagogical model that employs multilingual, multinational sociological texts through interviews with Senegalese migrants in Rome, New York, and Paris. She steps through an explanation of how these texts invite students to analyse the processes of racialisation in multiple contexts, the relationship between cultural belonging and language acquisition, and the intersection between language and identity construction. She emphasises that, "While race should be highlighted in a decolonising the curriculum approach to pedagogy, decolonisation must bring in other markers of diversity, such as multilingualism and national identity". At the same time, the multilingual and transnational experiences of the interviewees prompt students to make connections to their own language journeys, their own multifacted lived experiences and learn to identify the difference between linguistic forms and communication.

In articulating new directions in Italian Canadian Studies, Paolo Frascà and Licia Canton focus on the pedagogical and methodological innovations with regard to two projects that the authors were involved in. Frascà and Canton begin by contextualising their projects by way of an overview of Italian Canadian studies, emphasising the field's "multi-faceted mandate that encompasses research, teaching and community-oriented work". The first project, briefly treated in the article, is *Indigenous-Italian-Canadian Connections*, which interrogates existing connections between Indigenous and Italian-Canadian communities, as

well as how Italians, insofar as they have been European settlers in Canada, can commit to "reparations, reconciliation, [and] honouring treaties and restitution". The second project, titled *Queer Italian-Canadian Artists*, sets out to challenge hegemonic notions of the "ideal white Italian-Canadian citizen from the perspective of gender and sexuality". As recounted by Frascà and Canton, this project documents and assess the extent of LGBTQ+ Italian-Canadian artists' experiences, often of marginalisation, in order to begin to examine the broader group of queer Italian-Canadians. The project employs a multi-platform approach in engaging the public, including a documentary, an anthology, a media campaign, and a number of scholarly and public-facing events. By intersecting Italian-Canadian with queer studies, and academic and pedagogical work with community-building activities, the authors aim to "disrupt constructed and idealised notions of the Italian *migrante* that contribute to violent colonial pursuits and marginalise some community members".

Santino Spinelli's contribution, 'Fundamental Concepts about the Rom/Roma, Sinti, Kale, Manouche and Romanichal Cultures', outlines on a granular level specific critical elements of Romanì language and dialects that have shaped the culture and worldview of these diverse and ancient communities. As a member of and activist for Italy's oldest established Roma settlement, Spinelli's study of Romanì linguistic forms serves a double purpose: first, to demonstrate the linguistic underpinnings to the complexity and depth of Romanì cultures and second, as a means to write against misinformed stereotypes and media-generated images of nomadic peoples in Italy. With extensive, specific examples Spinelli explains the constant duality (*dujpen*) embedded in Romanì linguistic forms and that inform defining cultural concepts such as "*baxt* and *bibaxt* (fortune and misfortune), *pativ* and *laʒ* (honour and shame), *śuśipen* and *mellipen* (pure and impure), truth (*ćhaćhipen*, *ćhaćhimos*) and falsehood (*xoxanipen*, *xoxaipen*, *xoxaibé*, *xoxaimos*)". His analysis of the concept of honour (*pativ*) goes far beyond a superficial listing of acceptable and unacceptable practices and instead examines how this concept structures all aspects of Romanì society. Spinelli outlines the spiritual practices and beliefs that regulate activities from the rituals of daily activities to the ways of coping with illness, the practices surrounding marriage, birth, and death, and the values exemplified in even the smallest of human interactions. His

numerous examples trace the etymological relationships between different terms and show how "the dualism that permeates every aspect of life and every feeling [...] is a dichotomy that the Romanì people [...] live in continually, from moment by moment". His contribution is a clear statement that state-mandated nomadic camps not only disregard the culture and needs of Romanès cultures and instead serve predominantly to perpetuate misunderstandings about and discrimination toward Roma cultures and peoples.

Conclusion

As we are finalising this special issue *of Italian Studies in Southern Africa* titled 'Diversity, Decolonisation, and Italian Studies', we are confronted with troublesome events in the United States with echoes in the Western world such as the decisions of the US Supreme Court via-a-vis Roe v. Wade, the revelations about the role of the former president of the United States in the January 6 insurrection, the ever- increasing numbers of violent, armed attacks on the public often carried out by young white men, and the ever increasing liberalisation of the sale of weapons make us pause and wonder about the impact that our work can have and how it can contribute to a discussion regarding everyday events. In most academic environments Italian Studies occupies a marginal position and speaking about diversity, inclusion, transnationalism, the removal of strictures of thinking, and academic openness seems to be just a *vox clamantis in deserto.* However small the contribution of this project may be, we want to contribute to a much larger discourse that is disciplinary and academic, but it is also connected with everyday lives and institutional decisions that impact the way in which we will teach what Italian culture is. We will also teach how to engage with different cultures within and outside the confines in which we and our students live. We have tried to be as inclusive as possible, but this special issue of *Studi d'Italianistica nell'Africa Australe/Italian Studies in Southern Africa* can only be a small contribution to the investigation of what decolonisation means in Italian studies and reopen the necessary discussion on how we imagine and welcome change.

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REFLECTION PIECES / RIFLESSIONI

CLASSICS AND ITALIAN COLONIALISM: AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

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I am a classicist who studied and works in the United Kingdom. What then do I have to say about questions of diversity and decolonisation in Italian studies today?

The history of the study of Greek and Roman antiquity in Italy and the history of Italian colonialism are tightly intertwined. I came to be interested in these intertwined histories through my study of Latin literature. I will give a brief, specific example: The Roman historian Sallust, who was writing in the second half of the first century BCE, gave an account of the Jugurthine War, a war fought between Rome and the Numidian (roughly equivalent to the area of Algeria today) ruler Jugurtha, in 112-106 BCE. In this work, Sallust breaks off from his narrative to tell the legend of the Philaeni brothers, two Carthaginians who sacrificed themselves to expand the territory of Carthage, the ruins of which are in modern-day Tunis. On the site of their self-sacrifice, the Carthaginians built a shrine in honour of the brothers. In 1937, the Fascist authorities of the Italian colony of Libya inaugurated a triumphal arch in honour of this same pair, purportedly on the same site as the Carthaginian shrine. On the arch was a Latin inscription, which paraphrased Sallust's account, translated from Italian by the prolific classicist Giorgio Pasquali. The arch embodied the aggressive use of the texts of classical antiquity in support of modern Italian imperialism

overseas, and the employment of the institutional discipline of classics in such efforts.

Of course, Italian classics is not unique in deploying Greco-Roman antiquity in service of empire. What *is* unique about the Italian case is the fact that, of all the modern imperial powers that have posed themselves as the successor of ancient Rome, only the Italian empire had Rome as its capital. Secondly, the easy association of Italian imperialism with Fascism has historically limited interrogation of the legacies of imperialism in Italy and its former colonies. After all, the Italian empire fell with Fascism, end of story. Yet Italy gained its first African colony in 1882, long before the advent of Fascism, and only abdicated from its administration of what is now Somalia in 1960. So, it is clear that the legacies of Italian colonialism extend far beyond the Fascist period.

What business is this of mine then? I am a child of empire, with grandparents originating from Britain's West African and South Asian colonies, as well as from the imperial metropolis itself. For me, the interrogation of the legacies of empire and colonialism is personal. But why Italy? As a classicist, Italian imperial classicisms represent a limit-case of what Julia Hell (2019) refers to as 'neo-Roman mimesis'. Italy could most forcefully pose itself as Rome's imperial successor by dint of the fact that Rome was the capital of Italy from 1871. Perhaps the most explicit manifestation of this mimesis was Fascism's overtly Romanising rhetoric and practice, and Mussolini's proclamation of the refoundation of the Roman empire in 1936, following the conclusion of the invasion of Ethiopia.

While recent years have seen Italian classicists produce excellent work interrogating the complicities of the discipline with colonialism, both pre-Fascist and Fascist, and its legacies, there remains a good degree of resistance to engage with calls for academic 'decolonisation' and greater commitment of 'diversity'. Some of the resistance cites the perception that such calls are an imposition exercised by the hegemonic force of USA academia. Other times, descriptive scholarship, which explains specific elements of disciplinary history, but with no attempts to interrogate the continuing effects of such histories, are cited as examples of 'auto-decolonisation'. Attempts to push such avenues of research further are met with hostility.

For example, a recent editorial of a prestigious Italian ancient history and history journal pushed against an intervention made by a prominent USA-based classicist. In the intervention of this classicist, the demographic makeup of authors published in the most highly ranked North American classics journals is scrutinised and suggestions, some of them provocative, are made. In the editorial of this Italian journal, the provocations are decried as 'reverse-racism' and an example of the monopoly of American cultural discourses. I wrote a short online piece reflecting on this polemic, aiming to contextualise the USA classicist's intervention, and seeking to suggest that, in fact, what this classicist says is relevant not only to USA contexts, but is also of critical importance to Italian classics, not least because of the links between the discipline, and coloniality and racism in this country.

In response, the editor of this Italian journal – a scholar for whom I previously had profound admiration – sent an email to the editor of the website on which my piece was posted, in which I am unnamed but referred to as 'Afroamericano inquieto ma disinformato' – 'an anxious but ill-informed African American' (in the subject line of the email, no less), elsewhere referred to simply as 'the naïve author'. Just to be clear, I am not an 'Afro-American'. This scholar suggested that I direct my attention to the first ten or fifteen issues of the journal where the issue of the connections between Italian classics, colonialism, and racism are discussed at length. This is all well and good, but perfectly misses the point. When one is met with such defensiveness and racist hostility from a scholar who purports to have edited a journal which has exhaustively treated the theme of classics, colonialism, and racism in Italy, it proves the inadequacy and incompleteness of such approaches to these difficult themes. Unless such scholarship is combined with a genuine commitment to a more diverse academy which promotes the sustained interrogation of the ongoing effects of colonialism, then its purported contribution to 'auto-decolonisation' is limited, indeed, counterproductive.

The study of Latin literature continues to be of profound importance to discussions of diversity and decolonisation, not only in Italian contexts. Discourses of imperialism and racism are frequently anchored in readings of Greek and Roman antiquity – from defences of 'natural slavery' derived from Aristotle and environmental theories of race, to agile justifications for imperial aggression and empire-building in the

name of bringing peace. Only by really probing how readings of ancient Greece and Rome continue to be deployed in support of oppressive structures – be they aligned to discourses of nation, race, gender, or sexuality – can we begin to imagine a more diverse or 'decolonised' study of antiquity. In practice, and very briefly, I believe that this involves drawing on the methodological and theoretical tools of other fields and disciplines in our research, and, in our teaching, engaging with and employing pedagogical practices that are aware of and seek to redress classroom hierarchies. This, at least, seems more constructive an approach than ascribing such suggestions to 'Afroamericani inquieti ma disinformati'.

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DANTE, POET OF THE DECOLONISED WORLD: REFLECTIONS ON A FIELD AND ITS HORIZONS

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I have been celebrating of late. I have just begun a position that I have long dreamed of, as Assistant Professor of Italian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and the possibilities seem endless. Such moments are inevitably cause for reflection, both of a personal nature and with regard to the field that I have been part of for almost a decade. As a *dantista*, I have pushed in the direction of thinking beyond the confines of reading the *Commedia* exclusively through the lens of medieval theology, monolithic Italian identity, and, broadly speaking, Western culture. This has not been without resistance, but it remains a cause that I am committed to and a vision that I believe we must advocate for in the strongest possible terms.

Of late, my formulation for this approach has taken the form of this expression: Dante, Poet of the Decolonised World. In a forthcoming essay in the volume *Migrants Shaping Europe, Past and Present* (Manchester University Press, 2022), I elaborate upon this formulation as a fusion of two modes. The first is Erich Auerbach's *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*, a book first published in German in 1929 that makes the case for Dante as a great realist author in whose work "the confusion of earthly affairs is not concealed or attenuated or immaterialized" (Auerbach, 2007:133). The second stems from Teodolinda Barolini's *Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*, which posits detheologising as a form of reading "that attempts to break out of the hermeneutic guidelines that Dante has structured into his poem, hermeneutic guidelines that result in theologised readings whose outcome has been overdetermined by the author" (Barolini, 1992:17). As Auerbach draws attention to Dante's realism and Barolini seeks to detheologise the 'poema sacro', I hold that decolonising Dante means opening our

reading of the poem to global and cross-cultural currents in its moment and in our own.

In the essay mentioned above, I have sought to embody this mode by reading Dante in concert with the Arab poet of medieval Sicily, Ibn Hamdîs, thinking beyond the overly romanticised notion of poet in exile and instead considering the more grounded transhistorical phenomena of migration and refugee status. Such a perspective allows for a different Dante to emerge, and a different, more nuanced idea of medieval Italy as well. What happens when we consider Ibn Hamdîs as an Italian poet, as Valerio Magrelli did in including his poetry in his 2015 anthology *Millennium poetry: viaggio sentimentale nella poesia italiana*? How might such a perspective enhance our reading of that stunning moment at the end of *Purgatorio* 4, when home is referred to not with any Italian toponym but instead as Morocco, a place on the other side of the Mediterranean?

The round table series that provoked this special issue was a joy to behold. Scholars were gathered to provide wonderful perspectives on issues of diversity and decolonisation in a field that has been needing it. In the discussion following my panel, though, it was pointed out that I was the only person in this series speaking about a premodern subject. This is not atypical, on either side of this model that divides fields by historical period, but I want to emphasise that considerations of cultural difference, colonial thought, migration, and the like cannot be confined to modernity alone. There is so much that we have to gain in extending such approaches and interests to the more distant past. Decolonising and undoing the monolithic nation is, in many ways, best accomplished by going back to a time before the nation and radically complicating its founding myths. And this is particularly necessary in a moment when the European Middle Ages have been co-opted by white nationalists who seek to celebrate the period as an idealised version of their vision. In the Italian context, we need look no further than Matteo Salvini declaiming the verses of *Inferno* 28 describing Muhammad in a 2016 speech to justify his own anti-immigrant Islamophobia.

In closing, I want to reflect upon two ways in which we can expand our global approach to Dante. The first is through adopting the perspective of the Global Middle Ages. In an essay that came out last year, I read Dante through the lens of his contemporary Indian poet Amīr Khusrau, not in the vein of source study, but rather as a form of

reading that asks us to consider the ties that bind these poets together, such as vernacular experimentation, spice trade, and gender-bending (Kumar, 2021). The second is in the form of global reception. I've been thinking recently about Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison and her 21st-century rewritings of select canti of the *Commedia* in which she, as Jason Allen-Paisant puts it, "overtly presents herself as a new Dante" (Allen-Paisant, 2021:678). In her version of *Inferno* 1, Goodison's guide, the St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott, adapts Virgil's exclusion from paradise in a most telling way:

> […] the ruler /
> of the higher heights above, forbids that I who rebelled /
> against all forms of hierarchy and divisions of class and race /
> should approach unto that elevated state of grace.
> (Goodison, 2017:561-62)

Goodison stunningly expands upon Virgil's 'rebellion' as a non-Christian poet to rail against divisions of class and race, drawing us to reflect upon the work of decolonising that remains. Such a move should also provoke us to consider how Dante himself links the problem of Virgil's exclusion to the cultural other when he questions the justice of exclusion in *Paradiso* 19 and specifically names Indians, Ethiopians, and Persians as groups that challenge the narrow definition of worth and excellence based solely in the orthodox.

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CREATIVITY AND DIVERSITY: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ACADEMIC WORK AND THE PERFORMING ARTS

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I have always found creativity an effective tool to address overlooked historical issues of injustice, incarceration, and trauma. By creativity I mean the cultural and artistic production resulting from the dialogue between scholarly work and the performing arts at time of constraint. I believe that turning archival records and life writing about different forms of social and racialised discrimination into musical and theatrical adaptations can facilitate the understanding of complex historical dynamics. It makes it easier to process and empathise with individual and collective experiences while presenting them from different viewpoints. My teaching years at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester have reinforced my belief that scholarly research benefits from intertwining with diverse artistic productions as they bring scholars, performers, and students together around important societal issues.

I have investigated Italian military captivity in Africa during World War II for several years with a special focus on the cultural and artistic production by Italian prisoners of war (POWs) detained in British camps in East Africa, particularly in Kenya. When I first started my research from an Italian Studies perspective, I was surprised by the limited historical records on these men available at Italian state archives. While I could easily access folders on fascist colonial East Africa at the Central State Archive in Rome, I could only locate a few war pension request forms and repatriation documents related to Italian POWs interned in Allied camps in Africa between 1940 and 1947. I quickly came to terms with Italy's choice to erase this part of its past from its post-war official historical narrative, as Moore and Fedorowich underline (2002). I thus turned to life writing by men who lived through

this form of military captivity to fill in the gaps about their long years as POWs and gathered official records at archives in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Switzerland.

The unpublished war diaries and memoirs that I was able to identify at the National Diary Archive in Pieve Santo Stefano, Italy, revealed intriguing historical details and accounts that immediately broadened my approach. In their writings, Italian captives made constant reference to the importance of the performing arts in the forms of musical and theatre performances as ways to escape the trauma of captivity and deal with their captors. I was aware of the positioning problems that I had to face while analysing Italian servicemen captured in African countries that the Fascist regime invaded and occupied. The prisoners' pages helped me avoid simplistic analyses by pointing to intellectual and artistic production as key instruments through which we can make sense of such intricate historical experience.

How could servicemen who were raised under fascism cope with war imprisonment in Kenya through opera productions and theatre? They collectively enacted their fears on stage by singing Ettore Petrolini's *Gastone* or Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* in front of indigenous Kikuyu camp guards and British officers. Music and theatre allowed Italian POWs to come to terms with their defeat, regain some respectability in confinement, and interact with their British and native African captors. Through the performing arts, they fought off the depersonalising routine of captivity and shared knowledge with their guards. Italian POWs had to redefine themselves: from colonisers, they became prisoners kept in remote areas of British colonial Africa guarded by Kikuyus.

Italian captives worked inside and outside their camps, thus becoming a visible presence in East Africa that forced me to question the inadequacy of my Western approach: I needed to devote more space to native Kenyans' perspectives on Italian POWs next to the British and Italian viewpoints that I had adopted up to that moment. Consequently, I started to investigate how Italians were portrayed by East African native people in leading Kenyan newspapers and magazines, as well as in historiographical studies. By examining such records, I realised that Italian POWs represented the largest white group ever present on Kenyan soil (Ochieng, 1985) and that they interacted with local populations in ways I had not imagined. Italians learned how to cope

with native animals and vegetation from the Kikuyu people as they built roads for the British Empire. They worked for the Nairobi National Museum and passed their musical knowledge onto children in Nairobi while performing for the King's African Rifle soldiers, thus leaving behind handmade musical instruments that are still part of the Nairobi Orchestra's collection (Moss, 2010). They erected a chapel and a monument that Kenya recognised as national landmarks in 2011 to memorialise the Italian presence in the Rift Valley.

My personal research path has convinced me of the need to teach my undergraduate students that cultural and artistic production is the result of a dialogue between different artistic forms and cultural traditions. In a school of music, I can easily make students grasp how Giovanni Verga's reinvention of Sicilian culture in *Cavalleria Rusticana* was so successful that his short story was granted three separate lives as a literary piece, a theatre play, and an opera by Pietro Mascagni at the turn of the twentieth century. The leap of faith that students need to take to understand how Italian POWs could find this opera cathartic as they performed it in a camp at the foot of Mount Kenya in 1942, is often too big. Or so I thought until one year ago, when a student of Armenian descent asked me for mentorship for an honour lecture recital in which he intended to discuss the Armenian genocide by turning parts of his Turkish Armenian great-grandmother's genocide memoir into a cycle of classical songs. He believed that my work on Italian POWs' life writing in Africa could help him approach the historical complexity of his own path through his *nana*'s childhood memories. As we talked about the importance of positioning ourselves while using life writing to address historical traumatic events, we both realised that the dialogue between academic research and the performing arts remains one of the most powerful means to challenge people's understanding of historical forms of injustice and trauma.

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WASTING THE SOUTH: EXPLORING NARRATIVES OF ITALIAN AND MEDITERRANEAN DISPENSABILITY

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This paper shares what is for me the beginning of a research project that draws from eco-criticism and waste studies, 'from' and 'through' Italy, and further adrift, so to speak. This research is also converging into a project with Graziella Parati, Matteo Gilebbi and Damiano Benvegnù, whom I wish to thank for embarking on this new adventure. And, of course, it develops within a field opened up and studied by many scholars before me, such as Serenella Iovino (2016). Very recently, Marco Armiero published his work, *Wasteocene* (2021), that intersects and overlaps with much of what I have been exploring; this text has really been a guide and inspiration for my brief contribution to this debate. Marco Armiero's work is an inspiration (also) because his starting point is Naples (and the Campania region), where we both originate. This situatedness, or this sense of locality, seems to me particularly important, generally speaking, as scholars positioning ourselves when we do research, but even more so in relation to the issues of waste and discard. My aim, in this beginning of a wider investigation, is to think about waste, discard, or, in Armiero's terms, the wasteocene, setting it 'adrift', so to speak, looking onto the Mediterranean, and thinking 'with' the sea and its theoretical and material language, as Iain Chambers (2017) invites us to do. This means to overcome disciplinary and national borders in the fluidity of changing epistemological bearings, and opening up archives and narratives that have solidified into univocal roots and closed confines.

I acknowledge that I am using different terms that would require ample space for elaboration and clarification such as 'waste', 'discard', or 'dirt' and also 'disposability', among others. The debate is wide and complex (Liboiron, 2021; Morrison, 2015, among others); in this

specific space, I am working with these concepts as I understand they function in the articulation – as Stuart Hall (1985) would say – of environmental justice and new materialism, waste and discard studies, 'wasting relationships' (Armiero, 2021), and also post- and de-colonial thinking. For the purpose of this short contribution, I will employ these terms as paradigms working within the shifting lines of the North/South separation, while interrogating these same lines. The wider project is to look at material waste and its correlation to the narrative of Southern Italy, alongside the dismaying acceptance of 'wasted lives' and dispensable bodies, in today's Mediterranean.

The idea is then to interrogate the lines of separation between North and South in the Italian narrative of national 'progress and development', and also in the roots and seemingly inescapable design stemming from historical dynamics of domination, projected in turn onto the Mediterranean, from different angles in different moments in history. Certainly the South of Italy sits in the ambiguous space of being within *and* without, at times *in* but not *of* Europe, but also, of being the North of the Mediterranean, certainly part of a privileged North, economically speaking, compared to the Southern shores. And yet, the liminal position of Southern Italy speaks the (maritime) language of the colonial/commercial/interconnected complexity of the Mediterranean and has existed in the subaltern condition that Antonio Gramsci famously analysed in *The Southern Question* (2005 [1926]). Narratives of Southern Italy (and Southern Europe) as part of Africa abound, with their implications of the colonial paradigm of 'uncivilised/dirty/ dangerous', and we are all familiar with the most famous ones coming from the authors of the Grand Tour narratives (Cazzato, 2017). This is a legacy that, as we are all aware, has lasted and still persists at the core of anti-southern racism in Italy.

I am interested in exploring, through this paradigm of waste/dirt, what happens when the revivification of the racist matrix of (colonial) power that indeed was such a relevant (and silenced) part of building the Italian identity, 'allows' for a shifting of the lines of separation, with the arrival of migrants from 'further south', from across the Mediterranean. Is the shift a simple moving of the othering practice, the establishment of which lives 'can be wasted' (Bauman, 2004) because they are even 'further southern'? Does the complexification of Italian identity seep through these lines? And how does it interweave with the

necropolitics 'externalising' the borders of migration further and further away, out at sea or beyond, on the 'other' side of the sea?

As Marco Armiero writes, "Entering the bodies and the ecologies of humans and nonhumans, wasting politicizes bodies and ecologies. The disposable body becomes a political body" (2021:12). I add, and this I think is crucial, the disposable body becomes a critical body, in the broadest sense of the term: a body that criticises, a body that is critical, crucial, the opposite, if you will, of dispensable. Disposable bodies, indispensable bodies (Cariello, 2016).

Thinking about waste, then, also means thinking about personhood, measures of 'usability' and disposability (also) of subaltern subjects. I am thinking of the 'dirty', inadequate (though beautiful) bodies of *Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, I am thinking of the consumed bodies of southern women and men working in the factories in Turin in the 1950s and '60s, of the lives lost, the bodies and cultures severed in past and current migrations. And, today, Italy has still more dispensable lives and bodies: the women killed every other day by a spouse/family member or former partner. Dispensable bodies that are yet to be attended to seriously, I believe. I do not like inflated parallelisms and overarching definitions; I think they disempower the issues at stake. But I do think it is worth reflecting, in terms of 'wasted lives'/dispensable lives, on *where* the line between waste and value is drawn, how it moves (if it moves), who draws it, and why the politics of waste relations are so crucial. Here, the sea sets us in a powerfully more-than-human flow, in the urgency of some kind of ecological and relational justice, but also of how to dwell in the wasteocene, and perhaps that is why it is so relevant and useful to set our thinking adrift.

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MAKING ITALY POSTCOLONIAL, CHALLENGING REGIONAL STEREOTYPES

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Italy is understood as knowing mainly internal and regional diversity. A person from Sicily is said to have scant in common with her counterpart in Milan. It remains difficult for Italians to conceive of their colonial experiences as having been as significant as those of internal differences. But if Italy is defined by regional diversity, then it will never be thought of as cosmopolitan nor critiqued as postcolonial. Regional stereotypes provide a good alibi and a firm obstacle to it. This is true in spite of the many researchers who have shown that colonial and internal differences were constituted as parallel discourses (Lombardi-Diop & Romeo, 2012; Giuliani & Lombardi-Diop, 2013; Dickie, 2016).

Italian Southerners were linked with representations of the primitive, atavistic, and uncivilised because concomitant to the unification of Italy, European colonial discourses established Africans as primitive, atavistic, and uncivilised. As the saying went, 'Africa begins in Naples'. The elites, politicians, and generals who championed the unification of Italy saw their mission as one of 'civilising' Southerners. When resistance and civil war in the South revealed the failures of such a project for ethnic and national homogeneity, these same elites took their liberal-democratic ideals of the nation-state for export to Africa and South America (Bonvini & Jacobson, 2022).

This complex history of colonialism and its interconnectedness with national fissures are still not taught within secondary education. New works of research continue to seek to reverse this picture by demonstrating how deep and vast the overseas projects were, but reception often foregrounds the 'discovery' of Italian colonialism. By now it is well known that Italy did have an empire, and yet the society at large is still not compelled to consider the moral stakes of it for the

present. One is tempted to supply a psychological explanation: would thinking about the violence of Italy's colonial state mean a reckoning with the violent history of its own nation-state, one too bitter and close-to-home to address? (Riall, 1998)

In my book on the Italian state in the Aegean (Dodecanese islands), I explore such a premise. Stereotypes about the Mediterranean region have long serviced a disregard for the topic. The popular film *Mediterraneo* (1990) exemplifies this attitude. Gabriele Salvatores, the director, shot the film on location in the tiny, postage-stamp sized island of Kastellorizo; he carried out research for the film in the photographic archive of the Touring Club Italiano in Milan; he worked with locals during shooting supposedly to affect some historical veracity. But the film's narrative traffics in clichés about a universal Mediterranean brotherhood and presents the pleasure-filled Greek setting in shades reminiscent of a Gabriele D'Annunzio novel. Instead of challenging the idea that Italy was never a colonial nation, it reassures viewers that they need not feel compelled to examine it: Italy's 'Mediterraneanness' made its imperial project soft and nonviolent (Clò, 2009). But where else did these stereotypes originate if not in discourses of Italy, from the ancient Roman era to the present, as a Mediterranean country? (Fogu, 2020).

These same regional stereotypes command a powerful currency in the Dodecanese as well. 'Can there be that much to research?' Or I heard 'With a subject like that, your thesis won't be very long'. Such reactions came from residents of Rhodes when I was there for fieldwork. Most locals I met maintained one of two extremes, either that the Greeks had fiercely resisted a fascist state or that the Italians had been soft-hearted 'good people', and 'nothing like the Germans'. They often held comfortably both viewpoints. It boiled down to the fact that fascism was bad, but Italians were good – or put differently: good people sometimes do bad things. The myth that Italians and Greeks had traded claims that they were 'one face and one race', lives on without much, if any, critical awareness of how such a stereotype is a relic of the colonial era.

Regionalism and regional stereotypes were fundamentally embedded into Italian colonial governance in the Aegean. The liberal state that invaded the Aegean in 1912 positioned itself as a 'protector' and a safeguard of Greek culture, an eminently 'liberal' position at that

time[1]. Right away, the government saw the islands as an opportunity to lay claims to 'colonies' of 'Italians' living in the Orient (e.g., migrants in Egypt, Turkey and the Middle East) and to put a stake on the idea of a 'Mediterranean' expansion into the Levant.

A fascist state had no more trouble aligning an imperial mission in the islands with its ideology. The Aegean did not have material resources and was not a boon to the 'empire of work', or program to use colonies to mitigate Italy's surplus labour problem. But new economies, such as tourism, tobacco, wine production, and artisanal crafts justified the expense of maintaining a quasi 'colony' in the Aegean. State building in the Aegean looked much like state building at home, in the South especially. This created a problem: the local population could never be viewed as Italian, as to do so would defy the logic of nationalism and the 'natural' ethnic and linguistic homogeneity of Italians. Enter the stereotype of a 'Mediterranean' region and culture. An elaborate system of citizenship and nationality was developed to both include and exclude this 'white' colony in a discourse of Mediterranean regionalism that originated with the project of unitary Italy itself (McGuire, 2020).

Any researcher of the colonial Italy cannot help but remark over the irony that Antonio Gramsci, with his geographical and spatial approach to political power, his interest in *questione meridionale*, and his eventual reception and appropriation by Edward Said, has been a key thinker for the development of postcolonial studies globally, while Italy has proved one of the last nations in Europe to be reexamined through the lens of such postcolonial critique. Blinding Italians to their postcolonial present have been the very same regional stereotypes as those that inhabited their colonial past.

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LOCATING 'ITALIES' IN THE UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH LABORATORY

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At the beginning of each course I teach, I introduce myself as someone with both an 'Italian' and an 'Italian American' family: my mother's family resides in the political space known as 'Italy' and my father's family began their journey to the coal mines of Western Pennsylvania during the so-called 'great wave' of Italian immigration. I do this to begin a conversation with my students about the complex intersections between the *storie* we tell about our families and the *Storia* that we read about in history textbooks. I explain that, on one hand, my paternal grandfather and uncles were farmers and manual labourers, 'birds of passage' who arrived in this part of the United States of America through chain migrations that swept up families and indeed entire villages. On the other, both my father and mother were part of a subsequent wave of migration from Italy to the USA, one that was intimately connected to and yet historically distinct from those earlier dynamics of chain migration. My parents' story allows me to tell my students about Fascism's promise to fulfill the project of Italian unification; the militarised life led by people like my father under the Fascist regime and during World War II; my father's participation in the Resistance; and finally the post-WWII wave of emigration from Italy (Ruberto & Sciorra, 2017) that brought my parents to the USA in the 1940s and 1950s. That my father had until then lived more than half of his life in Milan also allows me to talk about Italy's history of uneven economic development, internal colonisation (Schneider, 1998), and labour migration. That my parents were Sicilians adds yet another layer to this complicated story (or is it a history?) of multi-dimensional belonging.

I also frequently tell my students that the dominant language of my childhood home was a Sicilian dialect, but that my parents explicitly

discouraged me from speaking it. I explain that I learned standard Italian at college, and that on my first day of Italian class the instructor vowed to rid me of my "terrible Southern accent". This is a far cry from the more enlightened position of educators like Gaetano Cipolla (2021), who argues that our students' heritage language knowledge can be an effective lever for retention and growth. While we've come a long way in the intervening 30 odd years, there is still much to do: decolonising Italian Studies is not only a matter of pushing back against colonial and colonising forces on the field. It also demands that we reflect on the ways that all power structures create inequities and radically limit access to a field and its production of new knowledge. It requires us to interrogate the reality of a nation-based project of identity and canon formation that has long held sway over what can and cannot be studied, taught, researched, read, and transmitted through our university curricula.

We in Italian Studies are not alone in thinking through these problems, but our field is uniquely situated to do so in productive and exciting ways. The "transnational turn" (Bond, 2014) together with the "postcolonial turn" (Ponzanesi, 2012) and a growing body of work in geocritical studies allow us to think not beyond the nation but alongside it, without being constrained by it. In so doing, we open our field to diasporic and other forms of mobility that have 'made Italians' in spaces that are situated beyond dominant frameworks of blood or soil. We can better appreciate the importance of cultural, linguistic, and other bonds that have shaped Italian belonging alongside notions of citizenship. And we can decenter the peninsular paradigm, which isn't exactly or exclusively coterminous with the nation, and much less so with *italianità*.

What might it mean, in practical terms, to interrogate broader notions of Italian belonging in this way? In my current work I'm committed to a scholarly and curricular agenda that sees *italianità* as a flexibly- and diversely-centered rhizome whose components interact with each other in often tangled, often tessellated ways (Hom, 2019; Fiore, 2017). But cultivating the borderlessness (Fogu, Hom, & Ruberto, 2019) of a decentred field can be challenging, and the American university curriculum does not typically welcome ambiguities or flexibility. Over the last five years or so, I've sought to work beyond properly curricular structures to invent one- and two-

credit laboratory-like experiences that build on students' previous classroom work with me. In this way, students who have completed courses like "Italies" or "Italian America on Screen" work with me in subsequent semesters in project-based teams. In weekly project meetings, these teams focus chiefly on research questions emerging from Pittsburgh's Italian community (such as the history of the city's Columbus monument). In a similar way, students from my Italian translation courses have also come together as teams of transcribers, translators, and curators of archival materials held at the Heinz History Center's Italian American Collection. As part of our collaborative work, students gain competencies in project-appropriate digital platforms, typically Omeka or Scalar, for the curation of our research product. And through the generosity of private donors and our European Studies Center's Title VI funding, these students all receive research stipends for their efforts.

Students working in this way on projects that connect Italian Studies and Italian Diaspora Studies have the freedom to explore projects in which they can draw on their own areas of expertise, such as curricular pathways they are pursuing as double-majors or certificate programs. In these laboratory-like groups, participants interact with other students who have studied Italian to various degrees, giving them all the opportunity to make practical use of whatever level of language proficiency they've attained. Whether we're engaged in translation or in comparing English- and Italian-language news coverage of matters relevant to our research, it is precisely the dynamic interplay *between* the languages that generates moments of real meaning-making. In these laboratories the group can chip away at the boundaries between Italian and English language materials and lean in to practices of translanguaging — much as was true of many of the century-old archival documents and publications that are the objects of our work.

The laboratory model is not only productive in the collaborations that it fosters within a given semester or academic year; perhaps even more exciting is the promise for diachronic collaborative work, where each generation of student researchers is brought up to speed on the work of their predecessors, and then collectively decide in which directions they might best carry it forward. Is this, perhaps, the path to new rhythms of research and discovery untethered to a course, a language, a syllabus, a *semester*, but where the logic of the project —

the boundaries of which our students, themselves, have a hand in shaping — rules? The students currently participating in my multi-year "Columbus, Interrupted" project (Insana, 2022) have learned much from the undergraduate researchers that preceded them, and in turn learn to position their own work to facilitate the project's continuation. With the laboratory as our model, they (we) thus gain interlocutors through time, and learn that the production of knowledge proceeds in its own time, not only in the rigid and constructed time of the academic semester.

If projects like these are to be a viable part of the post-secondary experience, a robust network of archival materials relating to the Italian experience is critical. They are the key to giving students an introduction to research; providing a community-facing service-learning experience that connects them to our city's immigrant and ethnic communities; and creating a radically interdisciplinary point of entry into the field of Italian Studies. I have been lucky, in Pittsburgh, to collaborate with an exemplary institution that boasts a dedicated Italian American history collection with extensive documentary and photographic collections; a rich and varied material culture archive; and a dedicated curator/director. But how much richer would our work be if we could more easily and efficiently explore analogous resources in other locations, in the USA and beyond? I will conclude by making a pitch for the Italian Diaspora Archive Resource Map project, a collaborative initiative I have undertaken with Melissa E. Marinaro (Heinz History Center) and Nancy Caronia (West Virginia University). Our aim is to identify, organise, and raise the visibility of archival collections relating to the Italian experience in under-studied areas of the US. If you see yourselves in this mission, I urge you to elevate the archival collections in your own areas through undergraduate research that connects all of these 'Italies': the ones that we locate in the Italian national space; and the vast, complicated, and transnational ones that thrive beyond it.

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(DE)COLONIAL MEMORY AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY: REASSESSING WHAT IS 'ITALIAN'[1]

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In a scene of Camillo Mastrocinque's 1961 comedy *Totò Truffa '62*, Totò's character, Antonio Peluffo, cons an American tourist into buying the Trevi Fountain. The scene can be read as an openly satirical send up of the most iconic episode in Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) and of the romanticised image of Italy it contributed to popularise. In an additional, ironic, twist, the victim of the eponymous 'truffa' is not just any American, but an Italian American looking to leave the United States and invest in 'un buon bisiníss'[2]. Among current debates on the future of Italian Studies and having recently moved to the United States, where I teach both Italian and Italian American cultures to groups that frequently include heritage students, I have come to think of that scene as an admonition against the temptation to keep 'selling' Italy, Italian culture and, by extension, Italian Studies as a largely fake, romanticised, reified set of stereotypical representations: a product to be peddled on the global market through a combination of glossy images of artistic monuments and Mediterranean beauty, accompanied by abundant helpings of fashion, food, and the occasional extra dose of equally romanticised organised crime. That temptation goes hand in hand with the pressure to 'perform' academic work as a form of soft diplomacy, promoting a recognisable but a-historical and exclusionary 'national brand' – while also hoping to fill chairs in our classrooms in the process. This kind of attitude is neither new nor specific to Italian Studies, but is rather an integral part of the methodological nationalism and ethnocentrism that remain a shared inheritance of Modern

[1] I would like to thank Mario Badagliacca for the permission to reproduce his work as part of this article.

[2] The sequence can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHEIkBaGh_Y (last consulted 8 July, 2022).

Languages as a multi-disciplinary field. Yet in its soft, tourism-friendly incarnation, this nationalist imprint of our discipline is proving extremely resilient, as it is perfectly attuned to contemporary post-capitalist, neo-liberal constructions of both culture and education as marketable products and consumable goods.

Thanks to the desirable images it generates and promotes, this Italy-as-product paradigm is also highly effective in reinforcing homonormative representations of the nation, while simultaneously rendering diverse voices and forms of cultural production largely invisible or inaudible. Recent years have seen the emergence and establishment of a number of approaches that can provide alternative routes to the study of Italian cultures. A significant part of the push towards change has come from social transformations and from a growing proximity between research and activism, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement being the most prominent example of this. As a result, diversity has come to occupy a much more central position in the ongoing renewal of the Italian Studies curriculum. In this brief position paper, I want to approach the question of diversity and of its impact on educational practices through the intersecting notions of (in)visibility and (in)audibility. I will use two more images as 'provocations', relating them to my own teaching as well as to the ongoing process of learning from my students – a process for which I want to thank them here.

Regimes of Visibility: Who Is 'Italian'?

In Spring 2021, in the middle of a global pandemic and in the aftermath of global protests catalysed by the BLM movement, I started teaching at a new institution, in a new country. My brief as Chair of Italian American and Italian Studies at Stony Brook University was to keep the two areas I teach neatly distinct: Italian Studies, taught in Italian and presenting aspects of Italian literature and culture to specialist students; and Italian American Studies, taught in English to students from across all years and disciplinary backgrounds. As I struggled with the limitations embedded in these criteria and the categories they took for granted – from notions of national language to images of geographic integrity; from cultural and political homogeneity to the assumed 'authenticity' of ethnic identities – I tried to devise ways to breech and

bridge those divides. One of the activities I proposed to my students was based on the 'Italy Is Out' photographic project produced by Mario Badagliacca as artist in residence for the 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages' project[3]. The photographs – a collection of portraits of members of the Italian diaspora based in the UK, USA, Argentina, Ethiopia and Tunisia – are the result of in-depth conversations between the photographer and his subjects, focusing on experiences of migration. Each portrait is accompanied by a tryptic of 'migrant objects': personal belongings selected by the interviewees as mementos of their migratory experience. Students in the Italian American Studies course I was teaching online in Spring 2021 – approximately forty, from diverse backgrounds, including some who identify as Italian American, Hispanic, African American, Asian American – were shown a selection of images and told they all portrayed Italians living outside Italy. In small groups, they were then asked to imagine a story for each person. At the end, I promised to share the original captions, so we could compare the sitters' self-descriptions with the lives we had invented for them. In most cases, the identities created by the students were highly compatible with those in the original captions. Some photographs, however, baffled the groups dealing with them, starting with that of a young black woman sitting on her bed, accompanied by a copy of Vasco Pratolini's novel *Le ragazze di Sanfrediano* and by postcards of a highly recognisable Tuscan landscape and an equally obvious view of Florence (Figure 1).

3 'Transnationalizing Modern Languages: Mobility, Identity and Translation in Modern Italian Cultures' (TML) was a three-year research project funded by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council's 'Translating Cultures' initiative. For more information, see the project's website: https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/ (last consulted 8 July, 2022) and also Burdett and Polezzi (eds), 2020; Burdett, Polezzi and Spadaro (eds), 2020.

Badagliacca's photographs were included in the project's itinerant exhibition 'Beyond Borders: Transnational Italy / Oltre i confini: Italia transnazionale' and have now also been published in book format (Badagliacca with Duncan, 2021). For the Beyond Borders exhibition see https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/media-collection/exhibition-beyond-borders-transnational-italy/; 'Italy Is Out' can also be viewed online at https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/media-collection/exhibition-beyond-borders-transnational-italy/ (last consulted 8 July, 2022).

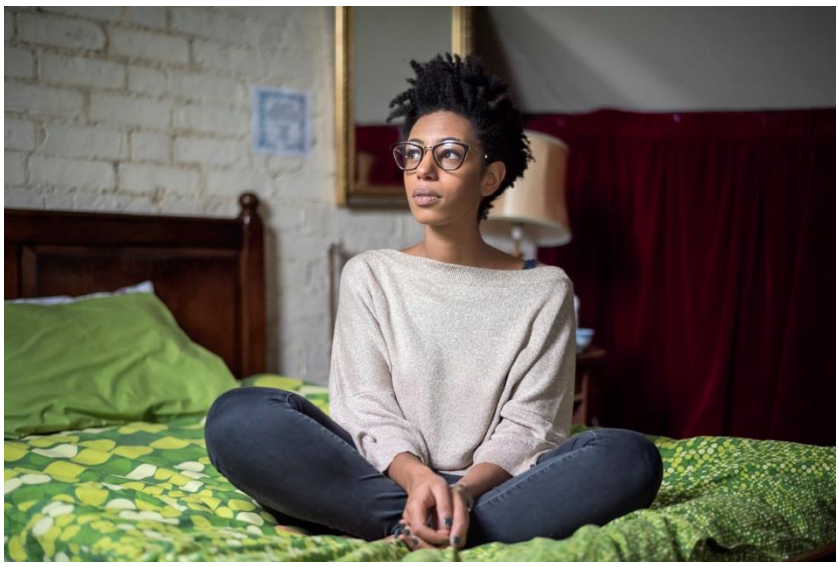

Figure 1: *Caption:* "Portrait: Sara Tesfai was born and grew up in Florence. After graduating in Economics, she moved to Cambridge where she has lived since 2014: 'Italy, Florence, represents home for me, my culture and everything that is most familiar. At the same time, though, I don't feel like I belong in only one place – rather, I'm surprised by the many places that make me feel at home. England is one of these. I myself am a balance of different cultures.' Cambridge (UK) 2015.
Objects: (1) Vasco Pratolini, *Le ragazze di Sanfrediano*. The book is set in Florence where Sara was born and grew up; (2) and (3) postcards from Tuscany and Florence.
Source: Mario Badagliacca, with Derek Duncan, *Italy Is Out*, Liverpool, LUP, 2021:18-19; printed with permission by the author.

In spite of my instructions, the group examining this set of photographs described the woman as an African American student who spent time in Florence, falling in love with its history and its culture. Although the Tuscan references in the pictures were correctly identified, the 'Black' signifier dominated the interpretation, thereby erasing or displacing the other evidence. The perceived dissonance between 'Blackness' and 'Italianness' was powerful enough to make the story told in the portrait – a story of post-colonial Italian Blackness – invisible. I do not read this as a 'mistake' on the part of my students. Rather, what the invisibility or 'unthinkability' of Sara Tesfai as an Italian subject reveals is the inbuilt bias that continues to dominate the images of 'Italianità' emanating from Italy and from Italian Studies and the way these are presented to students as normative. When that normative representation is integrated within educational practice, it gets reflected back onto images of Italy and their desirability, even among groups which are otherwise sensitive to discourses about de-coloniality, antiracism and other resistant critical practices. Simply *presenting* images that are more inclusive in *representing* the diversity of Italian culture will not solve the problem: we need a more active stance if we want to avoid complicity with the myth of white Italy and with its racist, colonial history[4].

Audibility: Whose Language Is It Anyway?

Among the many images circulating on Twitter in the Summer of 2020 to document the BLM demonstrations taking place around the world, one showed a young black woman holding up a home-made sign that recited: "We learned your English, your Spanish, your French, your Dutch, your Italian. You learned our nothing. You called us stupid.

[4] An important corollary of this conclusion speaks directly to notions, representations and narratives of Italian American ethnic identity and culture. Here, in a reciprocal propping up gesture, the myth of Italy's whiteness gets inscribed within the dynamics of United States racial politics, while the parallel myth of heroic migration is coupled with the foregrounding of tales of discrimination and minoritisation through negative stereotypes and representations, including assimilation or proximity to Black population. Both narratives place a high price/prize on Italian, Italian American and, ultimately, American whiteness, further reinforcing the regime of invisibility these impose on Italian Blackness. On these themes, see in particular, Jacobson 2006.

That's white privilege"[5]. In this slogan, the juxtaposition of Italian with other European languages more commonly associated with colonial empires denounces the racism of Italian normative whiteness as well as of Italy's disavowal not just of blackness but also of its own role in the history of colonialism. While effectively dismantling Italy's 'exceptionalism' with respect to colonial responsibility, this provocation explicitly raises the question of language and of audibility. At the same time, the image, with its central yet isolated black female figure, materialises in front of our eyes the intersection between the racialised body and language, asking how the availability or otherwise of *Italianità* echoes and reverberates in the inclusive or exclusive nature of the Italian idiom, its ownership, its availability.

This too is an important question for Italian Studies. Because language is often approached through instrumentalist, skills-centered arguments, whether at social or pedagogical level, we tend to forget (once again, in spite of all evidence) that no language exists as a self-contained homogeneous standard (Arnaut et al, 2016; Canagarajah, 2013), that multilingualism is common among individuals as well as communities (Canagarajah, 2020; Fortier, 2021; Gramling, 2016 & 2021), and that multiple forms of translation are constantly at play in inter- as well as intra-lingual forms of communication (Polezzi, 2022; Venuti, 2019). In the case of Italian, paradoxically, the double disavowal of Italy's colonial and diasporic history, including internal colonisation and migration, leads to a particularly strong association between the Italian language and the Italian nation. This resilient nexus silences internal diversity, from regional variants to linguistic minorities, while also rendering inaudible the Italian(s) spoken outside of Italy and, simultaneously, assimilating (but not equating) the speaking of (standard) Italian to citizenship[6]. When transferred outside the boundaries of Italy, this model of Italian language continues to

5 The image was posted by @MissTiaTaylor on 7 June, 2020, and captioned 'Rain or shine #BlackLivesMatter everywhere. #BlacLivesMatteritaly #blm'; it can be seen at: https://twitter.com/MissTiaTaylor_/status/1269659575093006337 (last consulted 8 July, 2022). I am grateful to Serena Bassi for pointing out this image and to Simone Brioni for tracking down its source on Twitter.

6 Recent debates in Italian politics about 'Ius Culturae' and, in the latest variation, 'Ius Scholae', present frequent 'progressive' formulations of this argument, for instance when noting – with some surprise and open satisfaction – that the vast majority of children born in Italy to migrant parents think in Italian (Amato, 2022).

perform its exclusionary role. It does so by marking diasporic Italian subjects as 'deficient', often asking them to choose between identifying as speakers of 'inferior' forms of Italian or learners of Italian as a 'foreign language' (Totò's 'oriundo' victim actually speaks very good Italian, yet he is still the butt of the joke for not being quite good or quite authentic enough).

This gesture of exclusion is further multiplied when we ignore or actively silence the multilingualism of all students in our classrooms, often, once again, in the name of instrumentality. Target-language-only policies in language classrooms render linguistic diversity inaudible, echoing 'English-only' campaigns (Avineri et al, 2019), and reasserting monolingual and monocultural normativity while asking students to ignore personal experiences – to leave them at the door – rather than tapping into them as the skilled cultural and linguistic mediators they often are. That demand – leaving diversity at the door of our classrooms – is both psychologically damaging and politically dubious. It is also, ultimately, unsustainable for a discipline that is intent on (re)stating its relevance in increasingly diverse societies.

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FOR A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY OF GENUINE COMMITMENT TO ALL STUDENTS IN ITALIAN STUDIES

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The path that led me to see the urgency to diversify and decolonise Italian Studies started a long way from Italy. A white Italian citizen, unquestioned in my legitimacy as Italian language instructor, it took me a journey across the ocean to the United States, where I have now been living for 18 years, to encounter ideas and people who prompted a desire to understand, firstly, the racial context here; secondly, my role in reproducing or challenging racialised hierarchies; and, eventually, to interrogate my cultural upbringing, shaped by the history of race in my country of origin (Giuliani & Lombardi-Diop, 2013). I learned that while challenging monolingualism has the potential to open minds towards a more diverse set of experiences, in circumstances where culture is presented superficially and essentialistically language students may retain stereotypes and prejudices; the potential is often left unexpressed due to issues of access, representation, and pedagogy in language classrooms (Kubota et al., 2003). Acknowledging my specific, privileged position and the perennially unfinished nature of my self-examination, I would like to share my experience on how what I am learning is impacting my pedagogy.

Unquestioned instruction that relies on established models inevitably leaves unchallenged patterns of exclusion, marginalisation, and oppression. The claims to decolonise the field cannot be supported by merely diversifying the materials if practitioners do not also question whether the ways of engaging, ways of learning, and ways of demonstrating learning in the classroom are reflective of a paradigm of white supremacy, intended as

> [...] a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley, 1989:1024)

I refer specifically to axiomatic prevalence of centering white Western[1] experience in Italian courses[2]; unfair expectations about pre-existing knowledge and skills that prevent underprivileged students from succeeding, while seeing unsatisfactory results as a reflection of their inadequacies rather than as a failure of our teaching; perpetuation of obstacles to participation based on power and ability; inflexible classroom practices regardless of the working, family, financial, medical, and mental situations students experience[3]; vertical classroom environments that do not value the epistemologies present in the classroom (Moll et al., 1992); a sanitised approach to cultural content that strives for consensus, rather than embracing controversy and fluid discussions rooted in the desire to understand, which is never conclusive; viewing learning achievements as strictly individual merits, normed and ranked against each other[4], rather than honouring the collaborative and collective nature of learning[5]; presenting the instructor as rule enforcer, rather than constructing a classroom climate of collective accountability where everyone is responsible for creating a genuine space for belonging.

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1 And, by extension, male centered, middle class, cis-heteronormative, able-bodied, Christian.

2 For example: assuming that familiarity with and love for Italian cuisine, however we define it, is universal.

3 English Department colleague Anne Fernald recently reminded me that every time we ask all students to do exactly the same thing we inevitably expose inequalities; flexibility is necessary to equitably address diversity in the classroom (for example, by offering multiple ways to approach or fulfill the same task or goal). This is a foundational principle of the Universal Design for Learning, https://udlguidelines.cast.org/.

4 On equitable assessment, see for example Blum & Kohn (2020), Feldman (2019), Inoue (2015).

5 I recommend Rufus Burnett's interview on the Twice Over Podcast (D'Agustino & Fernald 2021).

These exclusionary ways of teaching must be questioned. We have to be aware of and intentional about the values that we foster in our classroom spaces. It is helpful to move beyond the field of Second Language Acquisition to learn from the seminal work of pedagogues who imagined and advocated for pedagogies of liberation, freedom, hope, and justice (bell hooks, 2017; Freire et al., 2020). What would these pedagogies look like in the context of language teaching (Anya, 2021; Kubota, 2021; Norton & Toohey, 2017; Von Esch, 2020) and, specifically, Italian Studies? I have been exploring this question by engaging with students and colleagues across language studies.

After a few years spent learning about race in predominantly white reading groups, I had a moment of realisation at the 2019 Calandra Institute's conference on Diversity in Italian Studies. I met colleagues who face identity-based marginalisation within the field at large and, often, ostracism in the classroom, whose brilliance, generosity, and willingness to engage — despite the marginalisation they endure — prompted in me an urgency to act. That urgency became a commitment in summer 2020, when some of us founded a values-focused community of practice, the *Cosmopolitan Italies Collective*. The collective recently established a relationship with the pioneer group *Diversity, Decolonization and the German Curriculum (DDGC)* and colleagues from *Diversity, Decolonization and the French Curriculum (DDFC)*. I follow parallel initiatives, such as the important work of colleagues in *Transnational Italian Studies*, as well as the diversity-focused events of various committees born within professional organisations.

Thanks to an institutional grant[6], the collaboration with my colleagues Andrew Clark, Sarah Grey, Joshua Jordan, and Patricia Romero in my own Department of Modern Languages and Literatures led us to facilitate a credit-bearing seminar for undergraduate students from various language programs[7], prioritising minoritised students in our recruiting efforts. The students were tasked to prepare a report with

6 Specifically, a Teaching Race Across the Curriculum (TRAC) grant offered by the Office of the Chief Diversity Officer.

7 Participant students include Catalina Castillo-Lozano, Elizabeth Carrillo, Maniza Khondker, Yan Lin, Jenny Nguyen, Melanie Paquiyauri, Pauline Przywara, Olivia Tafs, Peter Wolff, and Sandy Zheng.

suggestions to improve the curriculum and pedagogy. The seminar strove to embody the principles of engaged pedagogy, with students bringing their own life (and linguistic) experiences in the classroom, largely self-regulating and having significant agency in decision-making. In this sense, the seminar became a laboratory to experiment with pedagogy. Participants studied and discussed work on inclusivity and anti-racism in language learning, observed classes, examined textbooks, spoke to language coordinators, and received funding to organise round tables with invited speakers (they decided to explore two themes, *race and music* and *linguistic, colonialism, and race*) and to sponsor an anti-racist workshop for language instructors led by Dr. Krishauna Hines-Gaither. At the end of the semester, the students submitted a report that offered well-supported, compelling, and comprehensive interventions to improve the language programs. Starting with a critique of a sample of our textbooks followed by a summary of the take-aways from the round tables, the students proceeded to expose which characteristics distinguished an anti-racist educator from a racially evasive one. They affirmed the shaping of social identity via language study as a key to an expanded worldview — a multilingualism that fully manifests its humanising potential. They identified practical suggestions that pertained to syllabi changes, identity-focused classroom activities, anonymous conversation spaces, active student reflection on learning, and the classroom environment. They articulated some requests directly to the faculty: humanise students, prioritising their holistic well-being; attend anti-racism training; acknowledge that white suprematist culture can manifest in classroom interactions between professors and students. We need to respond to these calls. As a first step, we turned their recommendations into a survey that functions both as a tool to collect anonymous data from faculty on current practices and as a checklist for instructors and language coordinators to envision change. We also secured another grant for a seminar in the fall of 2022 to continue this initiative: students will advance the project while starting a public archive of the work done.

The seminar is just an example of how language studies can act toward change. Engaged, critical, liberation pedagogies help us see how racial and social justice can be affirmed in the classroom. As teachers of Italian who are committed to this work, we need to ask ourselves

how those pedagogies translate to the specific context of our field. We need to ask ourselves how we draw the lines that define something as Italian, and question the fixity of those lines, blur them. Do our actions and pedagogies authenticate our words when we tell all students that they belong in the Italian classroom? Are we conscious of what we mean when we say 'we', or 'you', or 'they' when we speak in the classroom? Does the classroom explode and expand static and monolithic views of Italianness? Can instructors of Italian envision a space devoid of essentialisation and self-promotion, that finds the significance of studying Italian in the multifaceted perspectives Italian Studies offers and in multilingualism? How transformative can it be to approach the study of culture from a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, perspective/angle and to stress diversity within the cultures of Italy, and conceptualise culture as dynamic, situated, and discursively constructed within a system of power? (Kubota 2003, 2004). We can recast *italianità* as a question and a quest, approach its study by engaging with perspectives from multiple borders and margins, and, in this way, find a renewed meaning for Italian Studies in understanding realities near and distant for each of us.

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IMPOSTURE, TRAUMA, AND THE POSITIONALITY OF STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTORS IN THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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In 2009 we began teaching Italian courses geared toward Spanish-speaking students at California State University, Long Beach. The desire and need to radically rethink the model of language teaching that prevailed at the time, i.e., the communicative approach, had dogged me with respect to our Spanish-speaking students for personal, as well as academic reasons for many years.

On a personal note, I grew up in the City of San Fernando, California, where my father, Franco Donato, had been able to purchase a house with the $12,000 he had received thanks to the GI Bill, following his service in Italy during the war as a member of the OSS. San Fernando was a lush, agricultural oasis, home to groves of Valencia oranges that retain their juiciness even after months of hanging on the tree. The oldest city in the San Fernando Valley, San Fernando was a colonial contact zone as one of the sites where Spanish Franciscan friars built missions to convert the Gabrielino-Tongva Indian Tribe, the indigenous population in Southern California. San Fernando Rey de España Mission was only a few minutes' walk from where I lived, and I spent many an afternoon on those grounds, enjoying the fountain, the replica of one in Córdoba, and the Church interior, decorated in indigenous designs that contrasted with the ornate Baroque altar with a statue of King Ferdinand III of Aragon (1030-1082). I also stared at the bronze statue of Father Junipero Serra, his arm around an indigenous boy, near the large vats where the Indians made soap from tallow. The mission library offered me my first view of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century books from Europe, which is why, perhaps, I was inspired to become an eighteenth-century scholar. It also houses the

precious archives of the Gabrielino-Tongva tribe. The mission grounds, instead, reveal adobe walls, four feet thick, and the largest two-story adobe building in California, the grandest in the California Mission system, a testament to indigenous building techniques. Paintings of the saints and the Virgin hang on the walls of the Mission church and buildings and include a beautiful painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This is a site of cultural syncretism, a rare place in the San Fernando Valley, known today more for Valley Girl culture made famous by Frank Zappa, than the missions. Spanish became the language of the region, and immigrants and migrants flowed to the valley, the majority, over time, from Mexico, but when I was growing up there, in the fifties and sixties, significant numbers of Italian Americans moved west from the East Coast and settled in the Valley. If I look at the picture of my first-grade class, one-third of my classmates, about 15, have Italian surnames, while another 20 of them have Hispanic surnames, with the rest a mix of French and German. Italian Americans felt at home in San Fernando, where they established fig farms and expanded on the growth of the olive trees brought from Spain by the Franciscans to make the holy oil, chrism, used in so many church ceremonies, a mixture of olive oil, cinnamon, cassia, calamus, and myrrh.

What does this have to do with learning a language? Eighteenth-century English philosopher, John Locke, located self-identity in memory and self-knowledge. In his work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), he promoted memory and self-knowledge as the foundation upon which learning and self-improvement were predicated. In the State of California, the students who enter the Italian-language classroom are increasingly of Hispanic and indigenous descent. They grew up hearing or speaking Spanish at home; their identities, memories, and self-knowledge are steeped in languages and experiences that should be engaged in the Italian language classroom in ways that differ greatly from the language knowledge and experiences of students from other backgrounds. Engaging with their self-identity, memory, and self-knowledge as Spanish speakers, often with indigenous roots that lie in a complex colonial history of cultural syncretism, post-colonial trauma, and migration history, (not to mention precarious status, since they are often undocumented), we owe our students recognition of who they are when they enter the language classroom. In the same way that we acknowledge the sacred,

indigenous grounds upon which our universities rest every time we speak publicly, should we not also recognise the backgrounds of our students, the sacred grounds upon which their identities rest, especially our Spanish-speaking students, when they come into the Italian language classroom?

When I outlined the personal reasons that led me to create a program of Italian for Spanish speakers, I wanted to explain how the background of my Hispanic friends and classmates was in many ways a shared background, meaning that I, too, as an Italian American Californian who grew up in a historically and linguistically Hispanic-dominant setting, that I, too, would have appreciated a more welcoming pedagogical gesture from my teaching associates and professors. This wish, and denial of it, would emerge time and time again when I was a teaching assistant in training at UCLA, or when I began teaching at CSULB, strictly applying the communicative approach, and doing to my students exactly what had been done to me and my peers when we were in the Italian language classroom so many years ago. "I'm teaching them Italian, and they answer me in Spanish!", we would grumble in what had become the mantra if you were teaching with the communicative approach in institutions of higher learning in California, many already 'Hispanic Serving', though not yet designated as such. We knew nothing about a student's linguistic and cultural repertoire back then, only 'comprehensible input', which we would repeat over and over again, insisting that the students forget everything about themselves and the languages they already knew as they tried to connect to a language presented coldly through the holding up of pictures and our attempts to establish connections between those words and the pictures, all devoid of historical and cultural meaning. We were asking them to recode the relationship between object and word that they already possessed, affective relationships, and to block the words they knew, words that from Spanish, were often identical or almost identical to the Italian words we were trying to teach them. We asked them to block those words, drop them as Spanish words, and recode them as Italian, instead of demonstrating the relationship between them and the ties Italian and Spanish share as languages. We would watch the Spanish-speaking students as they tried to suppress their natural inclination to establish links with the Spanish words they knew, inevitably blurt out Spanish words, only to be admonished to say the

Italian word, not the Spanish word, by the very louder insistence of the instructor who was committed to diverting them away from Spanish to replace it in their heads with Italian. I once interviewed two of my Spanish-speaking students about how they had addressed the 'problem' of Spanish as they were trying to learn French and Italian through the communicative method in their high schools. They both spoke of being reprimanded when they were found to be sneakily writing down the Spanish equivalent of the French and Italian words they heard spoken. They also talked about going home and translating everything that appeared in French or Italian in their textbooks into Spanish. I refer to this as the secret translation and trans-languaging practices of Spanish-speaking students in the French and Italian language classroom.

Let me close with a thought that may be uncomfortable to many, but is, I believe, the overlooked arena of DEI, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Italian Diaspora Studies: the Italian language classroom, where hierarchical language-teaching practices persist, and where it is extremely difficult to move the Italian language teaching community from their communicative approach comfort zone. As Italian language instructors, we have been unwilling to rethink what we do, unwilling to understand that the students in our classrooms are human beings whose positionality has everything to do with their ability and desire to learn, especially when it comes to learning language, and in this case, the Italian language. The research on the need to consider the reality of who populates our classrooms and who teaches in them is deep and extends many years back by now, with Claire Kramsch at the forefront of multilingualism and language teaching. In a 2015 article co-authored with Lihua Zhang, "The legitimacy gap: multilingual language teachers in an era of globalization", the topic of imposing monolingual teaching practices on multilingual instructors is explored through the authors' own personal experiences at UC Berkeley. It throws into question the entire language-teaching, language-learning practice, not only from the perspective of students, but from the perspective of instructors as well, instructors who have also suppressed who they are. The trauma of the imposture of language teaching and language learning that we have been expected to adhere to no is longer viable. Why do students want to learn Italian? So they can go to Florence for a month of 'study abroad'? At a time when our existence as a discipline on college campuses has been reduced to that goal in many instances, it is time to

completely rethink what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how it benefits our students. Unfortunately, the title of a recent Netflix movie, *Love and Gelato*, does not bode well in this regard[1].

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[1] From the Netflix website: *Love & Gelato*, 1h 51m | Teen Movies: https://www.netflix.com/it-en/title/81278276. To fulfill her mother's final wish, Lina spends the summer before college in Rome, where she discovers romance, adventure — and a passion for gelato.

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HOW THE 'ANXIETY OF ITALIAN AUTHENTICITY' OBSTRUCTS DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI) PRACTICES IN ITALIAN STUDIES

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Pursuing Italian Studies for many low-income, first-generation Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) interested students feels like an unattainable college experience. Completing my doctorate in Italian Studies at a historically white institution like Brown University was both a rigorous and demoralising undertaking. Having to constantly explain to Italian fellow Ph.D. students and professors for the umpteenth time why I did not pursue a doctorate degree in Latin American Studies or answering the variously inflected 'How did you get into Italian?' is a common micro-aggression that we BIPOC folks in Italian Studies know too well. It gives the false impression that the field is exclusively by Italians for Italians.

In the Chronicle of Higher Education, Deborah Parker (2018), a professor of Italian at the University of Virginia, who specialises in Italian visual and print cultures of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, describes how it feels to be an Asian-Canadian faculty member in Italian, a field in which there are very few BIPOC folks, and how greater diversification offers a way forward. According to Parker: "Many Italian programs strive for 'authenticity' by favouring native Italians. The persistence of this practice fosters the widely voiced opinion that 'Italians hire Italians'." I concur with Parker's observation on Italian programs seeking 'authenticity' as I too have witnessed it and echo Catherine Adoyo's (a General Faculty in the French department at George Washington University) poignant online response to Parker's article on Race and Foreign Language. Adoyo remarks:

> This is so real. I have developed the sense that one of the greatest shortcomings in 'Languages and Literature' scholarship, especially in Italian, is in defining such disciplines according to national boundaries and the attendant identity politics. I have seen countless iterations of the 'how Italian are you?' litmus test frame many an interaction by establishing an undeclared pecking order of priority of authority, with peninsular Italians holding pride of place, their American descendants readily leveraging their ancestral bonafides to be heard, others of European descent claiming authorizing proximity, and then the rest. Reading this article makes me wonder honestly whether Africans even have a place at this table.

I wonder what it would take for BIPOC folks to have a welcoming and affirming spot at the table? I ask this because my research interests in Italian Migrant Culture and Afro-Italian women writers were initially undervalued and scrutinised unfairly during my graduate career. My writing style was criticised for lacking depth and clarity, yet I never received the attention and time from my advisor that other students in my program received. Frankly, I was rarely offered concrete feedback on how to improve my writing and consequently had to change advisors halfway through my program. Did my lack of 'Italian authenticity' position me as a less-valued student to advise and mentor? Did my Italian pronunciation, inflected with a Spanish accent, mean I would not teach Italian Studies successfully? Did my effort to learn and teach in a third language show any signs of my dedication and commitment to the field? Did my lack of skills or knowledge overcome my strengths? However, if it was my shortcomings, how could I reconcile that the other two fellow Ph.D. students of colour in my program, a Black woman from Chicago and an international Chinese male student, did not fare well. After two years, one left the program, and the other returned to China soon after completing his degree. I secured a position as an Adjunct Faculty at Rhode Island College with a promise of a tenure track position that never came to fruition due to institutional red tape. I mention all this not to point fingers but to make visible patterns that might be contributing to making BIPOC students and educators feel unwelcomed, excluded, and unsupported in Italian Studies.

My experience in graduate school left me with more questions than answers. However, it made salient the need to unpack race in Italian Studies instruction and diversify Italian Studies educators and learners. After hearing Parker's 2019 keynote speech on Diversity in Italian Studies, I learned that only five racialised minorities currently hold tenure track positions in Italian Studies across the United States. The dismal number signals deep inequity practices deeply embedded within the discipline that merit close attention.

The absence of BIPOC learners and educators in Italian Studies mirrors the exclusion of immigrants and children of immigrants in Italy. In an interview, the Roman-born author Igiaba Scego speaks to this matter and sarcastically discloses how Italians usually compliment her on her Italian, thinking she is an 'extracomunitaria', a demeaning word used by Italian speakers to identify a person who is not part of the European Union. The assumption that she is an 'extracomunitaria' is based on her phenotype, not on questions of upbringing, provenance, or how she identifies herself. In her case, she was born and raised in Italy, yet she is perceived as an outsider. I also felt like an 'extracomunitaria' in Italian Studies. My B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in Italian were not enough to be recognised as an Italian scholar.

According to (Italian Studies | Data USA, 2020) most bachelor degrees are awarded to white students. However, we (faculty, deans, administrators, activists, artists, and educators) cannot ignore the demographic shift sweeping through university campuses across the United States. Immigrants and children of immigrants are becoming an ever-larger share of students across our campuses. Research (National Center for Education Statistics (ED); American Institutes for Research (AIR), 2018) shows that in postsecondary institutions students of colour comprise approximately 42% of college enrollment. With this changing student body comes the responsibility of institutions to change, grow, and adapt to adequately meet the needs of their new constituents. This demographic change presents a niche field such as Italian Studies with an opportunity to meet the moment with innovation and exemplary leadership that can help diversify the field.

While diversity in Italian Studies can refer to the representation of individuals of a different race, gender, ethnic, national, linguistic, sexual, and social class identities, I have elected to focus on racial diversity, equity, and inclusion. When I think of diversity, equity, and

inclusion, I think of equitable, meaningful representation and participation. As Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy explain

> […] there is a difference between saying that everyone has a seat at the table versus saying that everyone has a seat, a voice, opportunity, and enough time to speak. Thus, any discussion of diversity must include considerations of power, agency, and equity that all are implicated in meaningful representation and participation.
>
> (Fosslien & Duffy, cited in Anya & Randolph, 2019)

While many institutions pride themselves on diversity and inclusive practices, the everyday reality for BIPOC stakeholders is relentless, unyielding, and a constant reminder that academia is not a place designed for us to thrive. What is packaged as an empowering experience comes at the high cost of systematically chipping away our self-esteem and creativity. Instead of leaving academia empowered, we are left traumatised and insecure.

After learning more about the experiences of BIPOC students in historically white institutions and the lack of research that acknowledges and validates their experiences and perspectives, I have realised that I am not alone. The under-representation of BIPOC faculty in Italian Studies signals that BIPOC students are turning to white faculty mentors, a situation similar to what sociologist Marisela Martinez-Cola (2020) identifies in her article *Collectors, Nightlights, and Allies, Oh My! White Mentors in the Academy.* In her auto-ethnographic study rooted in the counter-narrative tradition of Critical Race Theory — a legal theory of race in the USA —, Martinez-Cola found in her literature review that most of the literature regarding mentoring discusses its definitions and best practices but does not completely capture how students of colour perceive their white mentors. She found that most of the literature on the subject is rooted in a deficit model, describing these students as lacking some skills or knowledge rather than emphasising their strengths and focusing on structural inequalities. It fails to challenge white mentors who either 'tokenise' or lack the skill set and intercultural competence to understand the needs and perspectives of their mentees. I am a strong

advocate for more research on the experiences of BIPOC folks in Italian Studies, where their voices, perspectives, and incidents are centered.

My upcoming Photovoice Research Project for the 2022-2023 academic year builds on Martinez-Cola's findings and from a desire to understand and capture the experiences of Latino/a, Afro-Latino/a, Latinx, and Hispanic students and their perceptions of their white mentors at historically white institutions. The main research question is: How do first-generation students identifying as Hispanic, Latino/a, Afro-Latino/a, and Latinx experience their white mentors in Italian Studies?

To instill the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in the classroom, I have regularly tasked my beginning Italian students with creating an educational children's book for ages five to six that illustrates the various concepts they have learned throughout the semester. I ask them to write about a topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion that is important to them and educational to a young child. They reflect on diversity, equity, and inclusive practices that make every child feel seen, understood, and valued regardless of race, gender, background, ability, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, or creed. Their narrative, personal anecdote, or experiential piece must follow the same pattern as fiction. It must include the three main elements: exposition, or background information, followed by complication, the events of the narrative, and the resolution. Writing this children's book in Italian gives students some emotional distance to discuss, reflect, and find resolutions to inequitable practices in our society.

Representation matters in Italian Studies, and it goes beyond ticking demographic boxes. To guarantee equity and meaningful participation in language learning of faculty and students from BIPOC backgrounds, we must be willing to openly address race and racism in the ways in which Italian language and culture have been taught. We must be ready to make changes to the Italian curriculum and be intentional about the instructional materials and practices we use in our classroom. This includes unpacking how the anxiety of Italian authenticity obstructs DEI practices in Italian Studies. More BIPOC meaningful representation and participation within the professoriate will attract a broader demographic among students and stimulate innovative transnational research inquiries. This condition is crucial for the field's development and intellectual thriving.

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WHAT IS BLACK AMERICA FOR ITALY? WHAT IS ITALY FOR BLACK AMERICA?: RACE AND CULTURE IN TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN ITALY AND THE UNITED STATES

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> *Niente mi ha reso davvero libera come viaggiare. Sono nata dentro quel piroscafo che mi portava a Liverpool, in Europa. Nata a diciannove anni. Solcando quel mare dove la mia gente, la gente nera, ha sofferto l'inferno. Ed è superando l'inferno che sono rinata. Ora sto di nuovo partendo [...] Sto andando a conoscere la terra in cui finalmente potrò essere me stessa*.
> (Scego, 2020:113).

As I was reading Igiaba Scego's 2020 novel, *La linea del colore. Il grand tour di Lafanu Brown*, about the fictional African American Lafanu Brown's time in 19th century Italy, this quotation particularly stood out to me. Not only does it highlight a central theme of my research, but it also deals with one of the main questions I am asking in my current project. For the former, *viaggiare* can be used to characterise my projects as I have examined the ways in which American culture traveled to Italy, primarily in the 20th century, and the impact it had and still has on Italian society. Having explored the place and significance of American female consumer culture in Italy in the three decades after the Second World War for my first book, *Italian Women's Experiences with American Consumer Culture, 1945-1975: The Italian Mrs. Consumer* (2020), my attention has now turned to another aspect of female American culture in 20th century Italy: the presence of African American women in Italian film, television, music, and fashion.

Using the ideas of travel and mobility, this new project traces these women's journeys to Italy as a democratic republic, which was seeking to distance itself from an unwanted Fascist legacy, in order to bring to

light new stories in Italy's history. Moreover, this project uses critical race studies as its primary analytical lens, examining the women's representation in Italian media and their reception by the country's public to enrichen, deepen, and diversify our understandings of the history of race relations in the peninsula. Scholarship on race in Italy, while being a relatively recent development, has primarily investigated the indigenous populations in Italy's colonies, their descendants, or migrants from Africa. More recently, important work has been done on the African American presence in postwar Italy by scholars, such as Shelleen Greene (2012), Charles L. Leavitt IV (2013, 2019), Melanie Masterton Sherazi (2019) and Silvana Patriarca (2022), which has served to expand the parameters of the historical narrative of race and Italy. By analysing the lives and positionality of African American women, such as singer, dancer, and actress Lola Falana, model and actress Donyale Luna and soprano Leontyne Price, my project contributes to diversifying and adding nuance to this area of research[1]. For example, where do African American women fit in Italy's racial landscape? Are they viewed and treated in a similar manner to women from Africa, especially those coming from Italy's former colonies? In other words, does coming from the United States, a superpower at the time with a strong global cultural presence, or coming from a continent that had been colonised and exploited by European countries play a significant role in determining one's status? In this vein, another important consideration is that of the specific conditions that allowed these African American female entertainers to travel to and work in Italy. How did race, class and gender intersect to contribute to their mobility?

In addition to examining the ways in which Falana, Luna and Pryce moved into and through Italian society, the project also explores the movement of ideas, specifically, those regarding race. Did American

[1] Lola Falana starred in three Italian films in 1967 — *Quando dico che ti amo*, dir. Giorgio Bianchi*; Lola Colt: Faccia a faccia con El Diablo*, dir. Siro Marcellini*;* and *Stasera mi butto*, dir. Ettore Maria Fizzarotti — as well as co-starred in RAI's ten-episode variety program *Sabato sera*, dir. Antonello Falqui. She returned to Italian television in 1971 appearing in RAI's *Teatro 10*, dir. Antonello Falqui, in 1973, co-starring in another RAI variety program, *Hai visto mai?*, dir. Enzo Trapani and in the 1980s, in a Fininvest program. Donyale Luna, notable for being the first Black woman to appear on a cover of *Vogue* (*British Vogue*, March 1966), appeared in fashion spreads in Italian magazines and in Federico Fellini's *Satyricon* (1969) and Carmelo Bene's *Salomè* (1972). Leontyne Price made her La Scala debut in 1960 in *Aida*.

notions of race accompany these women as they travelled to Italy and possibly contribute to influencing Italian understandings of race and ultimately, Italian national identity formation? Moreover, how did the racialised discourse and thinking of the Fascist era affect representations and understandings of these women?

Additionally, instead of looking solely at the Italian aspect and the American impact in Italy, I am also interested in how these women's Italian experiences affected their own understandings of race, especially as racism and discrimination were still firmly embedded in the United States. In this manner, the words of Lafanu Brown, quoted above, speak to another line of inquiry of this project. Did travelling to Italy free these women from the restraints and restrictions of racism in the States? For example, when Lola Falana came to Italy, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States had achieved significant goals with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, racism, discrimination, police brutality towards African Americans, and economic injustice continued to persist in American society, leading to the rise of the Black Power movement in 1965. Thus, when Black America was expressing a stronger and more assertive stance against injustice, Falana arrived in Italy. Therefore, did Italy offer an escape or alternative to the marginalization of African Americans in the US?

This project's focus on travel, mobility and race not only provides new insight into the historic relationship between Italy and the United States, but also adds new stories and understandings to the history of race relations in Italy, which is an integral part of the Italian story.

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INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY AND ITALIAN TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES

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I am an Italian migrant living and working on Indigenous land in so-called Australia, and benefitting from a settler colonial system founded on dispossession, genocide, and racism. My decolonial focus is therefore not on Italy's imperialism and colonialism, or even on the complex memories and long-lasting consequences of such important histories. Rather the focus of my research and teaching is on the long, persisting and violent complicity of Italians, and especially Italian migrants, in settler colonialism and the violent denial of limited sovereignty to Indigenous people.

What are the implications of such a blunt and challenging, yet necessary acknowledgement?

In attempting to answer this question with some degree of honesty, I am guided by three simple principles that I have come to embrace through my study and reflections at the intersection of transcultural, decolonial and Indigenous methodologies. In turn, these principles shape my own approach to transcultural Italian studies.

Firstly, we must recognise and support Indigenous sovereignty, which includes, but is not limited to, their sovereign rights over lands, waters and skies. It is for each distinct First Nation to decide what sovereignty is and how it should be applied. While the settler colonial Nation-State's concession of limited "sovereignty" to Indigenous people, as defined and constrained by the settler colonisers through their legal systems, may have some positive effects, it is itself an apparent and paradoxical denial of Indigenous sovereignty.

This principle makes apparent the need to understand that Italians have migrated not just to settler colonial nations, but to specific First Nations. I see my contribution to the transcultural understanding of Italian migration as a preliminary and provisional contribution to

research on the history of Italian migration as (also) a history of diaspora settler colonialism, and as a history of violent migration to, and settlement in, First Nations.

Secondly, the immoral combination of settlers' guilt and hope is instrumental in recentring the moral privilege of whiteness in the exact moment in which white settlers declare their progressive, antiracist and decolonial beliefs (see Ricatti, 2016). It is not a proper decolonial process, one in which the settlers remain firmly at the centre of the moral, political and cultural discourse, even if such discourse is explicitly in support of Indigenous people. Guilt and hope should be replaced with silence. Listening to Indigenous people is much more effective and beneficial for decolonisation than any self-aggrandising declaration of moral and political intents.

This principle draws two essential methodological boundaries in my work. The first is the need to read, listen to, and cite Indigenous authors, artists, activists, and scholars, and to centre their perspectives, knowledges and theories in my own research and teaching about transculturation within Italian migrant communities. While many of my old publications fail this basic and essential duty, since 2019 I have tried to recognise the centrality of Indigenous voices in shaping my own work. Secondly, I make sure that my work is clearly situated within Italian migration and transcultural studies, that is, it does not attempt to occupy centre-stage within the decolonial scholarship, a stage that should be left to Indigenous voices. Instead, my contribution to research and teaching operates from a marginal discipline within the Anglocentric sphere (Italian Studies), to provide a limited but perhaps productive contribution towards decolonisation.

Lastly, a process of decolonisation requires an understanding of the complexity of settler colonial structure of powers and of their persistence and evolution over time. While there are many, different and contrasting theorisations of settler colonialism and racial capitalism, at a basic level this means that migrants who are not, at least initially, part of a dominant structure of settler colonial power, nevertheless can play an important role in both processes of colonisation and decolonisation.

This principle has informed my attempt to distinguish between those groups who are hegemonic within settler colonialism and its processes of racialisation (i.e., Anglo-Australians first and foremost, but also

other white migrant settlers, colonist, missionaries, etc.), and migrants whose alleged racial inferiority or ambiguity has come to play complex and ever-evolving, yet clearly distinct roles within settler colonial societies.

This distinction is fundamental when considering, in particular, the history of Southern Italian migrants in settler colonial countries. To argue, as some scholars have tried to do, that these migrants were not complicit in settler colonialism as they were also racialised and exploited, fails to recognise the importance that different degrees of racialisation and exploitation play within settler colonialism. It is my conviction that racial ambiguity has allowed settler colonial powers to enjoy and exploit a higher degree of political, economic and productive flexibility within evolving settler colonial and capitalist structures. In other words, the fact that Southern Italians (and other Mediterranean migrants) could be identified as white, almost white or almost black has allowed settler colonial nations to locate them at different intersections of race and class, depending on their needs in specific political, economic and productive systems.

On the other hand, the attempt by many Anglo-centric scholars of settler colonialism to equate racialised migrants to white settlers, is also extremely problematic, as it renders invisible the racism and exploitation these migrants have endured, but also their important contribution to antiracist and anticolonial struggles. Such contribution has been shaped not just by material and political conditions, but also by transcultural encounters, friendships and relationships with Indigenous people (see for instance Pallotta-Chiarolli & Ricatti, 2022).

If we are to recognise that "decolonisation is not a metaphor" (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and it is not a synonym of broader and at times unrelated struggles for social justice, our research and teaching in the field of transcultural Italian studies must recognise the specificity of settler colonialism, and the involvement of Italian migrants in it.

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WRITING AGAINST BORDER IMPERIALISM: EPISTEMOLOGIES OF TRANSIT

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A decolonized approach commands us to show sensibilities towards migrants' fundamental right to opacity, that is, that not everything *should be seen, explained, understood, and documented. As a migration scholar, I ask myself if my focus on migrants'/refugees' experiences of border crossings, journeys, camps, or asylum processes does not contribute to othering of them?*
Shahram Khosravi, 2020

Language is always a political choice.
Ubah Cristina Ali Farah, 2022

'I am not an economic migrant', Yousef told me. 'Because [migration] is something with you – it must *have* to be in my life and I have to travel in life'[1].

It was June 2018: anti-immigrant sentiment had propelled right-wing parties to victory in Italian national elections, and newly appointed Interior Minister Matteo Salvini was launching the #PortiChiusi campaign that would hold rescued migrants stranded at sea. Yousef (pseudonym) and I were sharing mint tea under the shade of a tarp at Piazzale Maslax, a camp operated by activist collective Baobab Experience near Rome's Tiburtina station. Yousef, who was waiting for his humanitarian visa to be renewed, could legally work and move freely throughout Europe. But because renewing his papers every two years was both time-consuming and costly, he lived in the improvised camp and worked odd jobs to save for his legal expenses.

1 Oral history interview, Rome, June 2018.

As a Gambian man who had crossed the Mediterranean and applied for asylum in Italy in the mid-2010s, Yousef fit the pervasive image in Europe of 'economic migration' – a category with no legal bearing, yet one which has come to define the national and European migration debate. As such, this term also exemplifies the kind of language I have been compelled in my own work not simply to avoid, but to challenge.

Yousef and I first met while I was conducting ethnographic research to better understand how emergency responses to migration operate beyond Italy's external borders. In the interview I quote from here, we reflected together on the ongoing politicisation of migration. In addressing popular discourses about who 'migrants' are and whether they deserve legal protection or to live in Italy, Yousef rejected the economic migrant/refugee dichotomy. Rather than uphold that problematic binary by opting for one label over the other, he instead suggested people shift their conceptualisation of border crossing and the right to move.

I hear Yousef's words as a challenge to scholars and activists – especially those of us from or based in the Global North – not to approach the study of migration strictly or primarily in terms of predetermined categories of mobility. More broadly, this is a call to recognise that scholarship on migration always reflects a conceptualisation of movement and borders, whether implicit or explicit, and to reckon with the resulting ethical implications. Widely accepted labels are not naturalised categories but social constructs, and our work can uphold or subvert them. We've seen this play out in the 2015 debates by media organisations about whether to describe people on the move as 'migrants', as the BBC declared, or 'refugees', as Al-Jazeera opted to do (Ruz, 2015). In Italian media, regular use of *migranti economici* assumes people's motives – details that we simply cannot know as they disembark on Italian shores and which, as Khosravi suggests in the epigraph, a broader 'we' perhaps have no right to know.

To study and write about migration necessarily means participating in an ongoing, multifaceted discussion of representation, rights, racialisation, and the politics of memory and belonging, and it is therefore never a neutral endeavour. This work emerges in contexts shaped by border imperialism, or "the processes by which the violences and precarities of displacement and migration are structurally created

as well as maintained" (Walia, 2013:5), and how we put our questions and thoughts into language is "always a political choice" (Ali Farah, 2022)[2]. In ethnographic and narrative research, this compels me to engage epistemologies of transit, rather than of states and of stasis – an ongoing process, and one I attempt through oral history and other methods that encourage a questioning of power dynamics and an acknowledgment of silences[3]. If language can reify borders and legitimise institutional violence, it can also disrupt and reimagine these structures. Think of the power of discourses that criminalise those crossing the sea, as politicians like Luigi Di Maio refer to rescue ship operators as taxi drivers; or of how terms like *clandestini* racialise precarious journeys rendered necessary by Italian and EU policies. The move by some migration scholars to shift framings from 'illegal' to 'illegalised' is one example of language calling attention to relations of power (De Genova, 2002).

What does this mean in the context of Italian Studies? The field's inherent interdisciplinarity and its current turn towards the transnational mark a crucial opportunity to embrace "a change in perspective and methodological approach that pays greater attention to the circulation of people, languages and artefacts" (Burdett et al., 2020:228) in order to question the assumptions of cultural homogeneity and fixity that uphold national borders as racial borders (Achiume, 2022)[4]. What ethical practices and more just understandings of belonging are enabled when we bring the post- and de-colonial lenses of transnational Italian Studies into conversation with the critical migration studies charge to "research migration without reinforcing the migrant as a problematic subject" (Anderson, 2019:5)?

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2 Ali Farah's words recall Black feminist scholarship on challenging hegemonic language as crucial for working towards justice (cf. Lorde, 1984).

3 Here I have in mind, for example, the understanding that memory "is not a depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings" (Portelli, 2006:37), recognising meaning making as itself a process in flux, and the interviewee as an active creator in the interview process.

4 In Italian literary studies, the debate about *letteratura migrante / della seconda generazione / italofona / postcoloniale* offers an important example of grappling with lexicons as an entry point for deeper epistemological questions and consideration of the ethical implications of work that aims to document and challenge marginalisation without reifying it (Romeo, 2011:381).

Let me pose the question slightly differently: what does it mean to study migration within an Italian Studies context, given pervasive anti-Black racism in Europe and the ongoing criminalisation of Mediterranean migration and solidarity efforts? To what extent are scholars ethically obligated to respond to these injustices in our work (not to mention beyond) – for those of us who, through whiteness, class, or citizenship status, can afford to choose?

The answer is not, of course, *only* language. As Sara Ahmed (2017:90) observes in the context of diversity work in institutions, "using the language [of justice, diversity, equity, etc.] does not translate into creating diverse or equal environments". But hegemonic language enacts border imperialism and working with that knowledge is crucial – and is a process with which I continue to wrestle in my own work.

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APPROACHING THE ARCHIVES OF ITALIAN CINEMA

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It is not uncommon to encounter absences and silences within an archive, especially as they pertain to film archives and the histories of African descent peoples. More than a passive repository of documents, the archive is an "active, regulatory discursive system", as curator and theorist Okwui Enwezor has written, which structures knowledge production but can also be "appropriated, interpreted, reconfigured, and interrogated" (Enwezor, 2007:11). These archives register the broader histories of Italian colonialism, racial discourse and hierarchies, often leading to the marginalisation of African descent and other racialised people. This erasure manifest itself in 'gaps' and 'absences' – for instance, in the difficulty locating actors who remained uncredited on screen.

My research emerged from a desire to address these erasures and disappearances in the canon, to acknowledge the presence of African descent people in the Italian national cinema, and to address what I then perceived as the neglect not only to study these representations but to consider the theoretical and methodological tools by which to undertake such an examination. Drawing upon primarily cultural studies, critical race and postcolonial studies, then emergent in the field of Italian Studies, and in consideration of Italy's so-called 'delays' – in terms of its national unification and its colonial enterprise – as well as the country's internal racialised north/south division (its 'Southern Question'), I argued in my book *Equivocal Subjects*, that through the trope of racial mixture, discourses of race and nation are evident throughout, from the silent historical epics, to the fascist colonial cinema, to the neorealist period, and the cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. More recently, there are artists such as Haile Gerima and Isaac Julien, who, through their cinema, have offered counter-histories of the Italian

colonial legacy and further, of the Mediterranean slave trade, as it is manifest in the current necropolitical borders of the Mediterranean (Greene, 2012).

It is an active investigation that Janell Hobson advocates in her essay, 'Viewing in the Dark: Toward a Black Feminist Approach to Film' in which she invokes Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, specifically, Morrison's "critique of the absence-presence of blackness" – or the "Africanist presence in American culture and literature". In terms of film, Hobson writes that we "must also incorporate an analysis of the invisible, or the dark presence" and soon after, states: "I advocate a feminist film theory inclusive of race, class, and gender analysis that integrate an examination of 'looking relations' with a search for the invisible but felt presence that frames the visual and cultural scene" (Hobson, 2002:47-48). I want to heed Hobson's call for a reading practice that attempts to subvert the ways in which the African descent presence has traditionally been read on screen. Thus, I find it important to identify Black women film scholars, or perhaps re-insert them into the canonical scholarship on colonial and postcolonial Italian film, one from the United States and the other from Nigeria writing in Italy during the late 1960s, who first turned this critical eye to the Italian cinema, and created a corpus that speaks back to this canon, prompting inquiries into its silences.

During my initial research, I encountered a scholar with a similar inquiry, a shared interest in exploring and contextualising these images. Chandra Harris's 'Who's Got the Power? Blacks in Italian Cinema and Literature, 1910-1948', is a pathbreaking intervention in the study of racial discourses in Italian film and literature. Her ranging work covers the silent to the immediate post-war era, and stands as one of the first studies of the presence of the African American GI in Italian neorealist films. At one point, Harris recalls the experience of sitting in a theatre and encountering African and African Americans in these films, posing questions to these images, deciding to examine "their potential significance in Italian culture" and the dynamics of race and power implied by these images. This critical viewing practice is suggested in bell hooks' "oppositional gaze" in which the process of looking upon and interrogation opens: "Spaces of agency [that] exist for black people,

wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see" (hooks, 1994:116).

This kind of oppositional gaze can also be found in the work of Joy Nwosu, who in 1968, wrote *Cinema and Africa: The Image of the Black in White Cinema and African Cinema Today*. Originally from Nigeria, Nwosu, then a student first at the Conservatory of Santa Cecilia and then at the International University for Social Studies (Pro Deo/LUISS), completed her thesis as part of her degree studies in Mass Communications. Nwosu wrote *Cinema and Africa* at a moment of heightened decolonial struggle, antiwar movement, and student activism. The text conveys the passion and conviction of its time. International in its scope, *Cinema and Africa* examines the early cinemas of France, the United Kingdom, the USA, and Italy, becoming one of the first texts to examine the continuities between the colonial era films and the cinema of the 1950s and 60s. As Italian film scholar Leonardo de Francheschi, editor of the 2014 reissue, writes, Nwosu's text points to the "continuity between the colonial cinema of the Thirties and Forties and the [then] most recent productions from [traditional] genre films to the auteur cinema" (de Francheschi, 2014:113). In an interview, Nwosu states of her groundbreaking text, "The fact is that, I was speaking the truth. I know what I saw in the films I watched, and I aptly interpreted what I saw. That was one aspect of my writing that I was not ready to compromise, interpreting the truth" (de Francheschi, 2014).

Perhaps we can also turn to a concept of archival retrieval. In 'Venus in Two Acts', theorist Saidiya Hartman directs us to the absences in the archives of slavery, and to the desire "to recuperate those lost to history" (Hartman, 2008). While I do not suggest a direct correspondence or analogy between Italian film archives and the archives of slavery, I do want to contend with the ways Italian colonialism has structured the archive (Greene, 2021). Indeed, African descent actors and film scholars are actively retrieving these histories and there are projects, such as educator and filmmaker Fred Kuwornu's *Blaxsploitalian:100 Years of Blackness in Italian Cinema* (2016) and Maria Colletti and de Francheschi's digital archive *Cinemaafrodiscendente,* which speak to these legacies in the present. Archival retrieval, as it pertains to returning to, working within and against the colonial archives, are appearing in various forms. For instance, moving briefly outside the

context of Italian film, we can look at author Maaza Mengiste's *Project3541: A Photographic Archive of the 1935-41 Italo-Ethiopian War*. This archive, developed from Mengiste's personal collection of photographs of Ethiopians that fought against the Italian invasion, is "a memory project and an act of reclamation that seeks to transcend the static nature of the archive" (Mengiste, 2019). This ongoing work offers the possibility of retrieving the histories of those misremembered or forgotten, and to move towards the creation of new archives.

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SÃO PAULO/SAN PAOLO: NOTES ON A TRANSNATIONAL APPROACH TO ITALIAN STUDIES

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Why Brazil? I have heard this question countless times. Some simply assume I must be Brazilian. Others suspect the existence of an Italian great-grandparent who moved to Brazil during what historian Mark Choate (2008:2) has called "the largest emigration from any country in recorded world history". Neither one, however, reflects the true reasons for why I decided to base my research on the construction of a racialised Italian identity in Brazil.

My entry into the academic world of Italian Studies was mediated by my previously cultivated interest in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies. That is, I arrived at Italy through Brazil. My approach to Italian Studies, then, starts not so much from what we can broadly define as its centre, that is Italy, but from the so-called periphery of what Arturo Escobar (2013:43) calls "the modern colonial world system".

Yet, more so than a geographical space, or an object to be known, Brazil becomes, very much in line with the framework proposed by the modernity/coloniality school, an epistemic perspective from which we can re-evaluate and re-imagine what counts as Italian and, consequently, as Italian Studies. According to Walter Mignolo (2013: 306) "the decolonial shift is a project of delinking". I propose that we need to switch how one produces knowledge about Italy. One should not take for granted Italy's status as a stable, uncontested signifier of meaning. Instead, 'Italy' should be understood as a dynamic, multivalent, and fluid 'sign' (Bassi & Riccò, 2021) whose meaning takes shape at the crossroads of transnational phenomena like migration, colonialism, and translation.

Turning to the Italian experience in Brazil allows us to see the different political and aesthetic valences of 'Italy' beyond the confines

of the nation-state. My current work traces how São Paulo, which has the largest concentration of people of Italian descent outside of Italy, became the locus of a 'whitening' project that conflated *italianità* with Europeanness and modernity. This 'New World Italian' identity, as I call it, stood in sharp contrast to the prevailing discourse in Europe, which cast Italians as racially ambiguous and economically backward. In my research São Paulo functions, from both a quantitative and qualitative standpoint, as a privileged transnational Italian space whence we can perceive the construction of Italian whiteness and the incorporation of Italians into a colonial project that anticipates and overlaps with Italian fascism and imperialism. And it was precisely my own beguiling encounters with the lingering contours of this New World Italian identity in contemporary São Paulo that led me to conceive of this project.

During my first trip to São Paulo in 2014, the cab driver who picked me up from the airport quickly detected my Italian accent. He immediately proceeded to tell me about his Italian family lineage and then asked about mine. After a couple of days in the city, I quickly understood that interactions such as the one with the cab driver would accompany me throughout my stay in the city. I realised that there existed in São Paulo a palpable pride in all things Italian, a quasi-obsession with declaring oneself part of some long lost Italian diasporic network. What is more, I noticed how also *paulistanos* who had no familial claim to that heritage touted it and proudly identified with it.

Demographic reasons might in part explain São Paulo's Italian fever. According to Brazilian sociologist Lucia Lippi Oliveira (2006), just shy of 1.5 million Italians arrived in Brazil between 1884 and 1939. Of all these immigrants, more than half went to the city of São Paulo. If we look at the numbers in São Paulo, Italians constituted the most populous group: 34% of the total arrivals in the city. When we consider how this data articulates with the modernisation of São Paulo — whose population nearly doubled between 1893 and 1900 — perhaps we can begin to understand that obsession with all things Italian that animated much of my everyday interactions in São Paulo.

Yet, without discounting this sociological and historical data, I came to realise that the racialised discourse that accompanied the arrival of Italians in Brazil also played an important role in defining the pride with which Brazilian people who have never set foot in Italy self-identified

as Italian. After all, Italians exist as unquestionably white in the Brazilian racial imaginary[1].

As historian George Reid Andrews (1991) noted, the massive importation of Italians that private societies and public institutions later promoted had two major functions: first, it served to flood the Brazilian free-market with cheap labour (and as a result crushed any negotiating power that recently emancipated slaves might have had) and second, it allowed for the repopulation of the country with allegedly superior Europeans, thereby whitening the Brazilian people.

While Brazil also welcomed large numbers of immigrants from Germany, these people posed a problem for the fledgling state's whitening project because of their tendency toward endogamy. Italians, on the other hand, commonly married outside of their group, a practice that won them a more favoured place in the country's racial and ethnic imaginary – turning conventional narratives about northern and southern Europeans on their heads.

Paradoxically, then, Italians' newfound honorific status as "white" and the attendant privileges thereof depended largely on their willingness to mix with and absorb the local populace. Italian bodies became the vectors through which Brazilian racial theorists and policy makers, who belonged to the landowning and slaveholding caste, carried out a white supremacist project that dramatically changed the racial make-up of Brazil. Their whiteness, as well as their italianness, not only dispersed but became constitutive of the new archetypical Brazilian, embodied by the cab driver I had met upon my arrival in São Paulo.

And yet, while still implying racial superiority, the Italian identity that takes shape in Brazil diverged drastically from the one endorsed by the liberal, fascist, and even democratic Italian national project. It is an Italian identity that emerges from a national reality that had to contend

[1] According to historian Barbara Weinstein, the term *imigrante* [immigrant] had a racial genealogy already embedded. It was "implicitly equated with 'white' people of European descent." (Weinstein, 2016:35). While the discourse of São Paulo's regional exceptionalism – the topic of Weinstein's book – excluded Afro-Brazilian and any African genealogy that might have had to do with the alleged greatness of the modernity and progress of São Paulo, it did encompass the immigrants that contributed to São Paulo's economic growth.

with the existence of multiple races and that idolised racial mixing at the expense of Black bodies.

Invoking one's Italian identity in São Paulo, just like the cab driver did, has little to do with the geo-political reality known as Italy. It instead refers to a possible valence of the sign 'Italy' one that, even in its most conservative and racist iteration, implies plurality, multiplicity, and diversity. However, in order to envision such an 'Italy', one has to be willing to embrace what Escobar (2013:43) termed "an epistemic change of perspective". A transnational approach to Italian Studies, then, offers one avenue toward decolonising the discipline insofar as it de-centers Italy altogether as the favoured locus of political enunciation and destabilises notions of 'Italian' ethnic, racial, and national identity.

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CHANGING CORPUS, CHANGING TOOLS, CHANGING AFFECT: FEMINIST AND DECOLONIAL REVISIONS TO THE ITALIAN LITERARY CANON

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Over the past few years, I have been working on a large-scale project on the Italian literary canon, with the aim of mapping its current configuration, understanding the rhetorical mechanisms through which it constructs and reproduces its hierarchies, its value system, its exclusions, and identifying the sites of power that enforce or challenge it (Bazzoni 2021a; 2021b). My initial motivation was sparked by the simple realisation of the near absence of women writers from literary histories, university courses, and textbooks. This absence extends all the way into the 20th century, where women were writing in mass, and reaches into our contemporary time, where the social system too often operates under a false assumption of gender neutrality. In addition to issues of representation, I was struck by how our discourses change depending on which authors we take into consideration and which voices have a say in the conversation. The trajectory of the modern and postmodern (male, white) subject, at the centre of our literary history, assumes very different connotations when we read writings by subjects historically in a subaltern position, who bring other genres, themes, languages and imaginaries.

While critical discourses on literature (and art in general) often exalt the independence of aesthetic judgement from social structures of power, Marxist, feminist and decolonial thought has trained us to see how artistic canons are the expression of cultural hegemony. Canons embody and reproduce the values of the social groups who maintain the power to speak and assert their worldview. As Lidia Curti, one of the first scholars in Italy to bring feminist and postcolonial approaches into the study of literature, explains with great clarity:

> L'articolazione della disciplina letteraria è forma di violenza alla pari della formazione nazionale cui è legata, e trova rispecchiamento nella pratica didattica che spesso è una pratica di esclusione. Tale discriminazione è volta in generale a scritture eccentriche e minoritarie, in connessione con differenze sessuali e etniche, geografiche e sociali. (Curti, 2015:18)

In order to document – and challenge – this form of symbolic violence, I developed a project entitled 'The Gender of Literature. Italian Women Writers and the Literary Canon', funded by the British Academy, which analysed the main sites of canon production, including school education, university teaching and research, literary festivals and prizes, authors' perspectives, readership and the contemporary book industry. For example, I conducted a systematic analysis of 24 high school textbooks, from 1992 to 2016, looking at women writers from the 19th century to today who are anthologised, present in paragraphs or boxes, or simply absent. Not surprisingly, the latter turned out to be the most common case; however, the extent of this lacuna is impressive – to give just some examples, Natalia Ginzburg was absent from 9 textbooks out of 24, Sibilla Aleramo was absent from 15, Anna Maria Ortese from 17, Matilde Serao from 20 – to mention only major names. I also took into consideration the positioning of women writers within the critical and historiographical discourse, where they are almost invariably confined in separate and minor sections or boxes. Even when they are present, moreover, they are often read through conservative lenses, which emphasise their minority status. We read for example of the "colorito e superficiale descrittivismo di Matilde Serao, venato di sentimentalismo da romanzo d'appendice e di ambizioni psicologiste" (Baldi et al., 2011:75), of the "tono dimesso" of Patrizia Cavalli, who "si ritaglia uno spazio minore, aspetto diaristico della confessione poetica"' (Baldi et al., 2016:213), or of the "tematiche tradizionali" and "storie intimistiche e private" of Elsa Morante's *La storia*, whose success is "pubblicitario" and "iperpopolare" (Magri, 2012:38).

The situation does not improve when we move to look at university education. An analysis of 189 syllabi of 19th-21st-century Italian literature in 25 Italian universities showed the massive over-

representation of male writers, who are the 91% of the authors taught. Seventy percent of courses do not include any women, and nine universities out of 25 do not include any women in any of their courses – meaning that it is perfectly possible for a student to graduate in Contemporary Italian Literature having studied exclusively male authors. With very few exceptions, migrant and second-generation writings in Italian are de facto absent from all these contexts. Overall, this research reveals a huge gap between the substantial work carried out within feminist and decolonial studies in Italy and internationally, and how much of this work is incorporated into didactic offering.

I would like to propose three main directions for the transformation of the literary canon, which I hope can serve as useful criteria when thinking of good practices in teaching, in developing courses, and in choosing or designing textbooks:

(1) Transforming the *corpus*: this is the first step, in order to interrupt the monologism and universalism of the male subject and multiply voices and perspectives;
(2) Transforming the *interpretative tools*: as the corpus changes, so does the way in which we read texts, reshuffle critical categories, and revise interpretations;
(3) Transforming the *affect* that sustains our reading, moving from the canon as a normative institution to the canon as a fabric of conversation, an open space for voices to be heard and appreciated in their specificity, with a commitment to unsettling hierarchies and keeping that space open.

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'LASTING LESSONS ABOUT DIFFERENCE': DIVERSITY, DECOLONISATION AND ITALIAN STUDIES

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What follows is written in the shadow of Sole Anatrone and Julia Heim's observation about the syllabus of CUNY's Italian literature survey course and the point that the list, "made up exclusively of straight White men" (2021:5) could have come from any North American university.

The undergraduate curriculum of Italian Studies (at least in the United Kingdom) is very different from what it was some thirty years ago. Whereas I completed my undergraduate degree without reading a single text by a woman author, it's hard to imagine a 2022 UK-based graduate in Italian having that same impoverished intellectual experience. Grounded in feminist thinking and practice of earlier decades, this much needed gender diversification of the syllabus certainly changed the look of the Italian Studies programme and mirrored more closely the predominantly female profile of our students. The progressive addition of female authors to the undergraduate syllabus raises potentially discomfiting questions about how thorough and lasting such shifts are. What has syllabus change actually accomplished? In what ways has the inclusion of texts by female authors (to stick with this example just for now) mattered? How many texts did it take to instantiate a critical and pedagogical tipping point and change the methodological biases of cultural study in Italian? Or has this inclusion paradoxically reinforced non-inclusive pedagogical practices which leave unchecked privileges of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, neuro-normativity? In sum, what does the visibility of one gender difference occlude, make possible, or leave unsayable?

For me, the current and very urgent debate around diversity and decolonisation in (but surely not only in) Italian Studies is haunted by

the historical experience of women's writing as a disciplinary intervention and by the waning of the feminist methodological energy which made it so necessary in the first place. Now that debate on the curriculum has extended to encompass other forms of cultural difference, marginalisation, and under-representation, how can those most actively engaged in this work ensure that curricular change in the present has the desired durative effect?

In the presentation I gave at the on-line 'Diversity, Decolonization and Italian Studies' seminar series in 2021, I made the following points which I still think are fundamental to moving forward the debate on diversity and decolonisation in order to transform critical and pedagogical practice in Modern Languages. These points are in part expressive of increased human mobility in recent decades and the consequent linguistic and cultural reconfigurations which they have effected. These reconfigurations have re-mapped the landscape of language study.

(1) Start from the positionality of the researcher/teacher/student to develop a critical understanding of, what we call now, Italian culture as the outcome of situated knowledges. Italy is afforded the value of case study only, not a secure object of knowledge. Positionality is not an abstraction. It is geo-politically emplaced as well as striated by multiple differences, optics, and histories. They all matter and give form to how knowledge is produced. Linguistic and cultural study needs to be the self-reflexive investigation of how what counts as knowledge comes into being, and how knowledges (in their unequal plurality) accrue value. The monolingual nation no longer has normative status. Language study is the exploration of proximate difference and cultural intimacy, not of a distant elsewhere and distanced alterity. Its work of critical self-reflection is akin to Audre Lorde's meditation on the self: "I have always known that I learn my most lasting lessons about difference by closely attending the ways in which differences inside me lie down together" (2017:116).

(2) Refuse the methodological nationalism of an 'area studies' model of Modern Languages and its project of naturalising language, culture and territory, a project which also encompasses colonised/

emigrant territories as extensions of a nation of origin. The historical ethno-nationalist bias of language study naturalises and reinforces, with different degrees of complicity to be sure, borders of identity and practices of belonging. Languages and cultures are porous and permeable. Replacing ethno-nationalist models of language and cultural study with transnational and transversal epistemologies encourages, to reprise my previous point, a more nuanced understanding of positionality and subjectivity, and their role in knowledge production.

(3) Temper the immediate desire to decolonise Italian culture and take the time to colonise it. What I mean here is that not enough work has yet been done to illuminate in capillary detail the extent to which Italian culture (and again Italy has value as case study only) as a diverse assemblage of practices, ideologies, and semiotic systems is bound by normative, exclusive kinetic energies. Stuart Hall's point about the temporality of undoing the imperious processes of colonisation is essential here: "My first sense of the world derived from my location as a colonized subject and much of my life can be understood as unlearning the norms in which I had been born and brought up. This long process of disidentification has shaped my life" (2017:3). The addition to a syllabus of one or more texts by writers of colour for example does not in itself 'unlearn the norms'.

So how do we engage this long process of decolonisation? There is ample evidence of individual colleagues, and sometimes departments, developing and pursuing a creative and politically coherent decolonising agenda. There is even more evidence, we have to concede, of resistance or indifference. For me, the place of women's writing in our discipline ghosts our current discussion (and here 'our' is used as a minoritising possessive) if no female-authored text appears on a literature survey at a major university. In light of this, the key to a longer-lasting transformation of the discipline is not innovation at the level of individual courses (albeit welcome in itself), but rather a complete re-conceptualisation and re-invention of degree programmes in languages and cultures.

Not least we need to ask fundamental questions about which languages and cultures matter enough to be taught in order to determine properly, and then fulfil, the 'long process' of decolonising. We need to ask (however counterintuitive or unpalatable, we may find this thought) if the 'decolonisation' of Italian at the level of curriculum is, from a more wide-ranging and radical perspective, a ruse to maintain, through sleight of hand, the un-decolonised hegemony of Eurocentric thinking and practice in our anglophone institutions. I wonder too if these are questions which current members of the profession at all career levels, too invested in the status quo, are unable to answer effectively as we are necessarily unequal to the methodological revolution required. These questions can perhaps as yet only be mooted on behalf of teachers and students of languages and cultures yet to come.

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ARTICLES / SAGGI

SILENCE AND RECKONING – AFRICAN-ITALIANS IN POPULAR CULTURE

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Sommario
Questo articolo sostiene che la decolonizzazione degli studi di italianistica può avvenire attraverso l'identificazione e la critica di modi scontati di pensare al razzismo, al colonialismo e all'italianità. L'articolo discute inoltre il potere razziale moderno-coloniale nell'immaginario quotidiano e popolare e alcuni dei modi in cui viene contestato. L'articolo esamina le rappresentazioni dominanti dell'italianità e della negritudine e le auto-rappresentazioni degli italiani afrodiscendenti, ad esempio nella serie Netflix Zero. L'autore incoraggia gli studiosi d'italianistica a concentrarsi sulla relazionalità del luogo e sulla complessità di ciò che significa essere italiani. Il presente articolo afferma che la decolonizzazione comporta la necessità di fare i conti con il passato del paese e di interrogare le relazioni di potere.

Keywords: Everyday practices, representation, colonialism, immigration, Black Italians, belonging, White resentment, antiblack racism, racism, racial reckoning, decolonisation, White supremacy

> *For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men*.
>
> James Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook"

FRUTTAIDS

'Do you know what Gabri's mother says if someone tries to eat a piece of fruit without washing it first?

'Be careful! Don't you know that the negri who picked it all have AIDS?' – Kossi Komla-Ebri, *EmbarRaceMents*

We, and by we *I mean [...] the human species, are all today in the colonial matrix of power. There is no outside of it, and there is no privileged location (ethical or sexual) from which to confront coloniality. For this reason, border dwelling, thinking, doing is the decolonial direction (we are) taking.*

– Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality*

In May 2021, PBS NewsHour ran a story about African migrants living in 'slave-like' conditions in Puglia, Southern Italy, a comparison that has become a common trope for African-origin farmworkers who cross the Mediterranean Sea and pick fruit and vegetables for Italian and Europe-wide kitchens. In this story, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Ivorian and Senegalese men and women describe their lived experiences in Italy before and during the pandemic, including being shut out of work, receiving paltry wages, living in inhuman conditions and being socially invisible. They toil in Italian farms and reside in primitive camps, out of sight and mind for most Italians (Raney, 2021). The way these African-origin farmworkers are rendered unseeable and unthinkable in the public mind signals modern-colonial racial taxonomies that are at once taken-for-granted, silenced, and persistent Black spaces (Merrill, 2018). In the Italian public imaginary, like most European public imaginaries, anti-Black colonial ideas that associate foreignness and inferiority with Africans have not been decolonised. There is instead a pervasive, habitual way of defining Italianness and the right to place, belonging and living with dignity – inherited from the European Enlightenment and the practices of slavery and imperialism it involved – as the antithesis of Blackness and life in Africa. With a renewed spirit of protest against racialised power, energised in part by a local sense of resonance with the public murder of George Floyd in the United States of America in May 2020, people of African descent are calling for a reckoning with Italy's racialised past and present. Several generations of people of African descent are challenging dominant images, ideas

and practices that dehumanise and render immigrants, refugees and African Italians invisible, yet denied and silenced (Carter, 2010). These anti-racist and human rights struggles involve efforts to decolonise the Italian mind by challenging dominant representations of Blackness and Italianness that inform public knowledge and encouraging attention to the Black lives currently lived in the shadows.

The women and men picking fruit and vegetables for Italian markets are integral participants in Italian society. They have formed a group called "Ghetto Out" in order to promote their right to live in dignity and the value of their contributions. Ghetto Out has created a canned tomato product called "R'accolto", a word that plays on the idea of 'accoglienza', which means welcome and hospitality and is used to describe the centres (Centro di accoglienza) in multiple Italian cities that receive migrants. 'R'accolto' also means harvest, an appeal to fair trade and labour practices. The new product features a Black hand holding up a tomato, a key ingredient in Italian cuisine and top export product, above the phrase "Land of Freedom". A principal purpose of the campaign is to counter dominant images and narratives of who farmworkers really are and oppose distorting stereotypes that circulate in mainstream media and daily life. Ghetto Out uses symbolic representation to compel Italy to confront its racism and injustice in the fields (Raney, 2021).

The fruit and vegetable pickers in Puglia are but one embodied example of a broad and profound existential crisis Italy has been undergoing since the Cold War ended, when the geopolitical axis shifted from West-East back to a North-South of imperial time and space (Silverstein, 2018). As Italy has transformed from a relatively poor country of out-migration, into a wealthy site of in-migration and growing diversity, its idea of what it means to be Italian is called into question. Can the country continue to proclaim itself as a place of relatively innocent and white, or white-adjacent, 'brava gente' (good people), who have often been treated like childlike siblings by much of the rest of Europe? If so, who and what part of this old Italian narrative are being erased and silenced?

There are now approximately one million African-Italians, born and/or raised in Italy, without Italian citizenship. Along with, or parallel to, farmworkers and others, these so-called 'seconda generazione' are building a vanguard of protest against their political and social

invisibility in Italy, classified as permanent outsiders and prohibited by law from even applying for Italian citizenship until they reach the age of 18 (Hawthorne, 2022). In order to truly transform the habitual racial taxonomies at the foundation of these institutionalised practices, they are urging the country to reckon with its colonial past and, crucially, also its afterlife. With counterparts throughout Europe, the USA and the Caribbean, these African-Italians call for a movement against anti-humanist government policies and for an end to the descent into violence and Fascism they have been experiencing and witnessing for years. How can we talk about decolonising Italian studies without working to advance insight into current internal racialising colonialism and without drawing the full breadth and complexity of Italianness into our teaching and scholarship? What does it really mean for us to decolonise Italian studies?

Decolonising Italian studies: Re-existing

The current movement to decolonise our theories and methods grows out of postcolonial and subaltern studies' questioning and critiquing the very bases of our taken-for-granted knowledge about personhood and society, progress and civilization, democracy and Fascism. This encompasses rigorous critique of modern colonial and racial hierarchies based on systems of social classification that enable claims to Euro-American and white supremacy. We must undertake a careful rethinking and remaking of notions of national identity, race, culture, knowledge and power in our approaches to the study of Italian culture and society, past and present. Decolonising suggests focus on the relationality of place in *Italy's colonial past and present* and re-evaluating the underlying Eurocentric structure that filters out many intertwined lived experiences and perspectives. As Walter Mignolo suggests in the epigraph quoted above, decolonising means delinking from the matrix of power that we are taught to operate within as part of our common sense. It means thinking relationally, not merely by including or incorporating practices and concepts from the "South of the world", but also by becoming aware of the integral relationships and interdependencies amongst all living beings and territories. As Mignolo argues, to decolonise is to unsettle singular authoritativeness, making connections and correlations across places and borders. It means

struggling against the modern colonial order, towards an otherwise' that is pluriversal and interversal instead of universal, disturbing the totality from which Eurocentric linear universals are most often perceived (Mignolo, 2018:3). Decolonising, which is akin to reckoning and involves a kind of *insurgent thought action*, does not mean to resist Western hegemonies but rather to 're-exist' and to redesign and redefine life in conditions of dignity. We may decolonise Italian studies by delinking ourselves from the colonial matrix of power, "constructing paths and praxis toward an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing, and living" (4). What habits of mind and practice have modernity and coloniality embedded in all of us? Identifying these habits, we can learn how coloniality works "to negate, disavow, and deny knowledges, subjectivities, world senses, and life visions" (4). We cannot do this through abstractions alone. Decolonising requires asking about the power relations in who is doing what, where, when, why and how (Pred, 1995). Understanding the underlying epistemological structure of modern, colonial Western civilization and Eurocentrism engenders decoloniality. And this makes it possible for a genuine racial reckoning to take place.

Visual and discursive representations are ubiquitous, expressing and teaching social values and perceptions in social and print media, film and television. As Stuart Hall suggested, representations signal taken-for-granted, yet shared cultural meanings and practices; they signal our collective being (Hall, 2013). Representations teach us who we are and who we are not, who is socially valued and who is not, who is seen and treated as a legitimate member of the collective and who is not. As Hall wrote in his introduction to the second edition of *Representations*,

> In part, we give things meaning by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them.
>
> (Hall, Evans & Nixon, 2013:xix)

Building on Antonio Gramsci, Hall argued for the complexification of social theories and problems where Marx's theoretical work was thinnest or the most incomplete, by focusing on specific historical

conjunctures or the political cultural dimensions of social formations. Hegemony is a useful concept in this sort of approach that seeks to make sense of how racial hierarchies are produced and reproduced in a "war of position" in which there's a constant struggle to control the whole structure of society by winning popular consent (Hall, 1996). Hegemony is exercised not only in the domains of the economic and administrative (including military fields) but crucially also in the domains of what Gramsci called "common sense" practice, everyday consciousness or popular thought. Cultural beliefs and knowledge, our common sense, is formed in the grounded terrains of everyday practices and representations. As Italian studies are decolonised for the purpose of re-existing, a crucial question at this historical conjuncture is whether Blackness is represented in Italian society.

Common sense anti-Black representations

When I first began doing ethnographic research in Italy in the early 1990s, the country was grappling with its new status as a place of immigration and there were daily newspaper reports filled with images of what was described as a tsunami of immigrants, especially from Africa. Two dominant gendered images of immigrants took hold, that of the African "Vu Cumpra" and the "Prostitute".

Itinerant street peddlers, often associated with Senegalese and North African men, came to be named 'Vu Cumpra', a denigrating term mocking the trader's limited command of the Italian language. These merchants would set up blankets as makeshift stalls on urban streets and seaside towns, selling a variety of items made in Italy or parts of Africa. Some of these traders were artisans, who sold, for example, wood carvings and masks. Others were market traders in their countries of origin, and yet others engaged in the trade when and if they were out of contracted work in Italian factories or construction sites. Many sought to establish stalls in the local open-air markets, but the licences were hard to come by and required a great deal of local knowledge and inclusion in social networks. So, they would sell their wares along avenues and streets, picking them up rapidly if a carabinieri approached. If the carabinieri caught them, their goods would be seized and they might be jailed and or given expulsion orders (Carter, 1996;

Di Maio, 2005). Men of African origin in Italy came to be popularly associated with the appellation 'Vu Cumpra'.

The other prevalent that image that circulated in the media in the 1990s was of African women as prostitutes and the demand for their services. This representation of African women as sexually loose and/or sex traders became so pervasive that I did not meet a woman of African descent in the 1990s who had not been approached and/or touched while in Italian public places (Merrill, 2004; Ifekwunigwe, 2006). It was noteworthy that many African women who migrated to Italy in the late 1980s and early 1990s and who, like their male counterparts, were often searching for better ways to make a living and take care of their families. Preconceived colonial images connecting Black women with exoticism and sexuality informed the cultural perspectives with which Italians greeted them. A racially hierarchical system of classification informed by the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, travel books, paintings, racial science, Italian and other European colonialisms, colonial films and propaganda had paved the ground for these popular perceptions. This was the case, in spite of the fact that relatively few people of African descent had lived on Italian territory until that time.

Ethnocentric, colonial knowledge of Africa and Africans had circulated to remote European villages. To explain this phenomenon even in the 1950s, James Baldwin wrote about his experiences as the single Black person living in a small Swiss village, the first Black person the villagers had ever seen. Baldwin described the villagers' astonishment upon laying eyes on him, even after people knew his name; he had had friendly conversations with the bistro owner's wife and befriended their son. They could not accept that he was American, in spite of his self-description, believing that he had to be African. It troubled and perplexed Baldwin that he was still seen as a stranger, and he surmised that Europeans did not have the intimate, first-hand relationships with Africans that Americans did, and they therefore viewed Blackness as an abstraction associated with Africa, a place in need of saving by Europeans as part of their 'civilising mission', a sort of absent presence.

Baldwin tried to have compassion for the people who made assumptions and acted in ways they did not seem to understand, having inherited a history that controlled them, a history in which they were taught they were the conquerors and he was the conquered, they had

authority and he did not. These European villagers were unable, Baldwin reasoned, to see and like him as a fellow human being, one of the collective, for

> No one, after all, can be liked whose human weight and complexity cannot be, or has not been, admitted. My smile was simply another unheard-of phenomenon which allowed them to see my teeth – they did not, really, see my smile, and I began to think that, should I take to snarling, no one would notice any difference.
>
> (Baldwin, 2012:165-166)

These relatively isolated Swiss villagers had inherited ('however unconsciously') an understanding of the 'Negro' as not belonging to European society. And because Baldwin was seen as of another place and people, he was in a sense *not really even there to them* (see Merrill, 2018). Baldwin found that, in time, some of the Swiss villagers began to see him as less of a stranger and more of a human being, to wonder more about who he was than about the texture of his hair. They never, however, entirely let go of their ideas that he was *out of place* and a threat to their social order.

Baldwin also reflected on his own responses to the villagers and the impact this was all having on him, the pain it was causing him. He described a feeling of being controlled by the very culture that erased him as a social actor and agent, a human being in European society. He had long felt controlled by American culture, but these Swiss villagers had never set foot in America or even much of the rest of Europe, so why did he have the feeling of also being controlled by their culture? Europe had given birth to America as we know it, and in some ways the villagers had inherited a history they did not seem to question or understand. The villagers were not responsible for this history, wrote Baldwin, and yet they seemed to take for granted their place within and his nonexistence there. He described how they communicated their sense of ownership of place, of belonging there, and his out-of-placeness where he did not have historical claims. He wrote,

> […] They move with an authority which I shall never have; and they regard me, quite rightly, not only as a

> stranger in their village but as a suspect latecomer, bearing no credentials, to everything they have – however unconsciously – inherited. For this village, even were it incomparably more remote and incredibly more primitive, is the West, the West onto which I have been so strangely grafted. (Baldwin, 2012:168-169)

From his own point of view, Baldwin was not a stranger in Europe. Nevertheless, the villagers perceived him at best with curiosity or suspicion and at worst with pity or the denial of his very being. Baldwin wrestled with what this all meant, how it affected him, and how it impacted other people like him (Baldwin, 2012). The very existence of the Black subject as part of modernity was suspect. Black subjects could enter history only as representations of a kind of a kind of anti, anachronistic time and space, having no forward movement in the development of the West.

At roughly the same time, Frantz Fanon wrote *Black Skins, White Masks*, addressing in his chapter five the experience of "the white gaze". Fanon had acquired a command of French language, literature and history as his own while growing up in French colonial territory, and he was astonished when, after arriving in France, he was regarded not as a fellow Frenchman but rather as an object of curiosity, outside of European history and culture. The same racial classifications were still circulating in the 1990s when Ken Bugul published *The Abandoned Baobab*. Bugul described in semi-autobiographical terms how in Senegal she had devoured French language, culture and history and dreamed of living and studying in Europe with her "ancestors, the Gauls". But when she arrived in Belgium on a scholarship, she was greeted as a servant or an exotic-erotic stranger. Feeling fixed by popular perceptions, she gradually and tragically succumbed to playing the role to which she was assigned (Bugul, 1991). Bugul wrote this story just when the presence of Africans and people from other areas colonised by European countries was wielding a great deal of attention, when immigration took centre place in European political discourse and policy.

Let us fast-forward a quarter of a decade to 2015, when *Adwa*, by Somalitalian writer Igiabo Scego, was published. *Adwa* portrays the parallel struggles of three generations of Somalis in their intertwined

relationships with Italy, from the period of colonialism and Fascism to the present. The main characters are traumatised by the deep structures of Italian colonialism and attendant racism in ways that the perpetrators and apparent beneficiaries seem blind and deaf to. Most of the female and male characters know the Italian language and are influenced by Italian culture, yet they are regarded, differently inflected by gender, by Italians as members of an inferior race to be dominated. Adwa, the main character, is envisioned as 'naturally' available for sexual exploitation, much like Bugul's character in *The Abandoned Baobab* and resonant with the prostitute trope for African or African descent women that began circulating in Italy in the 1990s. This trope has a far longer history, having become iconic in early 19th century Europe, with the spectacular display of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman from South Africa, in London and Paris. Baartman represents the European exoticisation and commodification of African women in a type of representation widely reproduced in 20th century European colonial imaginaries.

While seeking to explain how he was perceived by Swiss villagers in the mid 20th century, Baldwin looked to cultural histories inherited by the participants, ideas that had nourished the perceptions and attitudes that the villagers never questioned or doubted. Where had they learned to perceive themselves as having intrinsic authority in the world and to consider him as the kind of outsider who was not really even human enough to engage with, to know? How had they learned to erase his presence and render him invisible? Unlike Baldwin, who was a writer and had read most of the books in the local public library when he was just a teenager, the Swiss villagers were generally not highly literate people, and the village did not have a movie house, theatre, bank or library and had few radios. Nevertheless, as he described, they moved with an authority that suggested they knew they could go anywhere in the world and be treated with respect and dignity.

As in other parts of Switzerland, these villagers had a custom of buying African natives in order to convert them to Christianity. They could insert money into a box decorated with a Black figurine at the church. During Carnival, the faces of two children were blackened; they wore horsehair wigs and solicited money for the missionaries in Africa. In one of the years of Baldwin's stay, they had raised enough money from the box and the blackened children to 'buy' six or eight African

natives in order to 'save their souls'. This custom provided Baldwin with a bit of insight into why the remote villagers seemed hold their bodies as if they were conquerors and perceive Baldwin with astonishment as *a stranger*. They also took for granted that they, not he, had inherited from Dante and Da Vinci, Shakespeare and Rembrandt, while Baldwin's ancestors had merely awaited European arrival.

Baldwin grappled with how to deal with his feelings of rage from his social historical invisibility and with the fact that in the USA, where Black and white had been in tension and intimacy for centuries, white subjects who know Black subjects reverted to representations of Blackness as evil, as symbolic of darkness and hell. Such imaginaries, inherited from slavery in the Americas, Jim Crow and apartheid, and the European colonialisation of "the heart of darkness" in Africa, must have informed residents in the Swiss village who already 'knew' Baldwin and their own role as conquerors in relation to him.

Italian identity in the 21st century

Today, many wrestle with their current reality as a country where Italian identity is malleable and shape shifting. Populist party leaders nourish *white resentment,* attempting to normalise the notion that the Black subject is unacceptable, for as a permanent 'community' of citizens they threaten the 'Italian way of life'. There is an ongoing struggle over who can claim belonging in Italy. Contestations over belonging are waged on many fronts, and they are often expressed in popular representations that circulate in the media, including fashion magazines, television series and social media posts.

In its 7 February issue, *Vogue Italia* featured a Senegalese-Italian model, Maty Fall Diba, on its cover[1]. The magazine published two cover photos in the same issue, the other featuring a white model. I happened to be in Reggio Emilia at this time, and when I asked the vendor at a local stall for the magazine, he handed me the one with the white woman on the cover. I asked for the other one, and he commented

[1] *Vogue Italia* is actually notorious for its racist representations and advancement of colonial tropes. In 2018 for example, blonde, blue-eyed fashion model Gigi Hadid wore blackface on a cover. Italian fashion houses have also regularly adopted denigrating colonialist Black caricatures, for instance Gucci's blackface jumper, Prada's golliwog trinket and Dolce and Gabbana's pizza advert. Behind the scenes, there are no Black designers or merchandisers (Elan 2020).

that the issue I wanted signalled a 'tempesta' or storm, which I interpreted to mean that there was a lot of criticism of the cover I wanted. On the cover photo, Fall Diba wears a white Valentino dress, her hair is in Bantu style braided knots, and she looks directly at the consumer with a calm yet searching expression. She holds a sign across her chest at a diagonal angle that reads, "ITALIA". Next to her in English are the words "Italian Beauty".

For the first time in *Vogue Italia*'s history, the issue includes an insertion in English that represents a translation of articles for the stated purpose of reaching a wider international readership likely unfamiliar with Italian. The entire issue is dedicated to who and what Italy is today. Many of the photos were taken in Venice, for the issue is dedicated to this iconic Italian city where in 2019 flooding set off by rising temperatures damaged houses and forms of livelihood. In one photograph, a Black woman sits on a chair in a flooded Piazza San Marco, wearing rubber boots, her legs crossed and one calf in what appears to be six inches of water. The message seems to be not only that the city needs help, but that Blackness is Italianness.

The cover image of Fall Diba alone signals that the Italian fashion industry is at least in this instance engaging in a kind of initial counterhegemonic move to displace the common sense classification of Black Italians as strangers. They are also trying to appeal to a broad, transnational audience. And I think it important to point out that while the fashion industry is very much fair game for feminist and antiracist criticism, this issue of *Vogue Italia* has to have sent an affirming message to African-Italians, that they are accepted as part of Italian society. There are in fact few favourable representations of African descent people in popular media, as Fred Kuwornu suggests in his compelling documentary, *Blaxploitalian: 100 Years of Blackness in Italian Cinema*. The Black Italians in the film convey their frustration at being cast only in roles based on stereotypes of Africans and African refugees or immigrants, as for instance drug peddlers, people with special exotic powers, prostitutes and desperate poor. Second-generation Italian Africans need images of people like themselves as beautiful and in diverse forms of work and influence in order to develop a sense of their life's possibilities. This is especially relevant in a social and political environment where anti-immigrant and anti-Black words and images circulate continually.

The *Vogue Italia* issue also included editorials and photos of a variety of models of colour, rendering the issue more complex. In his "Letter from the Editor", titled "You don't speak Italian?", Emanuelle Farneti writes of the desire to confront racism and the rise of nationalist populism and to do so via an image of a beautiful woman ('la bellezza') who is Black *and* Italian. In this opening piece, Farneti suggests that Italian identity is transnational, stretching beyond Italian national frontiers. He describes 18-year-old Fall Diba as a young woman who comes from afar, holds in her arms the word "Italy" and represents a new generation of people for whom passports and borders are not limiting. The cover and internal photos include other stunning images of Fall Diba and Italians of diverse descent, depicting a broad and inclusive aesthetic. The images may send a message to young Italians of colour – in a country where appearance and 'la bellezza' are at a premium – that they are beautiful and esteemed, although their lived experiences do not back up these claims.

At the end of the *Vogue* issue is an interview with Fall Diba by Giovanni Montanaro, titled in the English language insert "One of Us: Maty Fall by Paolo Roversi", the latter being the photographer. Fall Diba paints a picture of her early life on the outskirts of Dakar, her young imagination captured by the Atlantic Ocean because her father lived in Italy[2]. As a child, she would model the clothing her mother made and sold. When eight years old, she joined her father in Chiampo, a town in the northeastern province of Vicenza. Fall Diba addresses the problem of citizenship in Italy with a hyphenated description of her identity as feeling part of both Italy and Senegal. She received Italian citizenship when she reached the age of 18. But this is not an easy process for most people.

When the application for citizenship process begins, there is usually a great deal of uncertainty, partly because the decisions, which can be stretched out for years, can be rendered at the discretion of local bureaucrats. This situation can create feelings of insecurity and alienation among young Italians with parents of non-Italian descent who identify as culturally Italian yet live with the absence of recognition by the Italian government and the rights and privileges accorded to people with citizenship. African-Italians are commonly

[2] This is reminiscent of the novel *The Belly of the Atlantic* by Fatou Diome, Serpents Tail (2008). I recommend you read it.

asked to explain why they are in Italy and, while in public places such as streets, piazza and especially on public transportation, asked for documents by officials. This absence of legitimacy accorded by the Italian state compels them to live in conditions of humiliation and shame. These youths are at high risk for depression, low self-esteem and other health problems that can make it even more difficult to face the challenges in daily life. The lack of citizenship underscores the relative weak positionality of the Black subject in Italy who is held in abeyance and therefore has difficulty claiming the right to belonging.

As part of the *Vogue Italia* issue, Jamaican-born journalist Jordan Anderson wrote an essay, "The Elephant in the Room" (Vogue Italia, 2020). In the English version, his article is titled "Slavery? No. But Racism? Yes". The elephant to which Anderson, who lives in Italy, refers is racism. Anderson cites growing nationalist populism in Italy and sometimes-fatal acts of aggression towards immigrants. On the same day the special issue of *Vogue* was published, a 29-year-old man of Eritrean descent was quietly seated and listening to music on a bus in Milan when two women pointed a gun at him and verbally attacked him with racist slurs. During the conflict, the bus driver stopped to let all passengers off, and the two women ran into the woods. Anderson expresses concern about this sort of violence in the current political climate, when public opinion polls indicate widespread belief that racist acts are justifiable or have no opinion about it. Anderson also argues that racism in Italy does not appear out of nowhere and that today's right-wing populism simply opened a 'Pandora's box' of racism germinating in Italy for centuries, about which there is silence. When one speaks about racism in Italy with 'white Italians' ('italiani bianchi'), writes Anderson, they usually meet with defensive pride in the fact that Italians do not have a history of slavery. Anderson responds, "What most of them don't understand is that this doesn't mean the absence of racism".

In 2020, persons of colour in Italy who are culturally and perhaps also legally Italian, regularly encounter people who assume and even insist they are foreigners, or strangers. Their cries of racism are denied and belittled by Italians. Soccer star Mario Balotelli has talked about the torture of hearing monkey chants while playing the game. Anderson urges Italians to face their history of colonialism and Fascism and how these inform current everyday expressions of racism:

> Racism persists as a toxic level of ignorance that generates great waves of both unintentional and intentional microaggressions against people of color. Regardless, racism isn't something that can be judged on the basis of its impacts or motives. It's not like a temperature that one can measure and assess based on how high it is. Any amount of racism, at any level – whether it be shackling bodies or throwing bananas at politicians – causes trauma.
> (Anderson, 2020)

He ends his article by stating that Italians must acknowledge that "the face of an Italian is not just the face of a white man, but has the faces of Africa, Asia and the Americas blended into it".

Italy's racial reckoning? *Nero a Metà* and *Zero*

When Black Italians saw the video of Floyd being murdered by an American police officer, it resonated with their experiences, and they organised demonstrations against system racism in Italy, throughout the country. In Torino's Piazza Castello, thousands of people sat in eight minutes of silence, the amount of time (they believed) it took for a police officer to choke Floyd to death while holding a knee on his neck. They shouted while holding up fists, "No Justice, No Peace" and held signs proclaiming, "Black Lives Matter", "No Freedom till we're Equal" and, notably, "Silence is Violence". In interviews with the local press, two African-Italian women and a man spoke about being emotionally moved upon observing so many people joining their protest against racism, something they had never seen before. They said they needed this support to be sustained in order for Italian society to confront and reckon with the racism they endure, alone (*Il Fatto Quotidano*, 6 giugno). A young woman whose parents are from Somalia disclosed that for the first time in her life, she felt as if Torino were *her city, her home*. Growing up as a 'Black girl', she always felt alone and, like many others, silenced. The solidarity demonstrated that day gave some African-Italians hope that in Italy, and throughout the world, anti-Black racism was finally understood as a social problem. What strikes me about their comments is that the young people spoke candidly,

without fear of being dismissed or punished, because they felt affirmed and supported by other Italians. Their perspectives derive from their lived experiences in Italy, which are essential for us to consider in any rethinking and decolonising of Italian studies.

In her introduction to a compelling book, *EmbarRaceMents*, by Togolese-Italian physician and writer Kossi Komla-Ebri[3], Graziela Parati describes as "a troubling and ever increasing racism in Italy". In the book's preface, former Italian Minister of Integration and member of the European Parliament Cecile Kyenge, who is Congolese-Italian, writes that "Every person of colour living in Italy' has their 'own rich repertoire of embar-*race*-ments'" which, like offensive faux pas, create uneasiness. They express "judgments and prejudices" that "wound their victims, because they occur daily and because they illustrate a common mentality that is packed with stereotypes" (Komla-Ebri, 2019:15).

Cumulatively, experiencing stereotypes in action, along with the dearth of positive images of Blackness in Italy, can have discouraging, even debilitating impacts on young Italians. It can be quite gruelling, for example, to deal with the experience of what Dienke Hondius (2009) in describing the Netherlands called "the repetition of surprise", a sense of astonishment when recognised (white) Italian subjects meet African-origin Italian subjects in Italian spaces. Such repetitive surprise is part of a monolithic worldview that 'innocently' reproduces anti-Blackness, energising deeply rooted modern, colonial beliefs about personhood, rights and belonging. This is facilitated by pervasive demeaning popular cultural, in this case media, misrepresentations that suggest a spectral presence, in which the actual human subjects are absent. They are there, in Italy, but not really seen or heard (Merrill, 2018; Carter, 2010).

Two recent television series offer seem to offer somewhat alternative viewpoints, the RaiUno/Netflix series *Nero a Metà* and the Netflix series *Zero*. Both explore issues of anti-Blackness and belonging in Italian society. *Nero a Metà*, created by Giampaolo Simi, is a rather conventional Italian crime drama set in Rome, co-starring Claudio Amendola and Miguel Gabbo Diaz. Diaz is an Italian actor of Dominican origin. The Netflix series *Zero*, which I would describe as Afrofuturist, is written by African-Italian novelist Antonio Dikele

[3] Translated into English by Marie Orton.

Distefano. Set in Milan, *Zero* is the first Italian series with a majority Black cast. How do these two series represent the complex, lived experiences of Black Italians as members of Italian society? And do they make any movement in advancing a racial reckoning?

The series *Nero a Metà* is translated for English-speaking audiences as *Carlo and Malik*, but its translation from Italian is 'Half Black'. Employing the term 'Black', which seems also to be emerging in Italy as a self-description, suggests an Italian fascination with Blackness expressed in films, which dates back to the Italian colonial period of the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. The direct title, whitewashed in the English translation, indicates that Blackness is a central feature of the storyline, but not necessarily from a Black Italian point of view. Our introduction to one of the two main characters, Malik Soprani, played by Diaz, is through a stereotype that has been circulating in Italy since at least the 19th century in Cesare Lombroso's depictions of Blackness as prone to pathological behaviour, including crime. We see Malik walking rapidly and with intensity on a graffiti-flanked urban street, wearing a black hoodie and jeans, which are not considered stylish in Italy and suggest he might be unemployed and/or a drug dealer. But there is something about Malik that indicates he is not what he appears to be, even when we see him interacting with other Black and brown men who appear idle and/or engaged in illegal drug transactions. While driving to his office, the other main character, police inspector Carlo Guerrieri (played by the well-known Italian actor Amendola), clearly perceives Malik as a drug dealer and runs to arrest him, but he initially gets away. While having a sketch of Malik made, Carlo comments that he cannot discern differences between 'neri', or Blacks, yet the detail of the likeness belies his claim. We next see Malik in an upscale, well-appointed apartment, his jeans and hoodie on the floor, as he opens a drawer full of tailored shirts that indicate an Italian insider status. When Malik and Carlo meet, Carlo is holding a pistol in his hand, and he tackles Malik to the ground and hits him in the face with the gun. Malik reveals that he, too, is a police inspector, Malik Soprani, and Carlo appears dumfounded. The case involves a murder, and the two inspectors are told they will work together to solve it. Carlo is unhappy about working with Malik, yet one of his three teammates, a young man, knows Malik as the top student in his police academy, and greets him warmly. Thus, we see here that while the middle-aged

Carlo has adopted stereotypical ideas about who can and cannot be an Italian inspector, a younger generation may be more accepting of the demographic and cultural transformations Italy has undergone over the past several decades.

The issue of belonging in Italian society is prominent in *Nero a Metà*, and the racist slights African-Italians endure are written into the series. After the younger police officer who knew Malik at the police academy calls Carlo out on his racism, Carlo accepts Malik so much that at one point he states that Malik is as Italian as, if not *more Italian than, he is*. Also notable is how Malik is represented as attractive and eligible to recognised Italian women, but in the end some of the same old colonial tropes persist. Carlo's daughter, Alba, and Malik are drawn to each other upon first sight. Alba (Rosa Diletta Rossi) leaves her white Italian lawyer boyfriend when she is unable to resist the attraction to Malik. But Malik is not really developed as a genuine Italian insider in this series, and he demonstrates his essential status as outsider when he does some spying on Carlo.

Malik's back story is built on the iconography of African refugees dying in the Mediterranean Sea as they try to reach the Italian shore, images that have come to dominate the popular media over the past 15 or so years. The writers resort to stereotypes that seem to fit the popular anti-immigrant appetite, instead of developing Malik as a substantial character with human depth. They represent Malik with a kind of contemporary origin myth of African subjects in Italy that echoes Baldwin's description of the Black subject in a Swiss village in the early 1950s, perceived in a fixed position as a permanent stranger who is present yet lacks human qualities. The Malik character, who appears to be in his 30s, was adopted by a white Italian woman, a white saviour mother figure who works with immigrants and refugees. Malik seems angry and to be without a full range of emotions, and the audience learns that this might be because of a past trauma that he has buried and forgotten. His memories come back to him, and it is revealed that watched his mother sacrifice her life for him and disappear forever into the sea. In the end, the series reproduces tropes of desperate, needy, traumatised and damaged Africans who need to be saved and who cannot be trusted as part of the Italian family.

The Netflix series *Zero* presents a considerable contrast to *Nero a Metà*. *Zero* begins to paint an interior of the Black subject, still bounded

by the 'barrio' walls. Set in a predominantly immigrant or Black Italian neighbourhood in Milan, the series breaks more new ground than *Nero a Metà*. Almost all the lead characters and cast are young Black Italians, educated in Italian schools. They speak in Italian, and Italian culture is their principal reference point. However, like the agricultural workers picking tomatoes in Puglia, and as the series title suggests, they are invisible in Italian society.

In his exploration of African diaspora, Donald Carter (2010:13) describes invisibility as a form of social erasure, "A way of making the seen disappear in plain sight". Writer Distefano, who is Italian of Angolan heritage, adopts a similar understanding in his depiction of the lived experiences of Black youth who have trouble communicating across cultures with their own parents yet are, as the main character states in an opening scene, 'invisible' in that nobody notices them or their neighbourhoods. The main character, Omar (Giuseppe Dave Seko), realises that he has the superpower to become, quite literally, invisible.

Omar, who has a passion for drawing Japanese Manga-style comic books with Black protagonists and dreams of becoming a cartoonist, also lost his mother and lives with his father and sister in an apartment that a developer wants to buy in order to build a shopping complex. In a telling scene, Omar is invited to dinner by a white Italian woman he met while delivering pizza to the home of a wealthy family. He expects an intimate dinner, but when the door opens, he finds instead a party packed with hundreds of recognised Italian teenagers, and upon seeing him one young man screams, "The Coke is here!" As Omar makes his way through the crowd, he is thinking, "Omar, the pusher, the street vendor, the thief, the waiter who serves your drinks. What's worse, to be mistaken for someone you're not, or not to be seen at all?" When Omar realises his extraordinary power of invisibility can enable him to take actions that address social justice for his friends and family, he adopts the name and role of a superhero, 'Zero', at once accepting and embracing his identity.

This is a story that, in the lexicon of Afrofuturism, envisions the shapeshifting abilities of Black Italians, the ability to transform social invisibility into strength, survival, social insights and vision. The series exemplifies the almost experimental presence of Black characters in Italian popular culture. They exist in their own worlds – in quarters that

are hidden from sight or as shape-shifting guests in largely 'Italian' locations.

To conclude, a Vice News video about Black Lives Matter in Italy and the country's need to reckon with anti-Black racism depicts a pre- and post-Floyd social-political consciousness among Italians. Sociologist Angelica Pesarini, in her interview by Camilla Hawthorne, has expressed scepticism about the alleged shift in consciousness, for while white Italians appear to have been horrified by the taped modern lynching of Floyd, they also routinely dismiss and express indifference towards anti-Black, racist acts of violence in contemporary Italy. Black social-political consciousness does seem to have been further energised by the global diasporic frustration with everyday violence. Yet, significant support and coalition partnerships with other counter-hegemonic movements in Italy seem to be forged more slowly.

If we wish to change deeply modern patterns of anti-Blackness, a renewed sense of urgency is required. We might begin by returning to Gramsci's guidance about how modern power works to structure social relations through common sense, unquestioned assumptions expressed in popular culture. Clearly, we are at an historical conjuncture, as Hall might suggest, when far-right forces are in a war of position for hegemony against what they perceive as the threat of decolonising Eurocentric thought and practice, including taken-for-granted modern, colonial racial taxonomies. It is incumbent upon Italian studies, a humanistic field of study, to interrogate and incorporate in our writing and teaching opposition to white supremacy and the knowledge power colonial nexus on which it is built. Western colonial discourses are as ubiquitous today as they were 100 years ago, when Fascism was ascending in Italy.

As Baldwin argued with extraordinary insight, Black subjects are treated in the West as if they do not meet the threshold of humanity. In Italy, they are regularly represented as strangers, extraneous and superfluous to the cultural world of Italians, their lives trivialised and or rendered invisible (Carter, 2010; Merrill, 2018). The quote from Komla-Ebri in the epigraph illustrates the routinisation of the stigmatisation of Black subjects as part of current society – not of the past or of some other country with a different history. There is a long tradition of Black radicalism that, like the histories of the Black Mediterranean scholars are now problematising and reworking and

activists and artists are building on in order to unearth the Black subject as in fact integral to the modern world. To decolonise Italian studies means to delink from common sense knowledge based on incomplete and distorted histories. And, to not just talk about this but to put our talk into action, making talking a verb.

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RACIALISED BODIES, VULNERABLE SUBJECTS: THE ITALIAN ZIGULA

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Sommario

In questo articolo mi concentro sull'esperienza in Italia di alcuni membri di un gruppo etnico e linguistico – gli Zigula – presente in Somalia già all'inizio del XX secolo. Questo saggio fa parte di un progetto più ampio che indaga la storia degli Zigula come esempio particolare e istruttivo di diaspora africana, per mostrare come movimenti transnazionali e contatti con culture diverse portino alla costruzione di identità ibride. Analizzo inoltre due aspetti dell'esperienza italiana degli Zigula. In primo luogo, spiego perché si tratta di un'esperienza postcoloniale. In secondo luogo, attraverso vari esempi, mostro che gli Zigula italiani sono soggetti vulnerabili che, a causa della loro mancanza di riconoscimento, devono costantemente giustificare la loro presenza in Italia. La mia analisi si basa principalmente sui risultati di un'intervista semi-strutturata con F., una donna zigula italiana quarantenne arrivata in Italia all'età di cinque anni. Il mio obiettivo principale è quello di mettere in evidenza un'esperienza diasporica controversa e diversa da quelle analizzate finora.

Keywords: Italian Zigula, colonialism, Black identities, homing, collective memories

I was at Fiumicino Airport in Rome, waiting for my biological mother, who was returning from Tanzania. I was with one of my cousins, who is also a Zigula; that is a Black person. It was late at night. There were only a few people around, and the police stopped us asking to see our documents. I gave them my Italian ID. They quickly checked my document before asking me to show them my 'Permesso di soggiorno' ('Permit to stay'), which, of course, being an Italian citizen, I did not need. I was shocked. Luckily, however, I also had my passport with me to further prove my Italian citizenship. They did not interrogate my cousin. He was a Black person with an African/Tanzanian passport, so his presence in this case was not as problematic as mine. We were two

non-white bodies inhabiting a white space, but with my passport, I was somehow threatening the Italian national identity. This anecdote, besides revealing some aspects of my personal story, relates a situation that I am sure many Black Italians would find familiar[1].

In this article I focus on the experience in Italy of some members of an ethnic and linguistic group – the Zigula – based at the start of the 19th century in Somalia. This article is part of a larger project investigating the history of the Zigula as a distinctive and instructive example of African diaspora to show how transnational movements and contacts with different cultures lead to the construction of hybrid identities. In this article I analyse two aspects of the Zigulas' Italian experience. First, I explain why it is a postcolonial experience. Second, by means of some examples, I show that the Italian Zigula are vulnerable subjects who, because of their lack of recognition, constantly need to justify their presence in Italy. My analysis is primarily based on the results of a semi-structured interview with F., an Italian Zigula in her 40s who arrived in Italy at five years of age and was fostered and then adopted by an Italian family from Faenza, in Emilia Romagna[2]. My main focus is to bring to light a diasporic experience that is controversial, multifaceted and, importantly, different from those analysed in the literature to date. The experience of the Zigula in Italy and its colonial and postcolonial implications have, so far, received scant interest.

The Zigula, originally based in Tanzania, experienced a number of migrations within and outside Africa. At the end of the 18th century, to escape a serious drought, they left Tanzania for Somalia. There they were enslaved by the local Somali population and subsequently experienced Italian colonisation. During colonisation (1908-1941), the trusteeship (1950-1960) and afterward, when the Italian presence in Somalia was less official but still of significant import, some young

[1] In her article 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', Sara Ahmed portrays a similar encounter that happened in another airport, at the borders of New York City. Ahmed describes how bodies who are seen as 'out of place' and thus recognised as 'stranger' are stopped and questioned. The 'search and stop', which Ahmed defines as 'a technology of racism', is one of the most frequent episodes of racism that Black subjects experience in Italy. Being legally Italian does not make any difference and often can cause more trouble (Ahmed, 2007:161).

[2] The larger project is partly based on several interviews held in Italy, Kenya and Tanzania during 2019 and 2020. I would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust and Cardiff University for funding the research leading to this article and the larger project of which it is part.

Zigula had the opportunity to learn Italian and to study to become elementary teachers in Catholic institutions. Thanks to these relationships and in particular to the connection with Italian missionaries, some moved from Somalia and Tanzania to Italy, where, since the 70s, a group of Zigula has settled and live, prevalently in Emilia Romagna. While some Zigula also left Somalia and returned to Tanzania to escape discrimination and exclusion, others, who fled Somalia in the 90s, after the beginning of the Somali civil war, eventually reached refugee camps in Kenya. A small number of them have been relocated to the United States of America, while many are still waiting in the camps.

The Italian context is significantly different from that of other European countries such as the United Kingdom or France. Italy has only in the last 30 years become a country of inward migration, having been a land of emigrants for a sustained period of time. Two main factors make the Italian context particularly complex. First, the persistence in Italy of a racialised identity, initially constructed in the early 20th century during Fascism and colonialism and set in opposition to darker-skinned people. Second, unlike in France and the UK, no single ethnic minority has dominated recent immigration into Italy, and very few immigrants who live in Italy come from the ex-Italian colonies. Furthermore, the Italian language is spoken almost exclusively in Italy, so for many African immigrants Italian is a third language, in addition to native and colonial languages. In modern Italy the idea of a Black Italian is still thought of as an oxymoron, as demonstrated by widespread media and political attitudes and discourses. The Zigulas' place in this sociohistorical context is particularly instructive because of their long-standing relationship with Italian people and culture. They settled in Italy prior to the recent migration, hold Italian passports and include among their number Italian-born members. In addition, an earlier generation had direct experience of Italy as a colonial power in Somalia, where they lived in servitude.

The 'diasporised' identities of the Zigula[3]

To understand the trajectories that brought the Zigula to move within and outside the African continent, it is necessary to examine their history. Thus, I briefly illustrate how the Zigula first arrived in Somalia as slaves, how they settled there and how they lived during the Italian colonisation. I also explain how the different labels used by the Zigula to self-identify were created and, in particular, when the term Somali Bantu gained popularity. Finally, I specifically focus on the events that prompted the Zigula migration processes, both within and outside the African continent.

The Zigula arrived in Somalia, probably in different waves, in the 19th century, after being captured by the Sultan of Zanzibar and other Arab slave traders. Furthermore, according to Lee Cassanelli, due to the drought that hit Tanzania in 1836, some Zigula decided to sell themselves as slaves (quoted in Declich, 1993:93). Along with other people from Malawi and Mozambique, they were forced to work on the Somali plantations. These groups, taken together, were identified as *Mushungulis*, a term that was used to indicate a worker, a foreigner and also a slave. Among them, the Zigula were the first to regain their freedom. Guided by their two leaders, Majendero and Wanankhucha, they fought against the Somalis, and they subsequently settled in the area of the Jubba River. In Somalia, even if they were free, they lived as second-class citizens and were discriminated against, as demonstrated by the use of derogatory terms such as *ooji* and *adoon*, used to emphasise their past as slaves. They were also considered inferior because of their physical features, for example their large nose and their particular gait, which were perceived as more African. Two terms were commonly used to identify and distinguish between the *Mushungulis* and the Somalis. The first, *Jareer*, means 'hard hair' and was used to refer to the *Mushungulis*, who had slave or non-Somali ancestry, while the word *Jileec*, which means 'soft', described those identified as ethnic Somalis[4]. The alleged national homogeneity of

[3] My reconstruction of the Zigula history is drawn primarily from the work of Declich, Menkhaus and Besteman.

[4] According to Menkhaus (2010:93) "the term *jareer* is now widely used by the Somali Bantu themselves, and carries no pejorative connotations; indeed, the name is employed with a

Somalia, grounded on a shared Arabic origin, a common nomadic culture and a common language, was used to justify the discrimination and the exclusion of the Zigula and the other Bantu populations. However, as appropriately stressed by Keren Weitzberg, these anti-Bantu sentiments were not universal among the Somalis. These were often apparent in "the ways in which prejudiced thinking intersects with structures of power" (Weitzberg, 2017:18)[5].

The subordinate situation of the Zigula was exacerbated by the Italian colonisation, during which the Jubba Valley villagers were obliged to work for free in colonial projects while Somalis did not have to provide free labour. During the Italian colonisation at the beginning of the 20th century, as Francesca Declich (2000:32), one of the most prominent experts on the subject, points out, the Italian colonialists were especially interested in those descendants of slaves who, unlike the mostly nomadic pastoralist Somalis, were skilful farmers[6].

The Italian colonial authorities started using the term 'Bantu' to indicate *Jareer* people. The use of a unifying term, which was imposed from the outside and referred to different ethnic identities, did not contribute to developing among them a group consciousness and a sense of community. Only after 1990 did the term gain popularity. When the civil war started, they began to flee Somalia, and they were accepted as refugees in the Kenyan Camps, such as Dadaab and Kakuma. In the camps, by accepting the use of the catchall term 'Somali Bantu', they could present themselves as a minority group, explaining the abuse and the discrimination they suffered from Somalis and which allegedly were still continuing in the camps. Thus, they had the opportunity to create "a positive ethnic identity distinguished by shared cultural characteristics" and to narrate their stories in front of an international audience (Deramo, 2017:93). The attention received determined the choice by the USA to accept the Somali Bantu as

certain sense of pride, perhaps because of its double meaning (suggesting both hardness of hair and hardness of the people themselves)".

5 Two Bantu scholars, Mohamed A. Eno and Omar A. Eno, have written extensively about the situation of the Somali Bantu in Somalia. In their work, they have fiercely challenged the notion of an ethnically homogeneous Somalia.

6 As stated by one elder Somali Bantu, now living in the USA, during an interview with Besteman: "The Italians were only colonising the *jareer*, not the Somalis" (Besteman, 2016:80).

refugees in the USA. Along with the so-called Lost Boys of Sudan, they were the only African people welcomed in the USA. Beginning in the 1990s, the label 'Somali Bantu' started to circulate also among educated Jareer in Mogadishu, who wanted to draw attention to their conditions in Somalia. As specified by Kenneth Menkhaus, the Jareer people started to identify themselves as Somali Bantu out of necessity. This allowed them to distinguish their experience from that of the Somali population and to gain the camp authorities' consideration (Menkhaus, 2010:98-99; Besteman, 2012:291-92).

Some Zigula managed to move back to Tanzania before the start pf the Somalian civil war. While in Somalia, in fact, the Zigula proudly maintained their traditions and their ancestors' language, which they thought could be used as a passport to go back to Tanzania, their country of origin, if their situation worsened and they found themselves at risk of becoming slaves again (Declich, 2010:169). The strong group consciousness of the Zigulas was crucial in persuading the Tanzanian authorities to recognise and accept them in the country's territories (Declich & Rodet, 2018:448).

We could ask whether the Zigula experience can be considered as diasporic. In order to answer this question, we must first provide a definition of diaspora. We can start by considering William Safran's 'centred' diaspora model. According to Safran (1991:83), diasporic people can be defined as "expatriate minority communities" that are dispersed from an original "center"; that maintain a "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland"; that "believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country"; that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return when the time is right and that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland. With respect to Safran's definition, James Clifford contends that, although it is necessary to define diaspora, it is also important not to adhere strictly to an 'ideal type'. If this model is rigidly applied, some significant diasporic experiences such as the African/American and the Caribbean/British would be excluded. These cultures, Clifford (1994:315) also argues, could be relegated into a category of "*quasi diasporas*" because they show only some diasporic features or moments.

Similarly, the Zigula's trajectories do not completely correspond to the definition of diaspora provided by Safran, primarily because of their

complex and ambiguous relationship with the idea of homeland. For many Zigula, Somalia, where they were oppressed and marginalised, cannot be considered as motherland. It is often Tanzania, where they were originally from, that is identified with the notion of home and which also comes to represent the place of return for some of the Zigula who live in a diasporic condition. During my fieldwork in Tanzania, in 2019 and 2020, I noticed that people of older generations usually defined themselves just as Zigula, and often they hid the fact that they were born in Somalia, fearing that they could be treated as foreigners by other Tanzanians. It is interesting to note that sometimes the place where they first settled in Tanzania is recorded in their passport as their place of birth. As reported by Declich and Rodet (2018:448), the younger Zigula self-identify just as Tanzanians simply to avoid discrimination in the job market. The Zigula who live in the refugee camps are generally defined as Somali Bantu.

The notion of homeland is particularly controversial for the Italian Zigula, the vast majority of whom have become or have always been officially Italian citizen. Nonetheless, because of their African features, they often experience the feeling of not belonging and of being regarded only as second-class citizens in Italy. As stated by Clifford (1994:310), "many minority groups that have not previously identified in this way are now reclaiming diasporic origins and affiliations". It is thus unsurprising that some Italian Zigula have rediscovered a strong connection with a prior home, often symbolised by an ideal image of Africa and, in particular, of Tanzania. Drawing on these considerations, it is possible to affirm that the Zigula, independently of their different diasporic trajectories, have developed a similar approach to the notion of home. For them, "'home' in diaspora, with its interrelated experiences of loss of origin and return to roots, can be redefined as 'homing', a continuous search for and approximation of a 'home base' in both imagination and practice" (Lee, 2010:127). These aspects emerge clearly in my analysis of the Italian Zigula and the complexities of their postcolonial and multicultural identities.

The Zigula in Italy: A postcolonial trajectory

The Italian presence in Somalia was still of relevant importance even after the United Nations trusteeship, under Italian administration, ended

in 1960. Until 1991, Somalia has been one of the priorities of Italian cooperation activities (Calchi Novati, 2008). The story of the state's radio station, Radio Magadishu, founded in 1951, clearly reflects the endurance and persistence of the ties between Italy and Somalia[7]. In this period, some young male Zigula had the opportunity to learn Italian and to study to become elementary teachers in Catholic institutions[8]. Thanks to these relationships and in particular to the connection with Italian missionaries, some moved from Somalia and Tanzania to Italy, where, since the 70s, a group of Zigula has settled and lives predominantly in Emilia Romagna.

The use of the notion of postcolonial when analysing the Italian context has sometimes been questioned. As previously mentioned, the Italian context is in fact significantly different from that of other European countries, such as the UK, France and also the Netherlands, where the vast majorities of immigrants came from their former colonies. Italy has become a country of inward migration only since the late 80s, having been a land of emigrants for a sustained period of time. Furthermore, no single ethnic minority has dominated recent immigration into Italy, and very few immigrants who live in Italy come from the ex-Italian colonies. It is, however, possible to acknowledge the atypicality of the Italian context whilst affirming its postcolonial character (Fiore, 2013:73).

The Zigula's experience strongly supports this claim. Their migration to Italy is a postcolonial trajectory. In the simplest terms, their route is postcolonial because, to paraphrase a popular slogan, the "Zigula are here [in Italy] because the Italians were there [in Somalia]". The same considerations are voiced by the Italian writer of Somali and

7 The recent 'restoration' initiative of an Italian language broadcast on the radio reflects the ambiguities and controversial aspects of this relationship. This decision, which triggered strong reactions, was defined by the Somali researcher Abdinor Dahir as "a new form of cultural imposition". It highlights the urgent need to examine Italian colonial legacy in Somalia from the perspective of the colonised (Ali, 2021).

8 Italian Catholic priests always supported the idea of a colonial civilising mission. In accordance with the colonial authorities, they often had a prominent role in the educational system (Pretelli, 2011).

Pakistani origin, Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, who affirmed, "I didn't go to Italy, it was Italy that first came to me"[9].

Understanding these trajectories through the framework of postcoloniality is illuminating because, as Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, among others, have demonstrated, it helps in the study of Italian colonial past, which cannot be considered a minor, closed or irrelevant experience. It also allows us to focus on its impact on the construction of Italian national identity and to better understand how the consequences of Italian colonisation still reverberate on present-day Italy. Postcoloniality so understood is a dynamic, rather than static, condition. It does not signal the end of oppression but instead, in Teresa Fiore's (2017:54) words, "it emphasizes the reverberations and extensions of it, while also including the forms of agency that individuals claim in response to it". Furthermore, a postcolonial perspective, by drawing our attention especially to the relationship between colonisers and colonised, brings to the fore the racial ideologies developed by that encounter. The analysis of the discourse on race and on how Black bodies have been racialised and represented in Italy requires an investigation of how racial ideas have developed since the Italian Liberal State (1861-1925). The situation of Black people who live in Italy and of those who have started self-identifying as Black Italian or Afro-Italian is strictly related to what happened when Italians colonised African territories.

Racialised citizenship in Italy

The liminal and peripheral racial status of Italians, who as immigrants in the USA and Australia have seen their whiteness questioned, has determined the establishment of a model of normative citizenship that does not mention whiteness but implies it. According to this normative model, no differently from what we have seen more generally in Europe, Italian identity, which is described as Mediterranean, is formed in opposition to those who are regarded as immigrants, foreigners and especially darker-skinned people. Gaia Giuliani explains the construction of Italianness adopting the notion of "altero- and auto-

[9] I heard Ramzanali Fazel affirming this during a conference in 2020. On this, see also S. Ramzanali Fazel's memoir, *Lontano da Magadisho* (1994).

referential racialization", as formulated by Colette Guillaumin. This notion refers to a system of racialisation that is centred on the Other while the Self is hidden (Giuliani, 2014:572-573). Only the contrast with those who are recognised as Other because of the colour of their skin permits the Self to affirm its identity. This contraposition becomes a unifying trait able to construct a common racial identity in an Italian nation that seemed "impossible to internally homogenise" (573).

Italy started its colonial enterprise in Africa in 1869, a few years after the unification of the nation, which happened in 1861. Contrary to what is generally thought, the Fascist regime carried on the plans of the Liberal administrations. According to Italy's Liberal governments, African colonisation was crucial not just in solving the economic and social problems of a young nation but also in creating "a sense of homogeneity and belonging" that was, otherwise, totally absent (Furno, 2010:36). The encounter between the Italian colonisers and the African colonised allowed Italy to cement its unity by weakening its internal differences. We could affirm "that colonialism makes [Italy] 'white'" (Ahmed, 2007:153). The work of historians such as Nicola Labanca and Angelo Del Boca has been fundamental to debunk the myth of Italian colonialism as a benign project. In particular, Del Boca clearly stated:

> The myth of 'Italian good people', which has been allowed to hide so many infamies, [...] actually appears, upon examination of the facts, a fragile, hypocritical artifice. It has no right of citizenship, no historical foundation. It has been arbitrarily and slyly used for over a century and still has its supporters today. However, the truth is that Italians, in some circumstances, behaved in the most brutal way, just like other peoples in similar situations. Therefore, they have no right to any mercy and much less, self-absolution.
>
> (Del Boca, 2005:8 - my translation)

The invisibility of the bodies of colonised people on Italian soil before the late 80s made it easier for Italy to distance itself from the legacy of colonialism, strengthening the myth of Italians as gentle colonisers and helping to corroborate the assumption that being Italian means to be

white or, better, non-Black[10]. In this context, racism and Blackness did not acquire any centrality in the political and social debate that developed in Italy after World War II. The discourse on race is broached with the same indulgent attitude generally applied to Italian colonialism. A "combination of denial, paternalism, and 'innocence'" that, as argued by Alessandro Portelli (2005:360), "makes possible in Italy things that would be unthinkable elsewhere". Italians still have the tendency to depict their nation as tolerant and to underestimate the importance of racial problems, stigmatising any form of racism as simply the bad behaviour of a few Italians. However, this image does not correspond to reality, and this can be seen, for example, if we focus on the legislation concerning Italian citizenship. Italian citizenship, which is granted by birth and is based on *jus sanguinis*, right of blood, is considered as "one of the most restrictive citizenship laws for immigrants" (Blakely, 2009:18). Italian citizenship legislation is based "on descent and ethnic belonging" (Clò, 2013:275) and makes it extremely difficult for immigrants to become legally Italian. According to Law 91, which in 1992 reformed the previous 1912 law, immigrants have to prove that they have been residing legally and continually in Italy for 10 years. They also have to fulfil economic requirements, showing that in the three years before their application they have had an annual regular income of at least 8,000 euros. Children born to foreign parents can apply only when they come of age, at 18, and before they turn 19. Besides all the bureaucratic complexities, those who apply for Italian citizenship also have to cope with an uncertain and discretionary process (Fiore, 2017:185-186). In this regard, one of the Zigula I interviewed stated, "When you finally have collected all the documents and you send them to Rome you have to wait for 735 days. Within the notorious 735 days you will know if your application was successful, you will get an answer. Thus, I ran the risk of reaching the

[10] The trajectories that in the 1960s brought to Italy university students from Ethiopia and Somalia and domestic workers from Eritrea can also be defined as postcolonial. Of particular interest in this context is Sabrina Marchetti's book, *Le ragazze di Asmara. Lavoro domestico e migrazione postcoloniale* (*Asmara Girls. Domestic work and postcolonial migration*), published in 2011, which focuses on the memories of some women who arrived in Italy to work as domestic help for wealthy Italian families. Because their presence was primarily restricted to the private and domestic sphere, it was perceived as less threatening to Italian identity than current more visible arrivals.

734th day and then, who knows, maybe at that point a problem could come up"[11].

Italian society still cannot conceive that Black Italians exist; Black people are, instead, mainly perceived as immigrants. The binomial association that links being Black with being an immigrant, does not just exclude the right to be recognised as a citizen, especially for those with an immigrant background but who were born and/or grew up in Italy, but enhances the idea of the Black body as a foreign body. In this view, Black people's presence, if not regulated and constrained, could threaten Italian racial purity. Because of the meanings with which their African features are invested, Italian Zigula often experience the feeling of not belonging and of being regarded only as second-class citizens in Italy. When, as happens frequently, someone asks them where they are 'really' from, they usually say Tanzania, where their biological kin now mainly live. They often feel forced to justify their being at the same time Black and Italian.

One of the Italian Zigula I interviewed, F., who teaches the Italian language to migrants and refugees, told me that, although she has Italian citizenship – which is compulsory for all government jobs – she chooses whether to tell her students she is Italian or Tanzanian depending on the situation. At times she says she is Italian when she intends to reaffirm her position as an Italian teacher or if she wants to keep some distance from her students. On other occasions, she replies that she is Tanzanian to show them her closeness and to suggest a common background. However, we do not always have the power to choose how to describe our identities. For Black people in Italy, the rights of citizenship are inextricably linked to being recognised as Italian. F., if she had to, would probably define herself as 'Romagnolo-Tanzanian', a label that evokes a sense of belonging and attachment to a local more than a national territory. This definition is the latest outcome of a long and never-ending process during which she has often questioned her identities and felt her vulnerability. Identities, as Stuart Hall pointed out, need to be thought of "as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'" (1996:2) and always "constituted within, not outside, representation" (4). Thus, they should be more about our routes than our roots. They should be regarded as an effort to illustrate the

[11] The interview took place on 17 February 2019.

"process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (4). Especially for diasporic subjects, their sense of self is not tied to the idea of roots, an immutable point of origin, but are projected forward. It is the result of constant negotiations. Memories, both individual and collective, are a fundamental element of this process. They are retold and loaded with new meanings that allow diasporic subjects to make sense of their experiences.

Multicultural Italian identities

Italian migrant literature and in particular postcolonial female authors' works have, since the 90s, played a crucial role in describing and promoting a discussion about the demographic change Italy has been experiencing and the difficult and contested development of a multicultural society. As pointed out by Sonia Sabelli, writers such as the Italian-Ethiopian Gabriella Ghermandi and the Italian-Somali Igiaba Scego and Cristina Ali Farah have with their narratives aptly promoted and emphasised the necessity to look critically at the Italian colonial past. They gave centrality to the stories of racialised subjects, who started speaking with their own voices. Thus, they have contributed to deconstructing racial stereotypes and ideologies consolidated during Fascism and now used as an instrument for ordering and regulating the presence of Black people and their migratory flows. These authors also clearly indicate the necessity to talk about race and challenge the idea of implied whiteness as the legitimate colour of contemporary Italy (Sabelli, 2013:292-293).

In her memoir, *La mia casa è dove sono* (*Home is Where I Am*), Scego tries to define herself by asking what it means for her to be Italian. She describes her identity "as a crossroad, a junction, a mess, a headache", and as a result she feels trapped like an animal, condemned to a perennial anguish (Scego, 2010:158). At the end of the book, she concludes that to find a proper answer to such a complicated question represents an impossible task. The reason behind this impossibility is that the path, which metaphorically could bring about a recomposition of subjective identity, is not just particularly tortuous but like a 'doodle' that encompasses multiple and different pathways and traces. The

ability to tell her own story, to listen to and narrate the stories of other people who had similar experiences, thus becomes the only reasonable answer that can be provided.

Scego also deals with the same issues in 'Dismatria' (translated as 'Exmatriates', 2011). This is a tale that ends with the image of the narrator's family members, who together open their luggage, in which they have stored a wide range of different objects, all of which have a personal and intimate meaning. Gathering baggage that has been hidden, sometimes with a sense of shame, and revealing its contents becomes a moment of reconciliation. It evokes a liberating gesture that functions as an individual and collective catharsis. The suitcases have a metaphorical relevance, and their contents represent their personal universes, their extravagances and their anguishes. They also seem to offer a way to conceal the fear of not belonging or not being able to find enough room for all the diverse pieces that composite identities are made of. This condition also implies a sense of loss and the attempt to resist it. A colourful chaos occupies entirely the white, cold floor of the living room. Nothing seems to be out of place, and the objects produce the sense of abundance and richness that characterise multicultural identities.

The experiences of the Italian Zigula, who are the subject of my research, exemplify these complexities and multiplicities. They bring to the fore the significance of a tortuous and longstanding colonial encounter and demonstrate that Blackness is not a monolith but that instead it presents different facets. Some Italian Zigula directly emigrated from Africa as children and were fostered or adopted by white Italian families. Others arrived in Italy as adults to complete their studies and to work. Others still were born in Italy; some are the children of mixed-race unions. They all inhabit different Italian spaces in different ways. Telling and knowing their stories can be a useful instrument to understand different aspects of Blackness in Italy. These stories also reveal that identities, and in particular diasporic and multicultural identities, far from being something fixed, are mobile and multifaceted.

Collective memories, collective identities

Collective memory is fundamental for the formation of diasporic identities and the creation of those forms of community consciousness Clifford refers to. Collective memory allows us to reinterpret the past and the present and consequently to look at the future from a different perspective. Through collective memory, existing narratives are replaced, others become central and new narratives are created. This dynamic contributes to demonstrate that identities are not stable and fixed but are continuously renegotiated. Identities are narratively constructed. It is through narrative that diasporic subjects can make sense of their self and also exercise their agency, choosing what part of their story is most relevant. This process, as I will demonstrate, entails also a reappropriation and reinvention of the past. Memories are not retrieved once and for all but are constantly recreated and invested with new meanings.

Collaborative remembering implies that individual memories are circulated and communicated to other people who identify themselves as a group because they share a common image of their past. According to Maurice Halbwachs these groups comprise "families, neighborhood and professional groups, political parties, associations, etc., up to and including nations" (quoted in Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995:127). Everyone belongs to different social groups, which influence and determine not only what we remember and how but also what we should or are allowed to forget. This is particularly important in the case of those Italian Zigula who grew up in Italy, fostered by Italian families and in a predominantly white environment. They arrived in Italy when they were still children, mostly aged between three and six. Initially they struggled to settle into their new families, and it seems that, even if probably unconsciously, they have attempted to create new identities by trying to forget their past. F. related an anecdote, which can help to illustrate what I am trying to point out. F. was fostered by an Italian family who, after a short period of time, decided that they could not keep her. She had to spend some months living with one of her uncles, who at that time was underage, until a new family was found. As soon as she started speaking some Italian, one of the daughters of her foster (and later adoptive) parents began to ask her questions and to write her answers down in a journal. She wanted to know her story and her

feelings, and she thought that it would be important for her to have an instrument she could rely on in the future to recollect her memories. When I interviewed F., asking whether it was possible to read that journal, she confessed that she had destroyed it, when she was about 10 years old, because she did not want to remember[12].

When Zigula children arrived in Italy, they had to adjust to the Italian context, and this led to an often-unconscious process of erasure of the culture of origin. These children did not have the opportunity to choose how to integrate into their foster families nor, because of their young age, were they able to decide whether to maintain their identity as Zigula. The first worry of the host families was that these children became accustomed to and assimilated into the Italian context as soon as possible, learning the language and how to behave 'in a suitable manner'. They had to replace their culture of origin with the new one, and this implied a cultural loss, symbolised primarily by the loss of the Zigula language. The fact that they also maintained relations with their biological parents and relatives made their situation even more complicated. They did not have the necessary tools to maintain an open dialogue with them, but, at the same time, they could not be completely understood by their foster families since there were some elements of their experience they felt could not be shared with them. In particular, they could not communicate to their foster family members that, in order to be recognised as part of the family, the family should recognise their Blackness and try to understand what it means to be Black in Italy. On the contrary, by using a colour-blind approach, family members seemed to refuse to see them entirely and to refuse to understand their experiences. This is not to say that Blackness is "an overarching identity marker which erases any other form of differentiation" (Furno, 2010:15); nonetheless, Blackness is most likely the first element Italian Zigula were and are judged on; many of their experiences, although not all of them, are strictly related to being Black. Often within the families, their vulnerability as Black bodies in Italian society did not receive the consideration it deserved. More specifically, Italian Zigula experienced different grades of vulnerability and a constant shift between two different situations. Within the family environment, they were regarded

[12] Transracial foster care and adoptions, their complexities and the unbalanced relations of power they create are a major subject of my research that I cannot discuss here.

firstly as adopted or foster children and only secondly as Black, while outside the home they were seen primarily as Black and then as members of white families.

Now grown up, this group of Italian Zigula has informally devised practices of collective remembering that function as processes where the problems and ambivalences of their position, which have been frequently censored in the attempt to assimilate, are no longer silenced but brought to the fore and discussed as central. Furthermore, remembering produces the kind of awareness that is instrumental to facing and overcoming their traumas. By collectively remembering and sharing memories about their past and the experiences they went through growing up in Italy, the Italian Zigula might be able to make full sense of their personal stories. Remembering, in the case of the Italian Zigula, involves dealing with past traumas, such as leaving their biological parents without a clear explanation, living in a foreign country and adjusting to families and to a society where often no one looks like them and where they are discriminated against because of their appearance.

In order to create a stronger bond with the members of the Italian Zigula community who live in Emilia Romagna and to attempt to reappropriate her country of origin, F. invented the 'Tanzaquiz', a game to test participants' knowledge of Tanzanian history and culture. The quiz is always played on 8 December. Previously, every year, her adoptive family, who live in Faenza, welcomed relatives and friends into their home on that date to celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, who is deeply revered in the town. When her parents' relatives stopped coming, principally because of their age, she decided to continue this family tradition but only invited her Zigula relatives. At the beginning, she also confessed she was extremely disappointed when her adoptive siblings showed up because she needed to have, within the family, a space designed just for her and her biological relatives. The Tanzaquiz has now reached its eighth anniversary. My interviewee illustrated that the quiz was first thought up to fill the time spent together during their annual meeting. By remembering the evenings she spent with the local Scouts group, she came up with the idea of doing a quiz on a topic that could unite all the Italian Zigula. At the heart of the quiz were two elements: the will to recreate a sense of community and then to broaden further the

knowledge of their roots. The quiz is divided into different topics. For each answer, players can gain from 10 to 40 points, according to the difficulty of the questions. There is also a team test, such as constructing a proverb or listing some typical spices or even telling stories about Tanzania. For these team tests, the organiser also takes inspiration from the most popular quiz shows broadcast on Italian television, such as *Caduta libera* (*Free Fall*), *I soliti ignoti* (*Identity*) and *Affari tuoi* (*Your Business*). The quiz also includes questions about the Zigula language, asking the meaning of words and expressions such as 'Mama ndogo' (Little mother) or 'Mama mkubwa' (Big mother).

The nature and the origin of the Tanzaquiz embody the diasporic and multiple identities of the Italian Zigula. It is a quiz about Tanzania, modelled on games played by Scouts and held on the day marking one of the patron saints of a town in Romagna[13]. The Tanzaquiz, by combining multiple belongings, challenges ideas about what is local and what is traditional. Through Tanzaquiz, she adapts an Italian paradigm for reaffirming a 'Tanzanian' identity. Therefore, it can be seen as part of those 'symbolic' journeys that according to Hall (2011:232) are not just 'necessary' but also 'necessarily circular': "This is the Africa we must return to – but 'by another route': what Africa has become in the New World, what we have made of 'Africa': 'Africa' – as we re-tell it through politics, memory and desire". By reinventing a family tradition, F. claims her space within the family environment and demands the recognition of her hybrid cultural identity.

In limine

Since the 1990s (when Italy first became a land of immigration), the Italian political debate has been dominated by issues of migration and citizenship. Migrants who first arrived in Italy in the 90s created communities independently of their origins in different parts of Africa, deciding "to adopt as their own the identity of 'African', which they originally rejected as a source of confusion and de-personalization" (Maher, 1996:170). Their children, born and raised in Italy, tried instead

[13] It is perhaps important to mention that the town of Faenza has always distinguished itself for the pre-eminent role played by Catholic political parties. Thus, it has been commonly defined as 'the white island' in the 'red' Emilia Romagna.

to emancipate themselves from the image of immigrants and the related stereotypes.

In recent years, not just in Italy but all over Europe, we have witnessed a rise of far-right parties and an increase in racism and anti-immigration rhetoric. These factors have caused and accelerated the emergence of a sense of community and a memory discourse able to make sense of the experiences of Black people in Italy. The need to build a Black Italian community has become stronger among the younger generation, who have started, thanks to social media, to share their experiences. Many young Black people set up websites and pages on Facebook and Instagram in which they tackle different topics, from activism and literature to beauty and self-care (e.g. *Nappytalia*, *Afroitaliansouls* and *Graceonyourdash*)[14]. Besides racism, they also talk about recognition and identity. They often describe how they feel entrapped in a liminal space that, using Raffaele Furno's metaphor, can be compared to an airport. Furno specifically refers to Black African migrants in Italy, but this condition is not dissimilar to that of Black Italians to whom a full citizenship is denied and those who, although they were born in Italy, are not Italian citizens and do not have the legal rights that come with it. With the image of an airport, Furno (2010:14) evokes Black people's "unstable existence, not rooted in traditional coordinates of time and space". The metaphor also draws attention to the control and the bureaucratic processes Black bodies are always subject to. The sense of community surfacing among Black Italians is borne out of the necessity to face the difficulties of finding a space in Italy, a country that has always adhered to a model of citizenship in which only white Italians can be included. It is also a way of affirming that it is possible to be Black and Italian, regardless of which exact definition (such as Afro-Italian or Black Italian) is considered more appropriate. I started this article by recalling an incident that happened to me almost 15 years ago at Fiumicino Airport in Rome, and in the

[14] In 2020 four important books by Black Italian women authors were published: *Negretta. Baci Razzisti* (*Black Girl. Racist Kisses*) by Marilena Delli Umhoza; *E poi basta. Manifesto di una donna nera italianai* (*That Is Enough. The Manifesto of a Black Italian Woman*) by Esperance Hakuzwimana Ripanti; *Corpi estranei* (*Foreign Bodies*) by Oiza Queens Day Obasuyi and *Ladri di denti* (*Teeth Thieves*) by Djarah Kan. They all discuss racism and the difficulties of living in Italy as Black people. Furthermore, recently podcasts (e.g. *Vabbèpodcast*, *Blackcoffee* and *The Chronicles of a Black Italian Woman*) have established themselves as ideal platforms to discuss Black identities and to create antiracist spaces in the Italian context.

end, I return to airports. Here, however, they come to symbolise Black citizens who are struggling to feel at home and claim a safe space in Italy. Seen through the airport metaphor, homing is a process in which "the points of departure and arrival" are redone and undone (Lee, 2010:128).

Among those Zigula who were born in Italy, some are the children of mixed-race unions. They are Italian born; they have one parent who is Italian by birth and often have no knowledge of either Somalia or Tanzania. Nonetheless, they are always being asked the same unsettling question: 'Where are you from?' They still inhabit a liminal Italian existence. The Zigula experience shows how the notion of Blackness in Italy is not a monolith but presents different facets. Nevertheless, the stories of the Zigula also help us to analyse aspects of the broader discourse about race in Italy, including the impact of Italian colonialism and its continuing legacy.

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FEDERICO FELLINI'S 2020 CENTENNIAL SCREENINGS IN SOUTH KOREA, JAPAN, AND MAINLAND CHINA

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Sommario

In questo articolo esaminiamo le dinamiche storico-sociali e le rappresentazioni mediatiche delle proiezioni del centenario di Federico Fellini che hanno avuto luogo in Corea del Sud, Giappone e Cina continentale nel 2020. Esaminando vari tipi di testi mediatici in lingua coreana, giapponese e cinese, esploriamo il principale significato del centenario di Fellini e dei suoi film per gli spettatori, i critici cinematografici, gli organizzatori culturali e i partner governativi e commerciali di ciascuno dei tre Paesi dell'Asia orientale. La comprensione dei significati, sfumature e diversi livelli del cinema di Fellini raccontati da questi attori ci fornisce una finestra sulla portata dell'impegno culturale contemporaneo con Fellini, il cinema italiano e le correlazioni tra la cultura italiana e i tre Paesi asiatici. Seguendo una direzione critica che reagisce consapevolmente alla tradizione critica occidentale, speriamo di contribuire ad aprire un nuovo spazio per gli italianisti con background non tradizionali e una via di ricerca ampiamente trascurata nell'ambito degli studi transnazionali di italianistica.

Keywords: Federico Fellini's centennial, Italian mobilities, East Asia, transnational cinematic culture, digital media, Covid-19 pandemic

Introduction

In this article, we examine the socio-historical dynamics and media depictions of Federico Fellini's centennial screenings that took place in South Korea, Japan, and mainland China in 2020[1]. We seek to answer several key questions surrounding this subject: Who were the organisers and what were their main agendas in staging and promoting the various retrospectives? What were the contemporary conditions of viewing and interpreting Fellini's cinema in each of these countries? How did the Covid-19 pandemic interact with the centennial celebrations? What did the attendees care about and what meanings did they derive from experiencing Fellini and his cinema as revealed in their online narratives in East Asia's vibrant digital domain? By examining various types of Korean-, Japanese-, and Chinese-language media texts, we probe the central question about what the Fellini centennial and his films meant for movie-goers, film critics, cultural organisers, and governmental and commercial partners in each of the three East Asian countries. Understanding the nuanced and multilayered meanings of Fellini's cinema as narrated by these stakeholders provides us with a window into the extent of contemporary cultural engagement with Fellini, Italian cinema, and Italian culture in the three countries.

As the subsequent sections will reveal, for decades South Korean, Japanese, and Chinese audiences and other stakeholders have been viewing, interpreting, and organising reviews of Fellini's films specifically and Italian cinema more generally. But the area of study pertaining to Italian cinematic culture in Asia has only recently garnered critical attention. Notably, the *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Federico Fellini* includes chapters on Fellini's relationship with South Asian cinemas (Niyogi De, 2020) and with Japan (Jackson, 2020). Several articles published in the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* dealt with topics as varied as Italian neorealist cinema's influence on Chinese cineastes (Lu, 2014), Japanese animation's circulation in Italy (Pellitteri, 2019), and the making of Bollywood movies in Italy (Cucco & Scaglioni, 2014). Our essay pursues this line of inquiry by focusing on examining the eastern region of Asia, one

[1] Hiju Kim drafted the section on South Korea and the conclusion, Hiromi Kaneda wrote the section on Japan, and Gaoheng Zhang was responsible for the introduction and the section on mainland China. Zhang oversaw the collective efforts of drafting and revising.

major event involving an influential Italian film director, and media accounts that reveal specific reception narratives of selected films. While similar previous scholarship tends to study the links between Italy and a single Asian country, our article considers those pertaining to three nation-states, thereby providing a complex and comparative view of transnational flows between Italy and Asia facilitated by cinema. In so doing, we hope to reinforce the growing awareness within Italian cinema and screen scholarship of the significance of studying its Asian connections.

In relation to Italian Studies scholarship, we aim to provide a notable example of the scholarly merits of considering transnational and transcultural dimensions of Italian mobilities in Asia. The research surveyed and collected in recent volumes such as Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Hom's *Italian Mobilities* and Charles Burdett, Loredana Polezzi, and Barbara Spadaro's *Transcultural Italies* has already forcefully argued for the necessity and values of analysing Italy from a mobility and transcultural perspective. According to the editors of the latter volume, the book "aims to show the interdependency of national and transnational, global and local, individual and community, and their impact on how we experience and narrate our lives" (Burdett, Polezzi & Spadaro, 2020:20). This stream of scholarship represents one example of decolonising and diversifying Italian Studies by placing Italy and people associated with it within dialectical relationships between history and narrative, and between the local and the global. However, substantial analyses of Asian-Italian exchanges and communications are not captured in these agenda-setting volumes, nor are they well-represented in Italian Studies scholarship as a whole. Our article will add to this existing scholarly landscape, particularly by examining primary texts written in non-European languages, thanks to the linguistic and cultural capacities of the three authors who are, however, North American Italianists by training.

Moreover, our essay also considers decolonisation and diversity by way of the critic Koichi Iwabuchi's call for the "trans-Asia as method". For the critic, this method means devising ways to "engage and tackle the issues that Asian societies share through tactical progression of trans-Asia comparison, mutual referencing, and reciprocated learning" (Iwabuchi, 2019:25). Iwabuchi means to both engage "de-Westernisation of knowledge production" and "investigate the

advancement of globalisation process that engenders cross-border flows and connections of capital, people, and media culture and renders many issues transnationally linked" (Iwabuchi, 2019:26). While each of the three East Asian countries represents a unique case study with their own specific socio-historical circumstances and media and cultural articulations, specific dimensions of the Fellini centennial screenings and related activities speak to commonalities and interactions. These aspects will be discussed in the conclusion. By following a critical direction that self-consciously reacts to the Western critical tradition, we hope to help open up a new space for Italianists with non-traditional backgrounds and a vastly under-explored avenue of research within transnational Italian Studies scholarship.

South Korea

In the year 2020, South Korea was one of the venues in East Asia for the celebrations dedicated to the centennial of Federico Fellini's birth. Though relatively minimal in scale, in comparison to the celebrations held in Italy and in other East Asian countries, the centennial events in South Korea consisted of a number of retrospective festivals and special screenings that paid tribute to the Italian filmmaker's artistic legacy. Due to the unforeseen Covid-19 pandemic, these celebrations were mostly restricted to small-scale exhibitions or online screenings. Public sources that should reveal the audiovisual and textual evidence of audience engagements at these events were quantitatively insufficient or unobtainable at the time of writing.

Yet, a digital landscape of Korean blogs and web portals that harboured records of Korean audiences' interests in Fellini over the last decade offers a valuable perspective on their understanding of the director's work. Notably, the 90th anniversary of Fellini's birth in 2010 produced textual criticism, in-person events, and discussions, which were transcribed online. Furthermore, recent interviews featuring two internationally acclaimed Korean filmmakers, Bong Joon Ho and Park Chan Wook, as well as digital news articles and commentaries from ordinary filmgoers found on online platforms such as web portals, blogs, and social media, further attest to Fellini's influence in South Korea in the last ten years.

Examining these digital references that were easily accessible to the general public, in this section I ask the question as to why do ordinary filmgoers, critics, and filmmakers in South Korea care about Fellini? As varied as these opinions are, Korean audiences agree that Fellini's *oeuvre* projects a wide range of themes and formal elements that generate interests based on individual preferences, such as one's emotional attentiveness to Fellini's use of visual art and music. My analysis shows that, from his treatment of social marginalisation to his incorporation of caricatures and operatic devices in his creative practice, the variety of Fellini's cinematic language has resonated with Korean critics, filmmakers and general filmgoers in its exploration of diverse political themes and aesthetic forms.

The Anticlimax of Federico Fellini's Centennial Celebrations

In 2020, South Korea held five centennial celebrations that consisted of both online and in-person screenings. Four of those events were organised by governmental agencies: the 8th Venice in Seoul Film Festival, a dance tribute to Fellini (titled "Felliniana"), Retrospettiva Fellini, and Federico Fellini's 100th Anniversary Film Festival organised by the International Tour Film Festival (ITFF). In addition, a series of commercial screenings were organised by CGV, the largest private multiplex cinema in the country. The events organised by governmental agencies were systematically sponsored by publicly funded organisations such as the Embassy of Italy, the Italian Cultural Institute in Seoul, the Seoul Metropolitan Government, Seoul Film Commission, and Seoul Art Cinema, reflecting a significant degree of cultural diplomacy between the two countries through Fellini.

These events took place intermittently throughout the year, mostly in person[2]. In January, the 'Venice in Seoul' Film Festival took place – an event that annually brings selected films from the Venice Film Festival to Seoul. In order to highlight Fellini's 100th anniversary, the 2020 edition showcased the film *Fellini fine mai/Fellini Never-ending* (2019), a documentary directed by Eugenio Cappuccio, who was the

[2] In-person events included 'Venice in Seoul' Film Festival, the dance tribute, 'Retrospettiva Fellini', the Korean Film Archive's screening of *Il bidone*, and the CGV screening of *La dolce vita.*. The virtual event was ITFF's online screenings, but the exhibitions of film projections and posters were in-person at two different galleries.

Assistant Director for *Ginger e Fred/Ginger and Fred* (1986) and Fellini's first feature film, *Lo sceicco bianco/The White Sheik* (1952). In March, the dance tribute to Fellini, produced by the Italian dance company Artemis Danza, was hosted by the Italian Cultural Institute (IIC) in Seoul. From June to August, the IIC also organised Retrospettiva Fellini, in collaboration with the office of the Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. This series of events took place over the course of 20 days and screened five films by Fellini: *Intervista* (1987), *Prova d'Orchestra/Orchestra Rehearsal* (1979), *I Vitelloni* (1953), *8½* (1963), and *Giulietta degli Spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* (1965). Finally, between November and December, the Korean Film Archive screened *Il bidone* (1955) for two days, and CGV cinemas held a special screening of a 4K restored version of *La dolce vita* (1960), also on two different dates. In December, the ITFF, which had previously toured in Russia, China, and Montenegro for Fellini's centennial, made its final stop in South Korea, where they hosted a series of free online screenings and exhibited a collection of his short films, movie posters, and a documentary at cafes inside Gallery Onue and Gallery 8th Street in Seoul.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, the extent of the audience engagement from these events was difficult to trace because online written and audio-visual documentation about the attendees' experiences appeared to be extremely limited in scope. For example, the promotional materials by Gallery Onue, which included images of posters and still shots of Fellini's films displayed on-site, generated some passive engagement on the gallery's official social media accounts, with an average of 24 'Likes' on ONUE586' official Instagram account (2020). In order to gain a clearer picture of contemporary Korean perceptions of Fellini's cinema, we need to turn to the 90th anniversary of Fellini's birth in 2010. Seoul Art Cinema, which also organised the centennial program Retrospettiva Fellini, attracted multitudes of visitors through events that were of a much larger scale compared to 2020. This institution has also archived a collection of criticism and transcriptions of their in-person events on an official blog. In contrast with the relatively small-scale celebrations for the centennial, these 90th anniversary celebrations, which were not constrained by a global pandemic, thus served as a clearer testament to South Korea's contemporary perspectives on Fellini, helping us to peer

obliquely into the attendees' experiences with the centennial screenings.

Looking Back Even Further

To be sure, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary retrospective, many audience members left comments on social media that expressed frustration with Fellini's films. On Twitter, the hashtag #FedericoFellini written in Korean revealed posts that expressed the audience's candid opinions about Fellini's cinema, such as the 'difficulty' in watching his films or their astounding interests in other aspects of his artistry, such as "Il Viaggio di G. Mastorna Detto Fernet", a cartoon that was envisioned by Fellini but was never turned into a film (Zzziney, 2018; Hudoongjidoongahrang, 2019; mltngdwn, 2021; CHOONSAM__27, 2021). One Twitter user also commented that films like *La strada* were difficult to watch for their critique of father figures, "even through a neorealist lens", and other users on Twitter and Naver reviews simply stated that his films were "boring" (Jung, 2018; Jaelippo1, 2021). Comments from the reviews on Naver and from the 'After Talk' discussion at the 90th retrospective also made note of this tedious aspect of Fellini's films. During the in-person event, audience members noted that Fellini's films can make one "fall asleep" largely because of their lengthy duration and fragmented narratives. In contrast, attendees expressed greater interest in Fellini's personal life and in the performance of Masina, as well as in the kaleidoscopic variety of Fellini's styles and the themes that his cinematic trajectory offers overall.

However, my analysis of digital narratives of the 90th anniversary events also reveals that Korean audiences engaged fervently, not only with Fellini's most celebrated works such as *La strada* and *La dolce vita*, but also with his later productions, acknowledging the filmmaker's evolution of thematic and stylistic choices over time. An exhaustive look at Fellini's filmography offered by these events inspired Korean audiences to share a variety of views on his comic satire, depictions of women, memories from his childhood, and homage to real-life figures in literary and musical arenas such as Dante Alighieri and Maria Callas. Korean critics and audiences engaged with Fellini's depictions of

subjective memory and his use of multiple art forms far more often than his treatment of meta-cinematic narrative techniques.

These views can be gleaned from various types of digital materials deposited at Seoul Art Cinema's official blog, which boasted critical reviews of 22 films directed by Fellini as well as considerable photographic and textual documentations of in-person events. During an 'After Talk' discussion session held among ordinary filmgoers on the last day of the 90th anniversary retrospective, we witness brief but varied opinions on both Fellini's political stance and his filming techniques (Hulot, 2010). Titled 'Fellini, an Ode to Clowns,' this event invited interested audience members to convene and share their thoughts on Fellini's cinema, with individual essays written about Fellini's visual styles as well as his differentiation from other Italian neorealist filmmakers (Hulot, 2010). A viewer presented an essay on how Fellini's cinematic language emphasises "fantasy over realism" and focuses on the inner lives of Italians during the post-World War II period, in contrast to the social realism and a specific vision of the future of Italian society proposed and critiqued by previous Italian neorealists[3]. Relatedly, several filmgoers commented on Giulietta Masina's performance as the character Gelsomina in *La strada*, with one viewer stating that simply recalling her facial expressions brought them to tears. They concurred that the filmmaker's obvious love for the circus was generative for his film art, the endings of his films are striking and "sad" given their impression of "death", and reflections on his personal memories were given expression through cinema (Seoul Art Cinema, 2010).

The above perspectives from Seoul Art Cinema echoed the reviews of Fellini's films in the film section on Naver, the largest web portal and database in South Korea. This parallel demonstrated the consistency among Korean audiences' inclination toward their emotional engagement with Masina's performance and Fellini's non-linear modes of storytelling. One reviewer for *Amarcord* writes that Fellini's cinema significantly differed from others in cinematic history because he represented his memories "warmly", through a fragmented storytelling, rather than through an "intricate narrative" to move his audiences (Naver, 2008). The same reviewer adds that Fellini

[3] This and subsequent translations from Korean to English are by Hiju Kim.

nonetheless incorporated a diverse range of themes such as "the misdirected sexual desire of adolescent males, brutality of administrators, the extremism of fascism, an emotionally drained, dysfunctional family, [and] the insanity of women and men's antisocial behaviours" throughout his career (Naver, 2008). On an emotive note, the reviewer ends this entry by talking about plans to play the piece "Gelsomina" from *La strada* on the saxophone that night. The account also mentions how the person wept while watching "Gelsomina's wrinkled face" on television while Fellini was receiving the honorary award at the Academy Awards a year before his death (Naver, 2008). These reviews reflected a highly emotional engagement with Fellini's films in general and with Giulietta Masina's striking performance in *La strada*, thereby once again stressing the director's personal treatment of various themes through visual art and music.

During the 90th retrospective, Seoul Art Cinema sponsored four lectures, representing the variety of angles from which audiences can engage with Fellini's films on diverse historical and aesthetic levels. One was on Fellini's specific incorporations of visual art and fashion in *Satyricon*, another on Fellini and Italian neorealism, another on Fellini and modernity, and another on Fellini's relationship with opera, as expressed in *E la nave va/And the Ship Sails On* (1983). Through these lectures, the presenters focused on the specificity of Fellini's cinema, his formal distance from archetypal Italian neorealist films like Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette/Bicycle Thieves*, his affinity for the circus, and the transgressive and subversive modes of depicting the female body and religious objects. During the talk on opera, critic Han Chang Ho relayed Fellini's biographical details instead of focusing on the work itself through a formal analysis. For example, with *E la nave va/And the Ship Sails On*, Han recalled the film's homage to the Greek soprano Maria Callas and how Fellini began to appreciate opera during the years of his later productions. Han made keen observations on Fellini's attention to music, opera, and other forms of art, which were also elaborated in his published volume on Italian cinema and opera with a reference to Fellini.

Han's other criticisms of Fellini's cinema were also available for consultation on digital platforms. In 2015, Han also published a series of essays called 'Han Chang Ho's Trip to Italia' on the online film journal *Cine21*, which was designed to take readers on an essayistic tour

through Rimini and Rome with references to Italian films. With Fellini's films, Han narrated the director's estranged relationship with Rome as an outsider from Rimini, noting the sense of disillusionment delineated in *Lo sceicco bianco/The White Sheik* and the scenes portraying marginalised prostitutes and themes of poverty in *Le notti di Cabiria/The Nights of Cabiria*. Contrary to any rose-colored descriptions of Italy as one might expect in an essay that connotes a "trip" to a particular country, Han describes a journey that disillusions his readers of picturesque scenery by critiquing the comments of Charles Dickens who once described Italy as "dirty, poor, and loud" (Han, 2015). Instead of rebuking such negative perceptions on Italy, Han underscored the irony that Fellini had very much intended to recreate such an image of Rome as a "chaotic and squalid city" in a film such as *Le notti di Cabiria/The Nights of Cabiria*. Instead of romanticising notions of traveling, Han used the online platform to discuss Fellini's biographical details and his honest portrayals of Rome with cinema as a personal lens to the city (Han, 2015).

Korean Filmmakers' Discourse on Fellini

Internationally acclaimed Korean directors, Bong Joon Ho and Park Chan Wook, have shown an interest in Fellini by selecting their favourite Fellini films and paralleling them with other works found in Italian cinema or with their own. While some similarities could be found between Bong's and Fellini's films, Park explicitly distanced his style from Fellini's, stressing the otherness and incomparability of Fellini's films as the very reasons for his admiration for the Italian director. Following his critical success with *Parasite* (2019), Bong mentioned in an interview during the 19th Florence Korea Film Fest in 2021 that *Amarcord* and *Le notti di Cabiria* were his favourite Fellini films, while expressing his reverence for the history of Italian cinema overall (RB Casting, 2021). In mentioning Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and his Brothers* (1960), Bong remarked that the domestic migration of an impoverished family from southern Italy to start a new life elsewhere was similar to the themes portrayed in his own *Parasite* (RB Casting, 2021). Meanwhile, Bong's selection of his favourite Fellini films startled a few ordinary filmgoers online, as an anonymous user on *Extreme Movie* (a Korean website dedicated to

discussing cinema) commented that they were surprised to see how *8½*, a film that harbours the "agony of filmmaking", could not make the Korean auteur's list of favourite Fellini films (ItalianaMobstar, 2021). In these comments, Bong gravitates towards Fellini's films that stress nostalgia for his hometown and marginalised female figures, such as those in *Amarcord* and *Le notti di Cabiria*, underscoring his admiration for Fellini's personal and sentimental engagement with thematic elements rather than his meta-cinematic explorations as an acclaimed film auteur.

Back in 2010, Park Chan Wook, the director of the 2003 Cannes Grand Prix winner *Oldboy*, had a conversation with film critics Jung Sung Il and Hur Moon Young for *Cine21*, during which they discussed Fellini's cinematic style (Moonseok, 2010). During the conversation, Jung revealed that Park met him at the Seoul Art Center earlier that day to watch Fellini's *Città delle donne/City of Women* together (Cine21, 2010). The critic then asked for Park's thoughts on Fellini, for he assumed that the director would not have asked someone to watch a Fellini film together simply as a fan. In addressing this question, Park emphasised the difference between Fellini's films and his own, which was the very cause for his awe and curiosity directed at the Italian filmmaker. Park said of Fellini: "Fellini is someone who is very different from me. No, he is actually someone from the completely opposite side of my world. My favourite Fellini film is *Amarcord*, but I don't think I can ever make a film like that for the life of me. I guess I get curious, because he is so different. I like Sam Peckinpah and Robert Aldrich's films because they are familiar to me, but Fellini's world is very different" (Cine21, 2010).

Further to this comment, critic Jung Sung Il discussed the role of "personal taste" when it comes to cinephiles while using Fellini's filmography as an example. Jung, who provided the audio commentary for *8½* released as part of a Korean DVD set called *Retrospective Collection Vol. 1* (2003), elaborated on Fellini's trajectory, from starting out as a director during the prolific era of Italian neorealism, to moving onto modernist aesthetics in his later years. With the remark that "anybody can create a different portrait of Fellini from any point in his career", Jung used Fellini's *oeuvre* as a case study to determine a true 'cinephile': "If someone were to tell me that they like 'all of Fellini's films,' and if that person were a film scholar, then I would

immediately lose interest in them. If they were a cinephile, I'd be suspicious" (Cine21, 2010). Jung's comment reflects not so much his distaste for Fellini's films as his emphasis on one's "personal taste" being crucial to his definition of a 'cinephile', while recognising the heterogeneity of Fellini's filmography (Cine21, 2010).

In this vein, critic Hur then remarked that his favourite Fellini films were his earlier works, such as *Le notti di Cabiria* and *La dolce vita*, and Park mentioned that *Le notti di Cabiria* had left quite an impression on his assistant directors and actors for *Crush and Blush* (2008), a film directed by Lee Kyoung Mi and produced by Park. The film portrays a female protagonist who has difficulty in securing a romantic relationship, all the while suffering from a chronic case of extreme hot flashes. Indeed, a general similarity can be found between the protagonist and the street-smart and spiritually pure Cabiria, the female protagonist in *Le notti di Cabiria*. As these selections show, Korean filmmakers and the critics have emphasised Fellini's attention to marginalised individuals and communities, which have resonated with their own production teams, while recognising the differences that serve as additional sources of inspiration.

Tracking Back to the Centennial

Despite Fellini's films being a 'matter of taste' based on the above discussions, these interviews were later deployed by organisers to encourage ordinary filmgoers to engage virtually with the centennial celebrations in 2020. On Studio Gwangkki, a Naver video channel that provided the digital platform for the ITFF celebration in Korea, host Lee Gwang Ki and critic Hong Seok Hwa promoted the event through a brief, informal conversation, during which they mentioned Bong's selection of Fellini's works as two of his all-time favourite films (Gwangkki Channel, 2020). While they regretted the necessity of digital means to experience the films due to the pandemic, the two interlocutors heavily stressed Bong's preference for Fellini's films to promote their own centennial event. Given Bong's influential presence in Korean cinema for both domestic and international audiences, the organisers remarked that their viewers "would understand why the director had chosen such films by Fellini" once they watched the documentary *Fellini & L'Alter Ego* directed by Graziano Marraffa, a

film that was uploaded on Studio Gwangkki as part of their event (Gwangkki Channel, 2020).

In sum, South Korean audiences engaged with a variety of angles offered by Fellini's films, including the performance of his wife and muse, Masina, and his use of music and locations, based largely on Fellini's own personal engagement with various artistic media and the city of Rome. As these online reviews, comments, interviews, and past celebrations show, the debates surrounding Fellini's creative mixture of art forms and genres have inspired South Korean audiences to make emotional connections with his films based on their varied interests in the cinematic as well as extra-cinematic elements of music and opera. Rather than blindly taking an interest in Fellini's entire *oeuvre*, or merely his most well-known hits, audiences at large expressed their admiration for Fellini's diverse essayistic styles throughout his artistic career, making note of the differences between Fellini's art and other examples found in Italian and Korean cinema.

Japan

In Tokyo, Japan, to inaugurate this "Fellinian Year," the Italian Cultural Institute and the Mermaid Film organised a special screening of *8½* on Fellini's centennial birthday, 20 January, 2020. During the inauguration, Paolo Calvetti, then the Institute's director, announced two main events meant to celebrate the centennial of Federico Fellini. The first event, called the Italian Film Festival (イタリア映画祭, 2020), was sponsored by the Istituto Luce Cinecittà, the Italian Embassy in Tokyo, the Italian Cultural Institute, and the Asahi Newspaper, a major newspaper in the country. The festival was originally scheduled to screen several Fellini's films during the Japanese holiday week called "Golden Week" from 29 April to 3 May. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Italian Film Festival was postponed to November and December and adopted a hybrid mode of screening. Only the first hundred people, who applied beforehand, watched some of the films in person at the Italian Cultural Institute and paid no fees. The rest of the public could watch the movies on an online platform, promptly made by the Asahi Newspaper. As a consequence of this delay, Fellini's films were removed from the program because, by that time, the second event announced by Calvetti had already shown

Fellini's films. The second and main event was the "100 Years of Federico Fellini" (生誕 100 年フェデリコ・フェリーニ映画祭), sponsored by the Istituto Luce Cinecittà and the Mermaid Film in collaboration with seven film companies, including COPIAPOA Film, Culture Entertainment, Fujifilm, WOWOWPlus, Field Works, KADOKAWA, and Incontro. Scheduled from 31 July to 20 August at Yebisu Garden Cinema, the event included nine films: *The White Sheik*, *I vitelloni*, *La strada*, *Il bidone*, *Nights of Cabiria*, *La dolce vita*, *8½*, *Juliet of the Spirits*, and *Amarcord*. Eight films were screened in a 4K digital remastered version restored by the Italian film studio Cinecittà, which were unveiled in this enhanced format for the first time in Japan (only *La strada* was screened in a 2K digital remastered version).

The centennial celebration was a "cross-border dialogue," (Iwabuchi 2018:2) as Iwabuchi would have called it, showing how to foster diversity, inclusion, and equity in this global mobility and transnational culture. Examining the Fellini centennial celebrations in Japan, in this section, I first analyse how the Italian government and cultural organisations, together with Tokyo's local institutions, played a decisive role in the organisation of the retrospectives. Secondly, through my investigation of the social media responses, my analysis shows that Fellini's films had a profound impact and elicited a strong emotional response among Japanese moviegoers particularly, and surprisingly, with male viewers.

Significant coordination between Italy and Japan had to take place in order for this event to happen. The proposal of organising the "100 years of Federico Fellini" came from the Istituto Luce Cinecittà, as Nobuo Murata, representative of Mermaid Film and film director of「恋する男」(*A Man in Love*) (Murata, 2020)[4], stated in the online presentation before the screenings at the Tokyo International Film Festival. They started to coordinate almost three years in advance, anticipating an excellent success for both Italy and Japan. Cinecittà, thanks to the support of Gucci and other Italian organisations, restored 4K digital remastered versions of Fellini's films, which were presented to the Japanese public for the first time. Writer and translator Taro Okamoto was in charge of the translations of the subtitles for this occasion. In an interview at the "Autumn Festa 2019" hosted by the

[4] Hiromi Kaneda translated this section's quotes from Japanese to English.

Japan-Italy Association, he said: "Fellini is one of the most beloved filmmakers in the world and in Italy. He is great not only because of his films, but also as a unique and irreplaceable genius" (Kōeki zaidanhōjin nichiikyōkai, 2020). At the online presentation that preceded the screenings at the Tokyo International Film Festival, Okamoto recounted the difficulties of rewriting the subtitles of all nine films from Italian into Japanese. He said that each script was very dense and full of different meanings, and to capture these nuances in Japanese took him much thinking. He spent a significant amount of time watching and rewatching each film in order to grasp the real meaning of each word and to translate accurately for the Japanese audience. Okamoto said that it was arduous work; however, in the end, he felt well accomplished once he finished the translations.

The organising committee put an impressive amount of effort into promoting these screenings, which were held in person despite the pandemic. For the "100 years of Federico Fellini," the Japanese and Italian organisations made an official website, which included a long list of cities and theatres where the screenings took place – in such major cities as Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto as well as small towns and suburbs throughout Japan. My take on this comprehensive promotion is that the event's public relations committee intended to reach out to remote locations in Japan in order to expose the local populations to Italian culture, art, and cities, and to allow them to travel at least virtually, since the pandemic closed the borders between countries. Another purpose was to promote the fascination that the Japanese have always had for Italy and Italian products. In fact, *La dolce vita*, which displays many scenic views of Rome and fashion design, was the only one of the nine film selections that was included in every program planned in the various parts of the country. A short video promotion showcased still shots from all nine films in the program with some of the well-known soundtracks in the background. (Moviecollecitonjp, 2020). This promotion video was posted on many cinema theatres and Fellini's fan websites and social media.

Despite the pandemic, fans of Fellini's cinema still flocked to the screenings in person, and tickets were sold-out in many theatres. The fact that the tickets were sold out is a positive sign of the success of the "100 Years of Federico Fellini". Based on the success of this event, the Japanese and Italian institutions wanted to examine the possibility of

creating another more significant event on Fellini to show all his works. However, in the online presentation of 100 years of Fellini's birthday at the Tokyo International Film Festival, the film director Nobuo Murata explained that for some reason, the Istituto Luce Cinecittà was not so thrilled about this project because such an event would require extensive organisation and time.

The "100 years of Federico Fellini" event can be understood within the broader context of contemporary Japanese-Italian commercial, political, and cultural relations. The Italian Cultural Institute (IIC) in Tokyo promoted this event to strengthen the relationship between Italy and Japan. When Calvetti was first appointed as the new director of the IIC in 2016, he stated in the interview released by the Ca' Foscari University of Venice:

> Among the activities of greatest impact of the IIC is definitely **teaching Italian**. There is also, for example, a major **film festival**, organised in collaboration with one of the most highly followed media platforms. I intend to continue to enhance the most 'classic activities' related to cinema, art, and literature, whilst also working on the production of more cultural activities related to the world of production, such as **fashion** and **design**. The IIC must act as a **coordinator for cultural initiatives** and a **magnet for economic fabrics**. It is important to enhance and promote some of our **technological skills**, such as those that apply to the restoration and digitisation of cultural heritage. I am also planning a collaboration with RAI for the release of documentaries on these issues.
>
> (Calvetti, 2016. Bold is Calvetti's)

Calvetti's program to enhance the relationship between the two countries through culture, fashion, and technological know-how refers back to the 1866 Treaty of Friendship and Commerce between Japan and Italy. The two countries had a long history that began with the commercial tie of the silkworm egg trade. This exchange was crucial for both parties because it was a source of foreign currency for Japan and a relief from the silkworm breeding crisis for Italy.

Indeed, commercial trade, political cooperation, and cultural exchange between Italy and Japan have been intense in the post-World War Two period. The Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ICCJ) is an association of companies and entrepreneurs founded in Tokyo in 1972 to help promote trade between Italy and Japan, which was officially recognised by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1986. Part of the Assocamerestero (Association of Chambers of Commerce Abroad), the ICCJ actively maintains commercial relations and collaborations with 79 Italian Chambers in 54 countries. The ICCJ organises events and seminars throughout the year, providing information and advice to help the members better understand the markets of interest or develop marketing strategies. Many of these events expose Japan's mass culture, tradition, and art in Italy, and vice versa. Thanks in part to the ICCJ's efforts, nowadays, Japan appreciates "Made in Italy" products similar to how Italy lauds "Made in Japan". However, the relationship between the two nations is not restricted to economy and trade. Japan and Italy also participate in political meetings such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which "is an international organisation that works to build better policies for better lives" with a goal "to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity, and well-being for all" (OECD, 2011). For this reason, over the years, there have been numerous official visits of Japanese politicians to Italy and vice versa.

In order to better understand the public perception of Fellini's centennial and his films in Japan, I examine several Twitter comments and blogs written by moviegoers and fans of the director. Several moviegoers posted on Twitter pictures of the programs of the "100 years of Federico Fellini" screenings in their places of residence, thereby demonstrating their pride in having the event held in their small towns or provinces. These comments and blogs reveal the profound effect that Fellini's films had on a wide cross-section of Japanese society.

When reading the comments on Twitter, it is interesting to note that many Japanese men had a strong reaction *La strada*. One man shared that *La strada* was a special film for him. In his interpretation, there is a big and strong man, a small woman, and a fool in the film. Everyone is selfish, kind, and cruel. Watching the film, it is possible to feel joy and despair at the same time. These feelings make the film so unique

for this viewer, which he considers to be the reason why *La strada* is loved by many. He also suggested that if the festival's organisation were to conduct a survey among the attendees of the screenings, *La strada* would probably have been ranked as their top favourite movie. Another man tried to invite his wife to join him at the movie theatre, but he decided to go alone since they had different hobbies. This viewer wrote that he watched *La strada* so many times that it was impossible to keep count, and that he cried at the same scenes every time. He was also delighted to watch it on a big screen. He noticed that the flow of the story moved quicker than he thought and felt that ultimately it was a very human story like a fairy tale. All the comments above demonstrate how *La strada* resonated with the public. The screening of the film enabled the spectators to reflect on their own life and somehow enact a cathartic mode that helped them appreciate their own life. It is impressive that many Japanese men were open about their feelings on social media such as Twitter on this occasion. Primarily as a matter of male gender, Japanese culture is known for being very quiet and for hiding their emotions. The fact that many people had to stay at home during the pandemic might have created a shift in their behaviour.

Professors, actors, and other film directors were invited to lecture during Fellini's centennial retrospective so that the Japanese public had an opportunity to hear, interact, and learn from them. If it had not been for the border closure, Italian experts on Fellini's works might have also been invited for public talks. A filmgoer shared what he learned during a lecture delivered by Dr. Atsushi Okada, a Japanese historian of western art and Professor Emeritus at Kyoto University and Professor at Kyoto Seika University: "As a Catholic, in Fellini's view, while criticising the dogmatism, he put an idealistic faith in the ability of film to express festive, ingenious, and magical moments. [Prof. Okada] mentioned that their existence is a part of Fellini's creative attitude". Having these Q&A sessions helped to clarify some possible interpretations of the films, according to this Twitter user.

Relevant Twitter comments point to another successful screening, that of *8½*, which was shown in Tokyo and in other parts of Japan. A statement said: "In the carnivalesque film that creates the anguished filmmaker Guido, delusion and reality come and go, and the experience is too cult-like for it to be considered comedy and sci-fi. In this film by Director Fellini, I even loved the suffering of art creation and I felt that

I could enjoy life and say so. Life is a party". In sharing a similar sentiment, many other filmgoers simply posted the famous quote from Mastroianni in the last scene: "È una festa la vita, viviamola insieme! / 人生は祭だ共に生きよう". ("Life is a party, so let's live it together!") This message of enjoying life as it unfolds is a very compelling idea for the Japanese audience because Japanese people are typically tied to live a life respectful of rituals and tradition. It is difficult for the Japanese to become accustomed to an everyday life where they can reveal their true feelings. In Japanese culture, the word 建前 (*tatemae*) means façade, which is juxtaposed to 本音 (*honne*), which means true feelings. Typically, the Japanese follow socially-accepted standards and practice *tatemae* to maintain their public image. Widely shared by the Japanese, this duality is meant to maintain harmony in the society so that things can go smoothly without any clash, a concept which the westerners often misunderstand as a form of hypocrisy. Overall, these Twitter comments are excellent examples of transculturality, where Japanese viewers found an emotional outlet in Fellini's films and Italian culture in general to express their feelings without fearing the pressure of society.

In conclusion, this analysis of Fellini's Centennial in Japan shows how this event showcased the growing Italian-Japanese ties over a century and how both parties put in much effort to maintain and deepen ongoing political, economic, and cultural relationships. Even though the Covid-19 pandemic was still present, the "sold-out" signs in multiple theatres testified not only to the success of the event but also reinforced the interest of the Japanese public in Fellini's works. Through social media, online presentations, and interviews, this Japanese case study communicates popular and important messages about the Japanese audience's perceptions of Italian culture and its transculturality.

China

Under the aegis of China Film Archive (CFA), and in collaboration with the Italian Embassy and the Italian Cultural Institutes (ICI) in China, as well as Italy's Cineteca Nazionale (national film library), Bologna's Cineteca, and Cinecittà, a series of screenings were organised and promoted with a Chinese-English-Italian title:

> "费德里科•费里尼百年诞辰纪念放映 / Ciao! Federico Fellini: A Retrospective / Ciao, Federico! Rassegna retrospettiva per il centenario di Federico Fellini."

As CFA's English-language announcement boasts, the October and November 2020 version in Beijing presented a "luxurious programming list [that] includes 19 most important films of Fellini representing different periods of his whole creation and three shorts related to his art to review the magnificent cinema life of this genius in the world film history" (CFA 2020). In November and December, eight representative works were then screened in-person in Suzhou, Changsha, Xiamen, Chengdu, and Guangzhou. CFA's Chinese-language release about these events highlights the rarity of public screenings of Fellini's films in China and the "intimate, magnificent, and dream-like" quality of his cinematic world, which "has inspired countless cineastes, profoundly changing people's ways of viewing films" (Li, 2020)[5].

The above communiqués represent two tendencies within the promotion of Italian cultural events in contemporary mainland China. In Beijing, the nation's political and cultural capital and a critical geopolitical location in today's world order, the events were intended to showcase Italy not only to Chinese people, but, more crucially, also to foreigners living there, using the city as a stage on which to display Italy's cultural heritage and prestige. In China's other major cities, the events were meant to capture the interest of the local elites often through putting Italian culture on a pedestal, a practice favoured by the ICIs and the Italian Trade Agency (ICE, Istituto nazionale per il commercio estero), the official organisations and the driving forces behind the promotional efforts. Thus, the cultural articulation of official Italy in China operates both in a global theatre, which is provided by Beijing's increasingly prominent international stature, and at a local level, seeping into the Chinese elites' cultural consciousness and becoming integrated into their cultural repertoires.

Focused on Fellini's centennial in China, this section will only probe the latter, Chinese side of the story: What did the centennial's promoters and Chinese audiences each care about Fellini? Why and how did these

[5] Gaoheng Zhang translated this section's direct quotes from Chinese into English.

kinds of reception come about? I answer these questions by examining and juxtaposing relevant news coverage by or concerning the organisers and their commercial partners, as well as social media posts by moviegoers. The conversation that I stage between the two types of popular media texts helps form a more rounded view of the reception and appreciation of an Italian artist in China. This is a key example of the transculturation of Italian cultural assets and imaginations in a country which has become a primary market for "Made in Italy" products.

The abovementioned five-city retrospective attracted extensive news coverage, thereby providing us an overview of what the promoters and journalists believed would draw audiences to the screenings. To start, we may observe specific tendencies in the coverage which must have originated from a same source provided by 保利文化集团 / Poly Culture Group, the Chinese company that hosted the centennial in its own movie theatres in these cities (Poly Group, 2020). This body of texts often recommends Fellini by concisely summarising the accolades that he received during his lifetime, such as the film prizes, while displaying images of film posters and the exhibitions that were created for the centennial in China in the theatres. Some coverage also places Fellini within the larger context of European film traditions, calling him, Ingmar Bergman, and Andrei Tarkovsky "the Holy Trinity" of modern art cinema (Cong, 2020). Some journalists referred to Fellini as an auteur, praising his unique film style and philosophy, which are said to articulate his thoughts about society, life, and human nature (Tencent, 2020). Moreover, when appropriate, journalists mentioned existing Italian connections in these cities, which the centennial presumably would enhance. For example, when covering the retrospective in Changsha, 中国新闻社 / China News Service, an important state-owned news agency that traditionally serves Chinese overseas, highlights 华谊兄弟(长沙)电影小镇, a planned town financed by the Huayi Brothers Media Group for both filmmaking and tourism, where a full-scale Italian-style small town based on urban elements of Venice and Assisi is featured (Tian, 2020). In Suzhou, the retrospective took place in conjunction with the city's so-called "International Day", which highlighted Italy that year (Chai, 2021). Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the year in which Suzhou and Venice became sister cities

thanks to their reputations as renowned water towns East and West, the events exhibited Italian and Chinese arts and crafts and Italian lifestyle products (Chai, 2021). Finally, in cooperation with other entities or on their own, the various ICIs also organised screenings of Fellini's films in other major cities. For film lovers and professionals alike, both the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF, 2020) and the Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF) (SIFF, 2020) dedicated special programs to review Fellini's *oeuvre*, and the ICI Shanghai helped create an "Italian Film Retrospective" in both Shanghai (IICS, 2021) and Hangzhou (DaWuDing, 2021).

Arguably, the above media coverage of the retrospective did not demonstrate much specificity relating either to the centennial or to China. This news production could be applied to a Fellini retrospective in any given year and at any place with little substantive change. However, one media frame was indeed special for the year 2020 in China: the establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and the People's Republic of China celebrated its 50th anniversary. Unlike events surrounding Fellini's centennial in Japan and South Korea, for example, Chinese journalism that promoted the screenings frequently used this frame. The celebrations were significant at several levels. For one, Italy was the first G7 country and the most significant Western power in 2019 to have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China with the intent of furthering bilateral and multilateral cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, 2013-Present). Although no significant projects on Italian soil have been finalised at the time of writing, and although the MoU is not a binding document that guarantees specific commercial agreements, the symbolic weight of the signing represented a clear victory for China. Consider also the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected China first in February, and which then caused Italy to be the first worst hit European country in March. The Chinese were proud of the many subsequent national and civic aid programs and display of support between the two countries. (CGTN, 2020a & 2020b) Finally, because of the pandemic, most of the scheduled celebration activities were moved online. In particular, the Year of Culture and Tourism Italy-China (中意文化和旅游年 / Anno dellaCultura e del Turismo Italia-Cina), which was inaugurated in January, had to be postponed. The initiative would have

further promoted the existing cultural and tourist mobilities between the two countries through exhibitions, concerts, performances, and lectures (Lin, 2020; Consulate General of Italy in Chongqing, 2020).

These circumstances accentuated one of the few occasions for in-person interactions scheduled for the celebrations: Fellini's centennial screenings, which took place in late 2020, when the restrictions on holding public events had already been lifted in China. In summing up its contributions to the retrospective, Poly Culture Group's news release twice mentions a "Cinematic Silk Road" (Poly Culture, 2020). In the past, Fellini's work supposedly followed this route to reach China, which, once again in 2020, film lovers would "collectively construct" in order to "further Chinese-Italian friendship and disseminate film culture" (Poly Culture, 2020). Even though no mention is made in the text of Fellini's early appreciation in China, the informed reader likely thinks of the screenings of neorealist films on Chinese television channels. For example, when introducing the emergence and development of neorealism on the website of China Movie Channel, the CCTV-6 (China Central Television), the text uses Fellini's *Le notti di Cabiria/Nights of Cabiria* (1957) as a classic neorealist movie and *Roma* (1972) as an example of the director's innovation in neorealism (XiaoYu, 2002). Poly Culture Group resorted to this knowledge of Italian cinema in China but updated it with a new coinage according to the current political discourse (Poly Culture, 2020). "Cinematic Silk Road" is a prominent example of coining new terms based on the "Silk Road" including the "Maritime Silk Road" and the "Digital Silk Road", both of which are used by the Chinese official authorities. Following a logic proposed by the BRI narratives, which often exalt its role in rejuvenating and expanding the ancient Silk Road, the company stresses how it helped strengthen the "Cinematic Silk Road". Overall, by aligning itself with the BRI through this coinage, Poly Culture Group tapped into the momentum created by the 2019 MoU, which was viewed as solidifying the diplomatic ties between the two nations.

Culled from widely available digital news sources, the media texts that I have examined so far provide us with an understanding of the most important qualities of Fellini's cinema that the organisers and promoters conveyed to the public. But such news accounts did not register moviegoers' reactions to, and reviews of, the screenings. In order to probe this dimension in order to contrast it with official

announcements, I examine specific social media posts from 新浪微博 / Sina Weibo (2009-Present), a popular microblogging service and one of China's most successful social media platforms. I focus on Sina Weibo users who are arts and film enthusiasts, but who do not present themselves as academic experts of film studies or Fellini's cinema.

Several Fellini fans from Beijing remarked on the substantial time that they invested in attending the retrospective. In particular, they showed off photographs of the (almost complete) series of tickets of individual films that they purchased, with one ticket stacked on top of another and with the film titles shown prominently (JamesYue1998, 2020; woodooxp, 2020). Sina Weibo bloggers widely adopt such a strategy of messaging accentuation, which is visually expressed as a collection of images on a single theme. A user lamented how she was only able to secure an entrance to *I clowns/The Clowns* (1970) during the SIFF in Shanghai, even though she would have wanted to see *La dolce vita* (1960) and *Amarcord* (1973) again on the silver screen. But this blogger made the best out of the screening by furthering her understanding of Fellini's passion for clowns through posting several carefully-selected images (御宅之神 lulu2, 2020). One image offers a synopsis of *I clowns* and clarifies the role of the circus in Fellini's *oeuvre*; two images of clowns captured from the film are presented; in another film image, Charlie Chaplin's daughter poses as a clown; and another image depicts Fellini's wife and the actor Masina as a circus clown in *La strada* (1954). Prompted by the centennial, some Chinese users reflected on their interactions with Fellini's cinema without going to the retrospective screenings. One blogger apparently only attended a screening of *La dolce vita*, likely outside of the official retrospectives in the designated cities, but shared several photographs displaying Chinese dishes consumed in restaurants in November, in a humorous reference to the good life that the film depicts (索尔格, 2020). Exhibiting a square of six headshots in the post, another bogger attached a link to an article that introduces the lives and major works of several Italian male filmmakers, including Franco Zeffirelli, Fellini, Sergio Leone, Michelangelo Antonioni, Bernardo Bertolucci, Gabriele Salvatores, Dario Argento, and Giuseppe Tornatore (奢望之旅, 2020). The blogger intended the post and the article to convey an appreciation

both for the patience needed to understand the depth of Fellini's cinema and for the new experiences that Italian cinema brings to the viewer.

These examples of a specific visual and digital technique allowed by Sina Weibo illustrate Chinese moviegoers' varied, dedicated, creative, and even critical engagement with Fellini's films, thereby demonstrating aspects of the transculturation of his cinematic art in China. In the last example mentioned above, this transculturation is expressed in cinematic terms, as the post displays good general knowledge of Italian cinema. Consider also that the fact of fans attempting to attend all the screenings of Fellini's retrospective in Beijing is indicative of a cineaste behaviour which, after the disruption of the Cultural Revolution, was imported from the West via other east Asian countries and regions. These Chinese cinephiles embraced the fandom culture and the film club tradition. Moreover, the Sina Weibo posts showcase the interactions between China's vibrant digital culture, which is nurtured by new media, and Fellini's films, products of an audio-visual technology before the advent of the Internet. Coming out of a prolonged pandemic, which in many Chinese cities lasted eight months, the audience were eager to be physically present in the theatres to enjoy films made for the big screen. While the theatre experience and Fellini's films are inherited from an era when new media was unknown, most copies used for the official screenings presented the 4K restored versions with the help of current digital technologies and the moviegoers relayed their thoughts and emotions on social media. Such a productive tension between cinema and new media is beautifully illustrated by a Sina Weibo post that features a video blog, or vlog, that commemorates the blogger's trips to seven screenings in Beijing (吉兹末 Gizmo, 2020). The 3.5-minute long vlog simulates a black and white movie with shots likely captured by way of the author's smart phone. The vlog's *mise-en-scène* takes place in four locations: the theatre's reception hall populated by the many attendees; a dog was featured in a garden just outside the theatre; in the screening hall, the author captured a partially darkened clip of the final scene of *Le notti di Cabiria*, said to be her favourite; and at the blogger's home, she showed books about Fellini that she owned and recommended. With background music selected mostly from *La dolce vita*, the vlog conjures a feel of Fellini's casual and free-flowing aesthetics.

Transculturality is also articulated in relation to viewers' musings about Chinese society after screenings. The figures of the clown and the circus provide a specific lens through which to think about the social and human plights that one faces when living in one of the most prosperous and mobile eras in Chinese history. For another example in this connection, one post contemplates what the blogger believes to be a depiction in *I vitelloni* (1953) of restless and lost young men who live in a small town, and it questions the credo that restricted social milieus necessarily mean "yokes" presumably on the townspeople (lit_forest, 2020). Thus, *I vitelloni* provides a springboard for Chinese viewers to probe the tremendous consequences that vigorous domestic migration from the countryside to the cities, particularly since the 2000s, has caused in both the rural communities and the urban centers. Are "love, loyalty, and responsibility" more important than the pursuit of a better economic and modern life in big cities? (lit_forest, 2020).

Finally, transculturation of Fellini's art may also be oriented towards individual personal lives, of which the culinary-related good life described above is an example. Revisiting *Le notti di Cabiria* during the centennial screening in Guangzhou, a blogger relayed his emotions and a sense of nostalgia, which were enhanced by the company of a cinema studies student currently enrolled in the same university from which he graduated (Blonde 小朴时态, 2020). According to him, Fellini's characteristic narrative and cinematic language made him weep because he was reminded of the days when he grew intellectually and watched this and other films as a student. He experienced bittersweet emotions brought on by the deeper understanding of the Fellini films that he now possesses. For this blogger, the centennial became an acknowledgement of his growth as a young man.

As this section's analysis shows, the centennial's promoters engaged the news media mainly through the frames of the international stature of Fellini, the diffusion of "Made in Italy" products and lifestyle in China, and the 50th anniversary of Italian-Chinese diplomatic ties. As a juxtaposition, on social media, non-expert but educated moviegoers responded to Fellini's films in a variety of ways specific to their subjective positionalities and experiences, which seemed minimally connected with the official frames. More generally, by approaching the Chinese case study from both the official perspective adopted by the organisers and the perspectives of civil society and its members, I also

demonstrate the complexity of Italian-related transcultural phenomenon in China.

Conclusion

In South Korea, Japan, and China, Fellini's centennial celebrations prompted a retrospection of the director's legacies, in part accompanied by historical commemorations of each country's cultural and political relations with Italy. To highlight Fellini, commercial and governmental sectors in each country organised a series of events to attract moviegoers to numerous physical and virtual arenas. These arrangements, however, were impacted by the spread of Covid-19 in 2020, prompting adjustments of events on the ground level and our differing research agendas in the three sections. In South Korea, the pandemic put a halt to the majority of in-person events scheduled throughout the year, which steered the section's investigation away from the centennial and brought a focus to Fellini's 90th anniversary in 2010. On the other hand, in Japan, a special week of celebrations dedicated to Fellini's centennial generated a substantial online database of visual and textual presentations of the events, and in China, the year 2020 marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and the People's Republic of China, producing a wealth of news coverage and social media posts concerning the flow of transcultural exchanges.

Despite the differences in viewing experiences between the three countries owing to the vagaries of public health measures adopted, some commonalities stand out from our sections. First and foremost, the digital culture in all three films have extensively engaged with Fellini's centennial celebrations, thereby providing us with a solid understanding of contemporary cyberspace users' narratives of Fellini and Italian cinematic culture. Notwithstanding the three East Asian countries' differing political junctures shared with Italy, a summative examination of the audiences' narrated reception in the digital domain in this research paper generates a rather expansive and comparative understanding of Fellini's legacies. The results reveal the functional value of the screenings and reviews of Fellini's films as well as the cultural and political operations that each country's intergovernmental and commercial parties have partaken in order to maintain their cross-

cultural alignments. By retracing the digital engagements and the historical and present contexts between Italy and each country, this article offers a cross-disciplinary understanding of socio-cultural engagements of South Korea, Japan, and mainland China with Italy through Fellini and transnational cinematic culture. Digital media narratives about the filmmaker's wide-ranging themes and styles, together with the movie-going culture itself for art house films, also showcase the three countries' interests in Italian cinema as one key indication of these societies' continued engagement with Italy's highbrow cultural products. Furthermore, the relationships unveil the inner workings of domestic media in each country that attempt to re-utilise Fellini's prestige as a platform to organise and promote their own local events.

Furthermore, the narratives tend to focus on the viewers' emotional responses to Fellini's cinemas. Although the data from South Korea mainly tackles the audiences' perception of Fellini and his films outside the centennial celebrations, the segment conveys the Korean moviegoers' present-day appreciation of Fellini's films. Re-articulated by reviewers, critics, and filmmakers, this South Korean projection of Fellini's works encapsulates the audience's overall relationship with the director's films and other Italian films from the same period. The reactions from South Korea have resonated with those from Japan, as the emotive aspects from the Japanese reception recall the subjective introspections found in the Korean data. Finally, these media accounts point to the role that Fellini's centennial celebrations played in commemorating and furthering other economic, political, and cultural ties between Italy and each of the three countries. In the Japanese segment, an examination of the history of trade behind Italy and Japan has allowed readers to make a connection between the centennial and the two countries' economic and political relations. Such ties are also visible in the segment on China, as the research scrutinises the cultural and political glorifications of Italian products as reinforced by the local elites. The data from all three countries also reflect the audience's recent positionalities as they have surfaced through varying digital platforms within the last decade.

Through this research paper, we hope to re-affirm the value of critically investigating Italy's cinematic legacies as a way of examining transcultural relationships between Italy and Asia. We also showcase

how differing linguistic and cultural capacities, as well as co-authorship, can help advance this enterprise. Our analysis of Fellini's 2020 centennial screenings and the audience reception in South Korea, Japan, and mainland China provides an additional example of critically engaging with decolonial and transnational methods in Italian Studies.

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INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGIES IN ITALIAN STUDIES: USING SOCIOLINGUISTIC DATA TO DECOLONISE THE CURRICULUM

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Sommario
Quando gli studenti frequentano i corsi di italianistica, si aspettano di conoscere i contributi culturali e linguistici degli europei bianchi. I libri di testo e il canone letterario rafforzano questo approccio. Tuttavia, sia nel passato che nel presente, la comprensione del concetto di razza in Italia e nella diaspora italiana è molto più complessa e connessa a contesti specifici. Con il recente aumento delle migrazioni in Italia, la natura dell'identità italiana e chi può rivendicare l'italianità per se stesso sono diventati oggetti di forte dibattito nella sfera pubblica. Un modo per gli studenti di pensare criticamente all'interno degli studi d'italianistica è quello di conoscere le esperienze vissute dagli abitanti italiani emarginati e minoritari. In un passo importante verso la decolonizzazione del curriculum, alcuni docenti hanno iniziato ad includere opere letterarie di autori italiani afrodiscendenti come Pap Khouma e Igiaba Scego. Tuttavia, approcci diversi al di là degli studi letterari possono mostrare punti di studio diversi. Basandosi sulla ricerca sociolinguistica ed etnografica analizzata in Senegal Abroad (2019), questo articolo analizza come i migranti senegalesi a Roma concettualizzino il loro ruolo nella società italiana attraverso le loro riflessioni sull'apprendimento della lingua e sull'appartenenza culturale. Impegnandosi in questo tipo di dati in interviste, gli studenti di italiano possono partecipare ad un'esperienza di classe più diversificata, equa e inclusiva.

Keywords: Racialisation, multiculturalism, sociolinguistics, multilingualism, translanguaging, reflexivity, Italian studies, national identity, mobility, inclusive pedagogy, decolonising the curriculum

When students take courses in Italian studies, they often expect to learn about the cultural and linguistic contributions of white Europeans. While discourses around national identity influence this perception, Italian studies is equally responsible for this narrow-minded view. As

Deborah Parker argues in her seminal essay 'Race and Foreign Language', Italian studies suffers from a lack of diversity among its members and trails other Romance language disciplines with regards to inclusivity: "The field has been insular for decades, and a patronage culture prevails. Many Italian programs strive for 'authenticity' by favouring native Italians" (Parker, 2018: para. 9). In her private response to Parker, Catherine Adoyo elaborates, "I sincerely believe that the lack of diversity in disciplines like Italian is only just a symptom of a much deeper problem; the provincial attitude that Italian literature is *about* Italians with the corollary that it is *for* Italian readers, Italian scholars, Italian thinkers, Italian people and them alone" (Parker, 2021:161). Italian curricula and language learning textbooks reinforce this image, and while there has not been a systematic exploration of Italian pedagogical materials, Anthony Tamburri (2021:iii) affirms that the lack of diversity regarding "issues of race and ethnicity within the field of Italian studies are very much tied to a canonical notion of literature, a dominant cultural thought process that dictates for the reader how a novel might be constructed and what themes it should, or should not, include". Therefore, students engage primarily with this canon – texts by white men (e.g., Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio) who have been deemed the greats of Italian literature and whose contributions form the basis of an Italian identity formation that presupposes whiteness.

However, both historically and in the present day, understandings of race in Italy and the Italian diaspora are much more complex than many realise. The existence of the Southern Question – a phenomenon in which southern Italians have been considered culturally inferior to northerners and have been described as more African than Italian – means that since 19th century nation-building, Italians have sought to distinguish themselves from anything that suggests Blackness. Furthermore, while Black Africans have been in Italy for centuries (e.g., enslaved Africans landing in Italy because of Florence's role in the slave trade; prominent people in Italy's history, such as Alessandro de' Medici, who would be considered Black by today's standards), this historical Black presence has remained largely unknown. Recent migrations to Italy have been more successful in igniting highly contested public discussions about the nature of Italian identity and who can claim Italianness or *Italianità*. Relatedly, as the global fight against

systemic racism proliferates, the correlation between whiteness and Italianness has been increasingly interrogated. As educators, we must ask ourselves the following question: how do we respond not only to this new focus on diversity in Italy but also to the increasing awareness among scholars from various fields that we must decolonise our Italian studies curricula?

While decolonising the curriculum has become a buzz phrase in the current climate, it is important to specify exactly what it means. Keele University's manifesto on the subject cogently articulates the key points, which include recognising that no one owns knowledge and that "knowledge is inevitably marked by power relations" (Keele University, 2018). Furthermore, the manifesto enunciates several steps to truly achieve decolonisation, including but not limited to "rethinking, reframing and reconstructing the current curriculum in order to make it better, and more inclusive"; not just "bringing in minority ethnic writers and texts" but also reconsidering "how we read 'traditional mainstream' texts"; "identifying ways in which the university structurally reproduces colonial hierarchies" and providing alternatives and "creating spaces and resources for a dialogue among all members of the university on how to imagine and envision all cultures and knowledge systems in the curriculum" (Keele University, 2018).

The edited volume *Decolonizing Foreign Language Education* (Macedo & DeGraff, 2019) takes these principles and distils them through the lens of foreign language education. Donaldo Macedo's chapter asks us to question "dominant colonial standard languages and the old assumptions about their inherent superiority" (46). Claire Kramsch then argues for a "dialogue with speakers from other educational cultures *on their own terms*, and the willingness to enter the slow and difficult process of linguistic and cultural translation" (69). Meanwhile, Ofelia García explores how, both historically and in the present day, "powerful elites have imposed a way of using language that is constrained by artificial conventions and that reflects their own language practices" (152). Connecting language to the idea of the nation, she adds, "Nation-states have co-opted the human potential of language as a meaning-making semiotic tool, relegating many speakers to a position of speechlessness" (152). She champions the notion of translanguaging pedagogy, a social justice tool that privileges "the fluid language practices of multilingual communities" to "liberate sign

systems that have been constrained by socio-political domination, attempting to give voice to all and redress power differentials among speakers" (163).

The edited volume *Diversity in Italian Studies* (Gibby & Tamburri, 2021) offers various pedagogical approaches to addressing Italian studies's lack of curricular diversity and its need to decolonise its curricula. For instance, Vetri Nathan relies on the Italian canon but asks students to engage with these texts critically "in order to gain a deeper insight into how literary and cinematic representation in itself poses many problematic questions about identity and power" (151). Deanna Shemek suggests "making visible the topics and players already present" in canonical texts in addition to adding texts from non-white authors outside the canon, such as Pap Khouma or Amara Lakhous (173). Meanwhile, Alessia Valfredini highlights the limits of textbooks by supplementing them with "a variety of voices that reflect a complex and multifaceted view of Italy" (179). She goes beyond literary texts to include song lyrics, newspaper articles, dialogue from movies, commercials and other types of texts (184).

In this article, I build on these pedagogical suggestions to show how interviews with minoritised and marginalised inhabitants in Italy provide students a complementary way to think critically about Italian studies. I have found that sociolinguistic, ethnographic research such as the data in my book, *Senegal Abroad* (2019), is a productive archive for students to analyse. Through this work, they uncover how members of the Senegalese diaspora conceptualise where they fit in *Italianità* through their reflections on language learning and cultural belonging. Taking a sociolinguistic approach to decolonising and diversifying Italian studies is important because (1) the student body at most universities is becoming more racially, ethnically, socio-economically and linguistically diverse; (2) students are constantly grappling with their own experiences as language learners and linguistic beings and (3) language is something that intersects with various other identity markers, a reality that people from minoritised and marginalised groups, such as those in my research, experience quite acutely.

With regards to diversity within the USA, 40% of the US population now identify as people of colour, and 20% of the population speak a language other than English at home. In higher education, students of colour make up over 45% of the student body. Furthermore, over 5% of

university students are foreign nationals, most coming from non-English-speaking countries. With these demographics in mind, Shemek (2019:170) rightly asks, "For what student population should Italian studies courses be designed?" Her answer is spot on:

> Just as students of European extraction are boosting enrollments in Arabic and Japanese, Italian should be seeking to attract students of Hispanic, Asian, African, and other backgrounds. Our task, as I see it, is to join this exciting and complex conversation, bringing Italian studies into a broader world picture and embracing the fact that Italy itself has become an increasingly multiethnic culture. (170)

If students enrolling in our courses look less and less like the historical, stereotypical representation of an Italian studies student, how will they be received in the classroom and in Italian society? Ryuko Kubota (2009) contends that linguistic legitimacy goes beyond the ability to speak a language. It is "determined by a discourse that produces a certain linguistic and racialized profile as legitimate or illegitimate speakers" (236). Similarly, Christina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (2012:10) show the false relationship between linguistic competence and societal acceptance in Italy: "Italianità seems unattainable for [B]lack Italians precisely because national belonging is generally understood in terms of specific traits (both cultural and biological) that cannot be simply acquired by a perfect mastery of the language and the Italian way of life". In other words, skin colour and other racialised markers impose restrictions on Black Italians' claim to *Italianità* even when they possess Italian language abilities.

This othering is exactly the experience of many scholars of colour in Italian studies as evidenced by Parker's (2018 & 2021) essays, where the 40 or so professors and graduate students she interviewed detail alienation and exclusion simply because they are not white. Those in power often weaponise language as an otherising force. For instance, Parker (2021:160) laments the language tests that 'peninsular Italianists' often put minority scholars through: "Many people speak a foreign language with an accent; virtually all make occasional grammar mistakes. But this phenomenon can become a way of testing a

minority's or non-native speaker's bonafides [...]. *What* we say should prevail over *how* we say it".

If this sort of linguistic discrimination exists among scholars in the field, what does this mean for the students in our classrooms and in study abroad programs? In a heartbreaking reflection on her experience as a doctoral student in Italian studies, Kenyse Lyons (2021) recalls the onslaught of injustices she suffered (e.g., exoticised as *la perla nera* [black pearl], belittled by professors, excluded by fellow students, barred entry to the library by white guards). However, the incident that has caused the most harm is an experience tied to language: "The most destructive stereotype I encountered during my studies showed up in the form of a trusted professor's claim – unsupported by any textual analysis of my writing – that language would be my 'Achilles heel'" (137).

Because of her experiences, she is deeply attuned to what her own students might encounter in their studies and provides strategies to cope with the 'race-based stress' that is embedded in our institutions. For instance, among other suggestions, she implores those in power to accept "students' historical realities, lived experiences, and the perspectives they give rise to"; encourages students to "actively seek out those aspects of the discipline where their social identity is included" and entreats them to "advocate on behalf of themselves and others for more culturally responsive practices of student/scholar engagement" (2021:144-145).

These suggestions are central to the pedagogical model that I advance in this essay. Our students, especially those from international or immigrant backgrounds, may struggle with their multilingual and multicultural identities when our pedagogical practices treat their abilities as hindrances instead of as assets. How can we expand our pedagogy to centre multilingualism and multiculturalism? What happens when we present nonliterary texts by non-white people to our diverse classrooms? What happens when texts in the target language are not just by monolingual native speakers? As Kramsch and Anne Whiteside (2008:664) argue,

> Social actors in multilingual settings seem to activate more than a communicative competence that would enable them to communicate accurately, effectively, and appropriately

> with one another. They seem to display a particularly acute ability to play with various linguistic codes and with the various spatial and temporal resonances of these codes. We call this competence 'symbolic competence'.

Therefore, if we give students the tools to invest in their language learning identities and to build on the linguistic and cultural capital they already bring to the classroom, they will be better prepared to navigate the culturally and linguistically diverse environments in which they will undoubtedly find themselves in life. Multilingual, sociolinguistic texts not only expand students' understanding of their abilities as multilingual beings but also redefine identities such as those associated with notion of *Italianità*.

Using sociolinguistic, multilingual texts in the Italian studies classroom

The following transcribed texts of interview data can be used in a wide range of classes in either the target language or English, from beginning Italian language classes to upper division content courses in Italian studies. Instructors can help students analyse these authentic texts for linguistic phenomena and/or read them as cultural reflections on lived experiences in Italy and the diaspora. I have presented them in colleagues' courses when guest lecturing and in invited talks at various universities. Student discussions of these texts have always been engaging and enlightening. While most of the excerpts I present are from data I collected in Rome, I also include conversations that took place in Paris and New York, because it is important for students to see that Senegalese migrants use Italian outside of Italy.

I introduce the texts by first talking a bit about the linguistic situation in Senegal and the migration pathways that those in my study took to get to Paris, Rome and New York. Senegal is officially French speaking but is also proudly multilingual with over 17 recognised national languages. Senegal also has a robust migratory tradition. Many Senegalese migrated to France during French colonial rule and continued to do so after gaining independence in 1960. However, French migration restrictions in the 1970s and 1980s redirected migration flows to Italy and the USA. Currently, there are about 90,000

Senegalese in France, 110,000 in Italy and 20,000 in the USA. The following examples are the types of texts that student analyse when thinking about Senegalese reflections on Italian and *italianità*.

'Je suis nero, je suis brutto, ma je suis vivo'

When decolonising Italian curricula, we should centre race in our discussions for multiple reasons. First, non-white members of Italian society are racialised in their daily lives. If we want to produce an ample and accurate portrait of life in Italy, these experiences should be included. Second, our students come from diverse backgrounds and could experience this racialisation if they get the chance to study or travel in Italy. Third, all students, regardless of their racial background or their opportunities to travel abroad, should be exposed to how racialisation works in various contexts. Teaching about race in Italy can open the conversation to comparisons with the USA.

It is important to help students theorise what race is and why it exists. I often begin any unit that discusses race with a lecture either in English or in the target language. For general theorisation, I bring in Omi and Winant's (2015:109) work on racial formation: "the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed". While dominant understandings of race tend to suggest that race is either a biological fact or an illusion, Omi and Winant argue that race is a social construct with very real consequences both in how it is embedded in macro-level social structures and in how it plays out at the micro-level in everyday interactions between people. People become racialised, that is, they are seen as belonging to a certain race and treated a certain way based on this race. This racialisation does not happen in a vacuum but is built on a historical legacy. We therefore make sense of the world through a racial lens.

I then share sociolinguistic data to illustrate how a person might experience racialisation. For instance, I introduce students to two Senegalese men in their 40s, Ndiaga and his friend who goes by the nickname Professore, whom I interviewed in Rome and whose reflections are found in *Senegal Abroad*. They both discuss how they did not think about being Black when they lived in Senegal. It is in Italy that their Blackness has become an issue.

In the following excerpt, Ndiaga and Professore quote a work of African-American fiction to articulate the racial exclusion they experience in Italian society:

> Professore: La demande, c'était?
> Interviewer: Tes pensées sur l'Italie?
> Professore: **Vabbèh** –
> Ndiaga: – Tu as, tu as [*trails off*]
> Professore: Les –
> Ndiaga: Tu as vu, vu le film Co, Col, Color *Viola*.
> Interviewer: Non. Oh, The Color Purple.
> Ndiaga: Color *Viola*.
> Interviewer: The Color, oui.
> Ndiaga: Tu [l'as vu]?
> Professore: Color Purple.
> Interviewer: Oui. Oui. C'est, c'est fort.
> Ndiaga: Je suis noir – je suis *nero*, je suis *brutto*, ma, je suis *vivo*!
> Interviewer: *Esatto*.
> Ndiaga: *È bellissimo*[1].

This short text is a gold mine for student analysis. I first ask students to consider the message Professore and Ndiaga convey through their conversation. Students pick up on the racial dimensions right away. I then have them ruminate on the rhetorical and linguistic features that Professore and Ndiaga use to make their point. Students usually first

[1] Professore: The question, it was?
Interviewer: Your thoughts about Italy.
Professore: **OK** –
Ndiaga: – Have you, have you [*trails off*]
Professore: The –
Ndiaga: Have you seen, seen the film Co, Col, Color *Purple*?
Interviewer: No. Oh, The Color Purple.
Ndiaga: Color *Purple*.
Interviewer: The Color, Yes.
Ndiaga: You [saw it]?
Professore: Color Purple.
Interviewer: Yes. Yes. It's, it's powerful.
Ndiaga: I am black – I am *black*, I am *ugly*, but, I am *alive*!
Interviewer: *Exactly*.
Ndiaga: *It is beautiful*.

note the quoting of *The Color Purple*. I then give background information on Alice Walker's novel and the film adaptation by Steven Spielberg before sharing the original quote that the battered Celie says to her abuser Albert: "I'm poor, black, I might even be ugly, but dear God, I'm here! I'm here!" As a class, we think about why Ndiaga chooses these words to sum up his experience in Italy. What does it mean to voice an African-American female character in a story full of racialised and gendered violence? We talk about how Ndiaga and Professore embody the emotions expressed by this fictional character and how her words evoke not only struggle but also defiance and agency. I also highlight for them the transnational dimensions of this exchange where the African-American experience in *The Color Purple* sheds light on Black identity formation an ocean away. Furthermore, by cutting off and speaking over each other as well as amplifying the other's words through repetition, Ndiaga and Professore co-construct this racialised narrative.

However, the multilingual aspect of this exchange also contributes to this understanding of race. I draw students' attention to the strategic code-switching that Ndiaga performs. Why does he keep the 'I am' in French but switch to Italian in describing himself as *nero*, *brutto* and *vivo*? I then explain to them the concept of metaphorical code-switching, where, according to Blom and Gumperz (1972:408), switching between languages "enriches a situation, allowing for allusion to more than one social relationship within the situation". Students often note that the switching between the French and Italian could signify a linguistic divide that conveys a feeling of societal exclusion. They may also see Ndiaga as making claims to an Italian identity in his use of Italian adjectives to describe himself. Because there are many ways to read what multilingualism does in this passage, students can be simultaneously creative and analytical in approaching the text.

'Ho tornato italiano adesso'

While race should be highlighted in a decolonising the curriculum approach to pedagogy, decolonisation must bring in other markers of diversity, such as multilingualism and national identity. My interviewees take great pride in their mobility and their multilingual

repertoires, extolling the virtues of being able to cross geographic and linguistic borders. Furthermore, they celebrate more than just being able to speak many languages. I therefore like to draw students' attention to ways in which language learners enjoy the different identities they acquire because of these languages.

For instance, during a tantalising conversation at a Senegalese restaurant in Rome, various Senegalese patrons negotiate national identities in a manner that plays on words and languages in a creative way. Here, Idi (I), a friend (F) and Bachir (B) joke about being Italian:

Idi:	Non mi piacciono i senegalesi, e per questo io ho tornato italiano adesso. Capito? [*everyone laughs*] I senegalesi parlano troppo, capito. Hai visto questo?
Friend:	Chi è italiano? Sei italiano?
Idi:	Sì.
Friend:	Meno male. Boy, *yow yaa doon naan fii*?
Idi:	Non è male che cosa?
Friend:	Perche sei italiano adesso. Noi siamo dei senegalesi, capito?
Bachir:	**Je suis fier d'être sénégalais**.
Friend:	*Wax ko si italien*.
Idi:	Ecco, io, grazie a tutti –
Friend:	*Jox ko si ndox mi mu naan si* **italien**.
Idi:	*Bokkul si* **italien**.
Friend:	*Waaye benn la*.
Idi:	*Asstaf four la*[2].

[2] Idi: I don't like the Senegalese and therefore I've become Italian now. Understood? [*everyone laughs*] The Senegalese talk too much. Understood? You've seen this?
Friend: Who's Italian? You are Italian?
Idi: Yes.
Friend: Thank goodness. Boy, *wasn't it you who was drinking here*?
Idi: What thing isn't bad?
Friend: Because you are Italian now. We are Senegalese, understood?
Bachir: **I am proud to be Senegalese.**
Friend: *Say it in Italian*.
Idi: Listen, I, thanks to everyone –
Friend: *Give him some water so he can drink it in* **Italian**.
Idi: *That is not part of the* **Italian language**.
Friend: *It's the same thing*.

I ask students why in an environment like the Senegalese restaurant where Wolof is predominantly spoken, Idi would speak in Italian to voice his decision to give up his Senegalese identity. I then have students brainstorm the ways in which those in the conversation conceptualise what identity is. Students note the humour displayed in suggesting that everyday activities such as drinking water can be done in Italian. They also remark that Idi is making claims on *Italianità*. In addition, we interrogate the 'us' versus 'them' framework where *noi* (we) represents the Senegalese who did not defect and 'them' represents Idi, who is now Italian. I then ask students to think about why Bachir would express his Senegalese identity in French by saying he is proud to be Senegalese when I explain how in other parts of his interview, he speaks about the colonising nature of French. For students, it is important to see how people negotiate identity through the use of multiple languages and through playful humour.

I also point out that a person does not have to use standard language to communicate effectively. For instance, Idi says 'io ho tornato italiano adesso' (literally, 'I have turned Italian now') to announce to everyone he has become Italian. In standard Italian, one would expect 'sono diventato italiano'. While some may view this as a mistake, it is important to show students that Idi was able to convey meaning through nonstandard usage with no issue. Students are always so worried about committing errors. Reminding them they can still be great communicators even when they veer from standard usage can be a liberating realisation for them.

'Un perfetto uomo che parla tutto'

This final excerpt explores how negotiating *Italianità* does not happen just in Rome. Senegalese in other parts of the diaspora carry their experiences with Italy, Italian and *Italianità* with them as they move throughout the world. For instance, Ousseynou, a 37-year-old taxi driver that I interview in Harlem, New York, and the waiter of the Senegalese-French restaurant where we conduct our interview begin speaking Italian when I ask Ousseynou what his favourite language is.

Idi: *Forgiveness from God. / It's not true*.

This spontaneous use of Italian on US soil shows how Italian can be found anywhere even though students often assume they will hear it only in Italy or in Italian-speaking enclaves. The multilingual usage also demonstrates how easily people can switch between languages:

Ousseynou: Ma *ça fait huit ans* **ma ngi fii leegi**.
Waiter: Ora io sono qui da cinque mesi.
Ousseynou: Cinco mesi? Ah.
Waiter: Cinque mesi che sono qui.
Interviewer: Ah, OK.
Waiter: Però io sono laureato in lingue.
Interviewer: Anch'io.
Waiter: Perciò ho studiato lingue. Inglese, francese, spagnolo, portoghese.
Interviewer: Anch'io!
Waiter: Sì! ...
Ousseynou: Un perfetto uomo che parla tutto ... *Tu as vu hein? Ça c'est les Sénégalais.*
Interviewer: *Oui oui. C'est incroyable.*
Ousseynou: *Les Sénégalais aiment voyager, aiment apprendre des langues. Tu vois?*[3]

Students are always amazed at the fluidity in the use of and movement between languages such as in the line 'Ma *ça fait huit ans* **ma ngi fii leegi**' [But *it's been eight years* **I am here now**] where Ousseynou speaks in Italian, French and Wolof or the question, 'Cinco mesi?' [Five months?], asked in both Italian and Spanish. They also cannot imagine

[3] Ousseynou: But *it's been eight years* **I am here now**.
Waiter: I've been here for five months.
Ousseynou: Five months? Ah.
Waiter: Five months I'm here.
Interviewer: Ah, OK.
Waiter: But I graduated with a degree in languages.
Interviewer: Me too.
Waiter: For that reason I studied languages. English, French, Spanish, Portuguese.
Interviewer: Me too!
Waiter: Yes! ...
Ousseynou: A perfect man who speaks everything ... *You see, eh? That is how Senegalese are*.
Intervoewer: *Yes, yes. It's incredible.*
Ousseynou: *The Senegalese love to travel, love to learn languages. You see?*

a Senegalese waiter suddenly speaking in Italian in a Senegalese-French restaurant in New York just from overhearing a conversation. They appreciate the matter-of-fact way Ousseynou announces that Senegalese love multilingualism with his line 'Un perfetto uomo che parla tutto' [A perfect man who speaks everything] and get a front-row seat to the concept of symbolic competence that Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) have articulated.

After analysing this passage, I ask students to brainstorm all the reasons why being multilingual is important. Communication with a variety of people, navigating foreign environments and job opportunities are some of the responses they share. I then follow up with one last quote from Ousseynou so he can explain in his own words. At one point in our interview, Ousseynou divulges that he wants to learn Spanish because of his job as a taxi driver: "Por me, è muy interesante de hablar muchos *different languages* ... si le client entre dans ma voiture, je dis, '¿Cómo estás? ¿Muy bien?' *They say* '*Ah, OK*, ¡tu hablas español!' Tu vois?" ["For me, it is very interesting to speak many *different languages* ... if the client gets in my car, I say, 'How are you? Very good?' *They say*, '*Ah OK*, you speak Spanish!' You see?"] For Ousseynou, speaking the language of his clients goes beyond utilitarian purposes for his job. It allows him to offer linguistic hospitality by creating an inviting space for them to feel welcome.

Scaffolding student experiences

It may be overwhelming at first for teachers to present multilingual, sociolinguistic texts if they normally use monolingual, literary texts in the classroom. However, because *Senegal Abroad* offers detailed analysis of these excerpts, which include useful background information about the speakers and their experiences, teachers are not flying blind when they ask students to engage with these texts. Additionally, students should be empowered to use their own experiences with multilingualism when they attempt to make sense of these texts. For that reason, I scaffold their engagement with the course texts by having students complete reflexive exercises.

Students often benefit from keeping language journals, either in English or in the target language, where they explore different concepts. For instance, near the beginning of a course term, I may have them

reflect on their linguistic autobiographies by asking the following questions: What languages do you speak? In which contexts? With whom? How have you learned these languages? Through formal instruction, informal conversations or immersion experiences? How confident do you feel using each of your languages in speaking, listening, reading and writing? Do you ever mix languages by switching between them? What are your thoughts of these practices? Depending on how you set up your assignments, you can ask multiple questions at once or have them focus on one or two questions in a series of low-stakes assignments. It is up to you to decide how often and in what format students share their responses. Sometimes I have them submit their writings to me. Other times I ask them to share with each other in small groups or the whole class. Sharing is key because I find it very helpful for students to hear about their classmates' experiences with language.

In addition to these more general questions, I may define a term and prompt them to think about whether they have experienced this phenomenon in their lives. The following are examples of possible discussion prompts:

(1) Ofelia García (2009:140) defines translanguaging as "the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential". Describe any instances in your life where you have engaged in translanguaging.

(2) Anne Charity Hudley (2017:383) argues, "Negative messages about language can be experienced as linguistic microaggressions. [...] [A] linguistic microaggression, which tends to be made toward people of color, is the statement 'You talk White' or 'You sound White', although the statement 'You sound Black' (or 'Mexican', 'Indian', etc.) can also sometimes be made. These microaggressions can imply that members of racial or ethnic groups are expected to talk and 'sound' the same, that anyone who does not is deviant and that some cultures are

> not worth identifying with. Furthermore, it can imply that the speaker in question, because of how she or he talks, no longer belongs to or identifies with her or his home culture, which may not be true". Have you ever experienced or witnessed others experience these types of microaggressions? If so, describe your emotions and responses to the microaggressions as well as your relationship to the racial/ethnic/linguistic identities in question. If not, how do you think you would feel and respond?

The first prompt would serve as a primer for a class where students are tasked with analysing any multilingual, sociolinguistic texts. The second prompt would introduce students to concepts they can uncover in sociolinguistic tests describing race and language attitudes. Creating a space where students have the time and tools to reflect on their own linguistic autobiographies helps them make sense of the course texts and make connections to their lived experiences.

Conclusion

A decolonising Italian studies pedagogy must reframe what Italian language education is and recentre who Italian language speakers and students are. To do so, we cannot rely on narrow assumptions about the Italian language, such as that it is spoken only by idealised native speakers in homogeneous, monolingual environments. We cannot put forth stereotypical depictions of Italian speakers or gloss over the immense diversity of Italy and other Italian-speaking settings. We also cannot assume that our students hail from only white, middle-class backgrounds where their only interest in the Italian language is to travel in Italy and be familiar with the Italian canon.

One way to address these issues is to present language and cultural studies students with texts that challenge all the preconceptions they may bring to the classroom. In this chapter, I have offered multilingual, sociolinguistic texts by non-native speakers of Italian who also happen to be Black and Senegalese. I have shown how these speakers use Italian alongside other languages in complex and creative ways and how they make identity claims in doing so. I have also demonstrated

how students can go further than simply analysing these texts. Teachers can pair these activities with reflexive assignments that force students to take stock of their own linguistic, cultural and racial experiences and how these experiences compare with what they are learning from the course texts. We must work hard so that our students never experience the pain and injustices that Lyons endured as a student in Italian studies. We can do so by honouring students' social identities and lived experiences while also empowering them in their journeys as language learners. This push to diversify our materials, make our classrooms more inclusive and relevant and recalibrate what it means to be an educator better serves our multicultural and multilingual student bodies.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS, BRIDGING COMMUNITIES: NEW DIRECTIONS IN ITALIAN-CANADIAN STUDIES

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Sommario

Questo articolo offre una breve storia critica dello sviluppo degli studi italo-canadesi e presenta due progetti che hanno recentemente contribuito all'espansione del campo in nuove direzioni teoriche, pedagogiche e metodologiche: il progetto Indigenous-Italian-Canadian Connections *e il progetto* Queer Italian-Canadian Artists, *che fa parte della più ampia iniziativa nota come* Queer and Italian-Canadian Project. *Il presente articolo introduce brevemente il primo progetto e si concentra sul secondo, fornendo una storia dell'iniziativa e descrivendo i vari sforzi orientati alla comunità (italo canadese) e allo studio a essa collegati; questi includono un documentario, un'antologia e un progetto di ricerca qualitativa. Il documento si conclude con una descrizione metodologica del progetto di ricerca qualitativa* Queer Italian-Canadian Artists*. Questo progetto di ricerca mira a identificare e studiare le esperienze dei creatori LGBTQ+ o queer italo canadesi, i modi in cui i valori tradizionali delle comunità italo canadesi hanno portato all'emarginazione dei suoi membri queer e i contributi degli italo canadesi queer alla vita sociale e culturale (italo canadese)*[1].

Keywords: Italian diaspora, Italian-Canadian writing, LGBTQ+ writing, community-based initiatives, Indigenous communities

[1] Paolo Frascà is also the co-director, with Angela Nardozi, of the *Indigenous-Italian-Canadian Connections* project, for which separate knowledge-dissemination efforts are underway. For more information, please visit the project website at www.iicconnections.com.

Italian-Canadian studies: Yesterday to today

Italian-Canadian studies is an interdisciplinary field that emerged in Canada in the 1980s and became a recognised area of scholarly inquiry through the establishment of institutions such as the Mariano A. Elia Chair in Italian-Canadian Studies at York University in Toronto, the Centre for Italian-Canadian Studies (later named after the Honourable Frank Iacobucci) at the University of Toronto and the journal *Italian Canadiana* (first issue 1985) at the University of Toronto. In its institutionalised forms, since its inception the field has had a multi-faceted mandate that encompasses research, teaching and community-oriented work.

The University of Toronto's Frank Iacobucci Centre for Italian-Canadian Studies (henceforth 'Iacobucci Centre'), housed within the larger Department of Italian Studies (St. George Campus), has a well-defined mandate: "to study the cultural and social life of the Italian-Canadian community, viewed in the context of multiculturalism and related to the evolving themes that inform research and writing on Canadian history generally". The mandate clearly highlights the interdisciplinary approach of the Iacobucci Centre and its "aim to foster the activities of academics, artists, professionals, and community activists working on topics related to all aspects of culture, experience, and history of the Italian diaspora in North America" (Italian Studies Website, 2020).

This mandate is remarkable particularly because it highlights the need for Italian-Canadian studies to be a scholarly space that is in active conversation with the community and that engages with political issues that affect Italian-Canadians. We can see this, for example, in the inclusion of 'activists' in the list of community figures that the Iacobucci Centre wishes to welcome into its operations, as stated on the Centre's website, and in the common use of language that appeals to multicultural, pro-migrant policies. Similarly, the Mariano A. Elia Chair, on its web page, highlights the importance of featuring, in its speaker series, "internationally respected scholars, researchers on all aspects of Italian-Canadian life, artists, and community members involved in issues of importance to Italian Canadians". On the same web page, the Elia Chair also promotes the idea of the university as a place "without walls" and thus a space that is open to all and that is

connected to the social realities that surround it. Though outside the scope of this paper, the ways in which the geographical location of these important institutions – the only two of their kind in so-called Canada – may have impacted the focus and objectives of the field of Italian-Canadian studies are important to recognise[2].

We can see that, like many other disciplines in the humanities that are invested in the social and connected to particular social groups, Italian-Canadian studies is a field that values contributions from outside of the academe and that recognises its own impact on the life of the communities it studies and with which it engages. Moreover, most scholars who teach and publish in the field are Italian-Canadians themselves and thus constitute what we could describe, in Antonio Gramsci's (1971:41) words, as "organic intellectuals": thinkers who are not outsiders to the social group that they may intellectually explore or even represent. It is vital to the field of Italian-Canadian studies that its socially engaged and community-oriented energy be harnessed in order to maintain its impact and value within and without university campuses. This is especially important since Italian-Canadians, as an ethnic group, have been able to acquire great political, social and economic power. The acquisition of social privileges lessens the need for self-advocacy and self-legitimisation, which have been important factors in the field thus far.

When skimming through publications in Italian-Canadian studies, we notice that this field has historically held at the centre of its aims the solidification of a history of Italian presence in Canada. It has often done so with a clear objective of legitimising the role of Italians in the making of Canada. In a special volume authored by Maddalena Kuitunen and published by the Iacobucci Centre in 1997, titled *From Caboto to Multiculturalism: A Survey on the Development of Italian in Canada (1497-1997*), the author writes, in the first few pages, that "today, students of Italian, above all if they are of Italian origin, can trace their links to Giovanni Caboto (1449-1498) [...]: the discoverer of Canada' (8). In the book, Kuitunen also cites particular episodes during

[2] The expression 'so-called' before 'Canada' is used here to acknowledge that (1) the entity known as 'Canada' is a product of European colonial expansion whose unified nationhood may be questioned and (2) a large number of the territories included in the definition of 'Canada' are actually completely unceded, are under claim or have been annexed through questionable treaty-making processes. See, for example, the Toronto Purchase Treaty No. 13: http://mncfn.ca/torontopurchase/.

which the Italian-Canadian community "claimed Caboto as a discoverer of their land of adoption" (11). We can see how the appeal to colonial histories, from which the mainstream migrant experience is arguably vastly disconnected, has played an important role in the formation of the cultural and historical imaginary of Italian-Canadians. We find corroborating evidence of this in the naming of Italian-Canadian cultural spaces, such as Toronto's Columbus Centre and Villa Colombo and Montreal's Cabot Square. Browsing through the indexes and archives of Italian-Canadian publications, such as the lengthy 'Bibliography of Italian Canadian Studies' found on the Iacobucci Centre's website, one learns that the field has been dedicated to attesting Italian presence in Canada in areas such as demography (particularly enclaves), labour, cultural production (particularly Italian-Canadian literature), language (particularly *italiese* and language variation), discrimination (particularly internment during WWII), traditions (particularly family and regionalisms) and affect (particularly displacement and nostalgia). This body of research has made a strong case for the legitimisation of Italian presence in Canada and has contributed greatly to the elevation of the Italian migrant to a figure that exemplifies productive citizenship and is unwaveringly committed to hard work, to family and to the (adoptive) nation culturally and politically.

The new projects at the Iacobucci Centre both honour the well-established tradition of the field and confront, through queer and Indigenous perspectives, the figure of the ideal Italian migrant that the field has contributed to establishing.

Some of the questions that the *Indigenous-Italian-Canadian Connections* project asks in order to challenge normative and colonial conceptions of Italian presence in Canada are as follows: What are the existing connections between Italian-Canadians and Indigenous Nations and communities? How have Italians contributed to the horrors of colonialism in Canada? How can Italians, as European settlers on this land, be in solidarity with Indigenous Nations and be committed to reparations, reconciliation, honouring treaties and restitution?

We know that the regulation of gender and sexuality has been an instrument of colonial expansion in this context and elsewhere. As Martin Cannon (1998) highlights, colonial policies have worked to alter Indigenous understandings and traditions around gender and sexuality

"through institutionalizing a structure of power and kinship relations that were both patriarchal and heterosexist" (7). These systems have also worked to racialise and marginalise non-normative sexualities (8). These colonial systems of nation-building, furthermore, force migrants to reproduce models of familial structures and genderedness that situate them in proximity with ideals of citizenship and afford them particular privileges; the latter is certainly the case for white Italians, who greatly benefit from their European origins with respect to finding their rightful place in trajectories of colonial projects such as Canada.

We also note that, recently, some Western conceptions of queer sexualities and genders have entered the mainstream and have, in some cases, been co-opted or contributed to nationalist endeavours; scholar Jasbir K. Puar (2007) describes these phenomena as *homonationalism*. The project *Queer Italian-Canadian Artists* challenges the conceptions of the ideal white Italian-Canadian citizen from the perspective of gender and sexuality, particularly as these relate to following particular models of integration, assimilation and 'self-production' in order to achieve 'happiness' (Ahmed, 2010:43). The project asks Italian-Canadian communities to continue looking inward, but in liminal spaces yet to be openly explored: What are the experiences of LGBTQ+ or queer Italian-Canadians? How have the traditional values of Italian-Canadian communities often led to the marginalisation of its queer members? What are the contributions of queer Italian-Canadians to Italian-Canadian cultural and social life? Who are the most marginalised and unacknowledged in the queer community?

Overall, the two projects focus on voices that are missing from mainstream Italian-Canadian cultural and academic discourses: Indigenous and queer voices. This paper will focus on the latter group. In the next two sections, we offer a description and history of the larger *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project (led by co-author Licia Canton). This project includes a documentary, an anthology and numerous public-facing activities, some supported in part by the Iacobucci Centre. The last section focuses particularly on the research project *Queer Italian-Canadian Artists*, an academic offshoot of Canton's larger initiative (and co-directed by Canton and Paolo Frascà); this project uses qualitative structured interviews to collect data on the experiences and work of creatives who are queer and Italian-Canadian and is funded through the Iacobucci Centre.

Queer and Italian-Canadian

The *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project, led by Canton, celebrates the cultural production of Canadians who live at the intersection of two communities: the LGBTQ+ and the Italian-Canadian[3]. The project thus far includes a documentary[4], an anthology[5], a series of online literary readings (some available on YouTube)[6], a number of roundtable discussions at virtual academic conferences and events[7], a social media campaign[8], a series of media interviews[9] and a website[10].

The queer experience is not easily discussed in many Italian-Canadian households. There is still 'a kind of lingering taboo' and a

3 Although Canton does not identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, she has been recognised as an active ally (as spoken by Monica Meneghetti on 29 June 2021, during *Here & Now: Readings and Discussion* that was posted on YouTube on 5 July 2021 [see *Accenti Magazine*, 5 July 2021, 1:15:00]). Canton is also the parent of a child who identifies as non-binary and uses they/them pronouns.

4 The documentary, *Creative Spaces: Queer and Italian Canadian*, was directed by Canton (2021a).

5 The anthology, *Here & Now: An Anthology of Queer Italian-Canadian Writing*, was edited by Canton (2021b).

6 The following four literary readings are available on YouTube: *Here & Now: Queer Italian-Canadian Readings* (April 2021) (Violet Hour, 15 April 2021), *Here & Now: Queer Italian-Canadian Readings* (May 2021) (Violet Hour, 21 May 2021), *Here & Now: An Anthology of Queer and Italian-Canadian Writing – Reading and Discussion* (*Accenti Magazine*, 8 June 2021), and *Here & Now: Readings and Discussion* (*Accenti Magazine*, 5 July 2021).

7 The first event was the panel 'Queer and Italian Canadian' at Librissimi Italian Book Fair on 9 May 9 2020. Two events were held at the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Italian Studies (CAIS) in June 2021: 'Contemporary Writing and Other Works by Queer Italian-Canadians' (a panel of academic papers) and 'Literary Performances and Discussion with Queer Italian-Canadians' (a roundtable).

8 Information about the social media campaign can be found at https://www.facebook.com/CreativeQueerItalianCanadian, https://www.facebook.com/Here-Now-An-Anthology-of-Queer-Italian-Canadian-Writing-104254428541696, and https://twitter.com/HereNowVolume1.

9 See OMNI News coverage (OMNI News, 4 June 2021, 2:49; OMNI News, 2 March 2021; OMNI News, 25 January 2021).

10 For more information on the project, visit http://www.queeritaliancanadian.com/.

'culture of silence' within Italian-Canadian communities[11]. In the past, being openly queer could have been met with violence or ostracism from family. Still today, some members of Italian-Canadian communities adhere to a culture of silence, which contributes to the erasure of LGBTQ+ experiences. The *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project was initiated in response to this silence: to bring attention to the children and grandchildren of immigrants who are members of the LGBTQ+ community. Their voices are often unheard, and their creative work is rarely acknowledged by the Italian-Canadian community itself.

Whereas the beginning of Italian-Canadian literature can be traced back to the 1970s, queer Italian-Canadian writing is a new literary corpus. In fact, the *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project has been instrumental in discovering and identifying the writings of queer Italian-Canadians[12]. In his introduction to the anthology *Here & Now*, Domenic Beneventi notes that "the invisibility of queer writers of Italian-Canadian origin may be explained, to some degree, by the lingering taboos around the subject matter – some are still not comfortable writing such personal stories" (Canton, 2021b:16). He makes the point that "demographics and patterns of migration" are also a factor:

> […] since the majority of Italian Canadians can trace their roots back to the large wave of Italian immigration in the late 1960s, the transitional generation would not be writing about these kinds of subjects. It is their children and their grandchildren, born and raised in Canada, who are writing their queer stories, and we start to see an identifiable body of queer writing emerge in the early 2000s.
>
> (Canton, 2021b:16)

In the past, queer literary artists did not always feel comfortable writing about their queer reality or creating fictional characters that reflect that reality. In some instances, the writers came out – so to speak – through

[11] As spoken by Domenic Beneventi in the documentary *Creative Spaces: Queer and Italian Canadian* (Canton, 2021a).

[12] When we first began the project, we were aware of 'a handful of writers'. As of publication of this essay, we count over 45 writers.

their creative production. One such example is playwright Steve Galluccio. In the documentary *Creative Spaces*, Galluccio states that everyone knew that he was gay because of the play *Mambo Italiano*. His parents attended the French-language premiere in 2000; that is how they found out that their son was gay[13].

More than twenty years later, how much has really changed within the Italian immigrant community? Anna Camilleri, an author in the anthology, states that despite the fact that she has been making art as an openly queer and Italian-Canadian creator for 25 years, still today people come to her in a whisper to say, "I'm also Italian and queer"[14]. Much *has* changed in the last two decades with respect to LGBTQ+ issues, especially in public discourse. However, despite the normalisation of LGBTQ+ people in Canadian mainstream culture, the Italian-Canadian community has lagged behind in public acceptance and valorisation of their queer children and their cultural production. For some, being queer and being of Italian origin is irreconcilable. The project seeks to remedy this by creating a platform where the intersection of queer and Italian-Canadian identities can be explored safely, openly and creatively.

A history of the project

The making of the *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project has been affected by the pandemic. In a 2021 article titled 'COVID-19: A Boon or a Bane for Creativity', published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, experts studied creativity in professional and everyday spheres. Regarding everyday creativity, Maxence Mercier et al. (2021) "observed a significant increase during lockdown"[15]. But professional creative

[13] As spoken by Galluccio in the documentary *Creative Spaces: Queer and Italian Canadian* (Canton, 2021a). Although Galluccio wrote the semi-autobiographical play in English, Michel Tremblay's French translation was produced first, by Théâtre Jean-Duceppe in 2000. In 2001, Centaur Theatre produced the English premiere. It is considered one of the most successful plays in Canadian theatre history. The movie, *Mambo Italiano* (2003), was an international hit that sold in more than 53 countries.

[14] As spoken by Anna Camilleri on 3 June, 2021 (*Accenti Magazine*, 8 June 2021: 52:53).

[15] See, for example, Natalie Proulx's April 2020 article '12 Ideas for Writing through the Pandemic with the New York Times': https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/learning/12-ideas-for-writing-through-the-pandemic-with-the-new-york-times.html. (Accessed: 29 November, 2021).

writers, for instance, have had difficulties producing during COVID times. As Vancouver author Monica Meneghetti passionately stated during an event, she was unable to function during the pandemic: "Oh my God, I'm a mess. I can't write" (*Accenti Magazine*, 5 July 2021, 1:16:50). Many of us can identify with Meneghetti. But this project – the *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project – motivated us to get up every morning, to do research, to seek collaborators and to raise funds. For the most part, the *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project has taken shape and grown during the COVID-19 pandemic and largely because of it. Thus, one could say that it is a pandemic project.

The project began taking shape in early 2019. Its aim was to highlight the work of LGBTQ+ Italian-Canadians in order to emphasise the importance of diversity, acceptance and inclusion in our communities. As Beneventi writes in his introduction to the anthology, the initial steps of our work were

> […] first, to find the 'hidden' community of writers of Italian origin who were LGBTQ+ and give them the visibility they so deserved – for, to our knowledge, there were only a handful of such writers in the public eye. Second, [to] shed light on the everyday lived realities of people growing up queer within the Italian-immigrant community – a community that is so often silent on such questions. We also wanted to explore to what extent these writers and artists draw from both their ethnic roots and their gender and sexual identities in their own creative process. (Canton 2021b:15)

In early 2019, we knew of only 'a handful of writers' who openly identified as members of both communities through their writing or in interviews. When this project began, some hesitated to participate because they would clearly be identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community, while others hesitated because the project is closely linked to their Italian upbringing (i.e. rejection, mistreatment). The reluctance to be identified as either queer or Italian-Canadian confirms the importance of our project, which has helped to shed light on the suffering that has taken place in Italian immigrant families and to create a space for conversation and healing.

As mentioned, the project includes a documentary, an anthology, a media campaign and a number of scholarly and public-facing activities. The documentary *Creative Spaces: Queer and Italian Canadian*[16] was released in March 2021. The volume *Here & Now: An Anthology of Queer Italian-Canadian Writing*[17] was published in June 2021. With the *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project, and specifically the film and volume, we have begun a much-needed conversation, we have tackled issues that are not often discussed in the Italian-Canadian community, and we have taken concrete steps in response to the culture of silence. Sadly, when compared to violence or mistreatment, silence has often been the more positive response to queerness in the Italian-Canadian family and community. However, the failure to acknowledge a family member who does not follow the traditional path, who does not meet the expectations of the Italian-Canadian community, is certainly damaging.

In the documentary, Montreal writers Galluccio[18], Christopher DiRaddo[19] and Liana Cusmano[20] discuss the intersections between their lives and their creative work, touching on spatiality (private spaces

[16] The documentary *Creative Spaces: Queer and Italian Canadian* premiered on 3 March 2021, at a virtual event organised by the Iacobucci Centre at the University of Toronto. The 28-minute documentary was made possible by the Queer Studies in Quebec Research Group, also known as Équipe de recherche en études queer au Québec (ÉRÉQQ), and the Association of Italian-Canadian Writers (AICW). See the two-minute trailer at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xu8_ZzbcLo.

[17] The official (virtual) launch of *Here & Now: An Anthology of Queer Italian-Canadian Writing* was on 22 June 2021, organised by the Iacobucci Centre at the University of Toronto. The volume was published with the support of the Iacobucci Centre at the University of Toronto, the University of Calabria, AICW, English Language Arts Network (ELAN), the Mariano A. Elia Chair at York University, ÉRÉQQ, Longbridge Books and *Accenti Magazine*. See https://accenti.ca/product/here-now-anthology/ for details.

[18] Galluccio is a playwright and screenwriter. Besides *Mambo Italiano* (2003), he is also known for the Gemini award-winning TV series *Ciao Bella* and the movies *Funkytown* (2011) and *Little Italy* (2018).

[19] DiRaddo is the author of *The Family Way* (2021) and *The Geography of Pluto* (2014). Since 2014, he has worked to create a space for LGBTQ literature in Montreal – producing and hosting the Violet Hour reading series and book club.

[20] Cusmano (they/them/iel), aka BiCurious George, is a spoken-word artist and arts educator who works in English, French and Italian. They wrote and directed the film *Matters of Great Unimportance* (2019) and wrote the film script for *La Femme Finale* (2015), screened at the Cannes Film Festival. Their first novel is titled *Catch & Release* (2022).

versus public spaces), temporality and affect. Beneventi, professor of English and comparative literature at Université de Sherbrooke, provides the historical and theoretical commentary in the documentary. He heads the FRQSC-funded queer studies in Quebec Research Group, also known as Équipe de recherche en études queer au Québec (ÉRÉQQ)[21]. As Beneventi writes in *Here & Now*,

> It was an eye-opening and touching experience, bringing together two worlds that so often seem at odds with each other: on one side, family traditions held together by immigrant memory, the Italian language and its various dialects, the rituals and celebrations of domestic life, reunions, food, and extended family; on the other, chosen families based on networks of friendship and care, on community organisations and, yes, on nightlife.
>
> (Canton, 2021b:15)

We were inspired to interview queer Italian-Canadian writers for this documentary after having read Meneghetti's (28 May 2018) *The Globe and Mail* piece 'I'm Queer and Italian-Canadian – Coming Out Was Twice as Hard'. The initial plan was to interview about 10 writers in different parts of Canada. Although Canton's expertise is not film, Canton knew a film would reach a wider audience, different generations and multiple communities[22]. Writers in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver had agreed to be interviewed. We began in Montreal, where the director and cinematographers (Béatrice Langlois-Bettez and Justine Rivard)[23] reside. With COVID-19 restrictions and a deadline to complete the documentary, the team was obliged to produce a film that is different from what was originally intended but a good start

[21] The cinematographers are Béatrice Langlois-Bettez and Justine Rivard, Université de Montreal. Canton, Beneventi, Cusmano, DiRaddo and Galluccio participated in a roundtable discussion, moderated by Frascà, right after the premiere at University of Toronto's Iacobucci Centre.

[22] Due to the pandemic, the film was only screened publicly (virtually) on 3 March 2021. It has been used in the classroom and at nonpublic virtual events. This is unusual, of course, and contrary to the reasoning for doing a film in the first place: to reach more people.

[23] Langlois-Bettez and Rivard were students in cinema at Université de Montréal when they worked on the documentary as cinematographers and editors.

nonetheless, with the hope of interviewing other writers across Canada in the near future.

Here & Now, the groundbreaking *Anthology of Queer Italian-Canadian Writing*, was initiated because we were unable to interview writers across Canada; therefore, we had to find another way to bring these voices together. To date, *Here & Now* is the most comprehensive volume of writing by queer Italian-Canadians. To be included in the book, a contributor did not have to write about being queer or of Italian origin, but they had to identify as belonging to both communities. The volume features nonfiction, poetry, scripts, fiction, a graphic story and interviews. The contributors are established and prize-winning authors, as well as emerging writers[24]. For some, this is their first publication. Some authors have chosen to use pseudonyms.

The creative contributions are preceded by a three-part introduction by scholars Beneventi (Université de Sherbrooke), Michela Baldo (University of Birmingham) and Frascà (University of Toronto). In her essay, Baldo focuses on the production of lesbian writers and makes the link with the volume *Curaggia: Writing by Women of Italian Descent* (1998), which appeared more than 20 years before *Here & Now*. As Baldo states, the writings in *Here & Now* "are filled with sadness, shame and frustration, but also with tenderness, joy and hope" (Canton, 2021b:31). Frascà describes the volume as

> a celebration of the change and the diversity that our communities have cultivated in this new home. [...] Diverse is what we are, here and now: a community of first, second, third, fourth generation migrants who recognize each other as sharing similar histories while upholding one another, as this collection does, in our differences. (Canton, 2021b:38)

[24] Contributors include Elena Basile, Tina Biello, Anthony Bonato, Anna Camilleri, Frank Canino, Jessica Carpinone, Rachele Clemente, Paul Coccia, Cusmano, Amber Dawn, Luis De Filippis, Anthony DeFoe, Vanessa Di Gregorio, DiRaddo, Nikki Donadio, Matthew Fox, Frascà, Phoebe Fregoli, Galluccio, Alessandro Giardino, Elio Iannacci, Erica Lenti, Ariana Magliocco, Violet Mayhew, Steff Juniper Mendolia, Meneghetti, Anna Nobile, Anthony Portulese, Jeremy Saunders, Luca Cara Seccafien, Jonathan Settembri, CJ Volpe, Daniel Zomparelli and allies Michelle Alfano, John Calabro and Gianna Patriarca.

The collection of creative works opens with Meneghetti's personal essay 'Biting the Parmesan', a revised version of her piece in *The Globe and Mail* mentioned above. Writings, from poetry to screenplays, by more than 35 different creators follow. Luis De Filippis, for instance, shares the script for their prize-winning film, *For Nonna Anna*. Amber Dawn sets her poem, 'preliminal rites', in a small town in Abruzzo. Erica Lenti's 'Why I Won't Tell My Grandmother I'm Gay' and Anthony Portulese's 'Another Timeless Italian Tradition', both nonfiction texts, deal with the refusal to come out to their grandmothers. Matthew Fox's short fiction, 'Toronto, 1937', depicts the gay and lesbian underground scene in the 1930s. Some of the contributors are well known as Canadian writers, but they may not be easily recognised as being of Italian heritage. *Here & Now* is a milestone in Canadian literature. It also fills a gap within Italian-Canadian studies.

This project holds personal value for Canton, who has a very strong connection to her cultural roots[25]. Being Italian-Canadian for her means living fully in the present as a Montrealer, a Quebecer, a Canadian. She had hoped that her community, by now, would have been more inclusive, more embracing, less silent. This project is also in response to her disappointment. At the start, Canton thought she could use her position within the Italian-Canadian literary community to bring some attention to writers and artists whose experiences have purposely gone unnoticed. Canton was motivated by questions such as the following: What can we all do to be more inclusive? How can we encourage others to listen, to speak, to be informed? What concrete steps can we take? Ideally, this project will reach beyond creative and academic collectives and encourage people in the community to start a conversation, ask questions, look for information, find answers. Every person that is touched by this project can help to fill the silence that has been detrimental to the queer children of immigrants, so that the Italian-Canadian community and the LGBTQ+ community can be in conversation with one another. Ultimately, it is hoped that the *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project will help us to rethink (trans-)national belonging in Italian-Canadian communities from a gendered

[25] Canton is quite involved in the Italian-Canadian community, specifically on the cultural scene as a creative writer, a magazine editor and an organiser of events.

perspective and to rethink belonging in queer communities by considering questions of ethnicity and tradition.

There is still a lot of work to be done, and we plan to release a second documentary and another volume. In the meantime, we hope that the *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project will inspire others to work on additional initiatives, organize events and start conversations that lead to more queer inclusivity. What Beneventi writes of the anthology, in his introduction to it, is equally true of the project as a whole: this work

> demonstrates in various ways, the bonds of feeling, affect, and desire that cut across the artificial borders of languages, communities, genders, and sexualities. Each of us – writers and readers – are made the richer for lingering, even momentarily, in that threshold space of possibility and mutual recognition. (Canton, 2021b:23)

Canton and Frascà connected while the documentary was being edited and pieces were being collected for the anthology. An ongoing collaboration and a friendship were born, with the clear goal of challenging normative conceptions of Italian-Canadian identity and creating not just safe, but joyful spaces for queer Italian-Canadians to connect and create together. The Iacobucci Centre at the University of Toronto, previously under the directorship of Nicholas Terpstra, has supported a number of efforts connected to this project. In particular, important funding has been allocated to interview queer Italian-Canadian artists in order to understand their personal and professional experiences more fully and to create pedagogical tools that allow students to learn about this important aspect of Italian-Canadian social and cultural life. This academic research project is called *Queer Italian-Canadian Artists*.

Queer Italian-Canadian Artists **qualitative interview project: Objectives and methodologies**

Through this study, we aim to demonstrate that queer Italian-Canadian creators contribute to the richness of Italian-Canadian culture while they also constitute an important element of the pluralistic cultural and social landscape of Canada. We aim to do this by exploring and

analysing the cultural and creative phenomena that lie at the intersection of queer and Italian-Canadian identities and experiences. Through literary analysis, using theories of migration and of sexual and gender diversity, and through community-based qualitative research (structured interviews) informed by queer interdisciplinary research methodologies (Meezan & Martin, 2008), the project provides insights into the queer Italian-Canadian community with two main objects of focus: (1) the artists' experiences at the intersection of their sexual/gender and ethnic identities and (2) their creative work and its connection to their gender/sexual and ethnic identities and experiences. With the help of Ariana Magliocco, Heather Sdao and Sam Rosati Martin, our research assistants, we have collected about ten interviews thus far; we aim to collect five more by the end of the 2021-22 academic year and to author our first study by the end of 2022. A digital platform is also in the works and will be launched in late 2022: this will contain short video excerpts from the interviews and the artists' biographies. At this time, our project focuses on the authors included in the anthology, *Here & Now*, with the hope to lay the theoretical and methodological groundwork for a research project that is long-term and broader in geographical scope.

Our project responds to important academic and cultural urgencies. Academically, it adds a vital layer to the study of the social and cultural life of Italian-Canadians, which is the mandate of the field of Italian-Canadian studies, thus helping to provide a more complete, accurate and inclusive account of our community and its contributions. From a cultural and public perspective, it both targets the reticence with which matters of sexual and gender diversity are, more often than not, discussed in Italian-Canadian communities (particularly in Italian-Canadian media and public functions) and reaffirms the importance of the humanities in building kinship and fostering inclusion.

With this project, we wish to make clear that a generative juncture exists between queer and Italian-Canadian identities and that this is most tangible in artistic production, with a focus on creative writing. Different gender and sexual identities are represented in our pool of interviewees: lesbian, bisexual, gay, trans, non-binary, women and men. Different migration experiences are also represented: from first- to third-generation migrants, from northern to southern regions of Italy, from Canadian urban and suburban contexts. Looking at these creators'

experiences and their cultural production, we aim to document the ways in which queer and Italian-Canadian identities may be in tension with one another but not mutually exclusive. Our project wishes to highlight that these intersecting identities can be productively and inclusively integrated. The value of the intersection of queer and Italian-Canadian identities is evident to us as researchers and, particularly, as consumers of queer Italian-Canadian cultural production, so we wish to formalise and disseminate these observations through our research.

As mentioned, this academic work arises within the field of Italian-Canadian studies and is being conducted through the University of Toronto's Iacobucci Centre. Through preliminary research carried out in issues of the journal *Italian Canadiana* from the last three decades as well as through the Iacobucci Centre's Digital Archive of Italian-Canadian Studies (which records books, book reviews, media files and articles in this field; 3800+ total entries), we notice the exceptionally marginal presence of research on queer Italian-Canadian realities (one article by Beneventi (2019) in volume 34 of *Italian Canadiana*). We are, however, aware of additional literary and linguistic scholarship in this field by Beneventi (Université de Sherbrooke) and Baldo (University of Birmingham), who are both connected to the larger *Queer and Italian-Canadian* project in different ways. Additional documentation connected to queer migrant/Italian-Canadian experiences has been carried out at *Il Museo*, the museum within the Italian Cultural Centre of Vancouver. The work at *Il Museo* is particularly focused on family values through a series of interactive videos titled *3 Queers Chat in East Vancouver* and an exhibition titled *Family Lines: Lesbian Family Heraldry*.

Research that focuses on Italian-Canadian women, on the other hand, is extensive and rotates around three main themes: (1) women's contributions to Italian-Canadian cultural production, particularly literature; (2) women's labour, particularly in education, social services and in the domestic realm and (3) more generally, women's role in the emancipation and integration of the Italian-Canadian community (these are often case studies). Volume 11 (1995) of *Italian Canadiana*, dedicated entirely to Italian-Canadian women, is a particular example of this important pioneering scholarship in our field. We are thankful for this gender-specific research because it has opened the way for

further inquiries in gender and sexual diversity in Italian-Canadian studies and has made the field more perceptive to such issues.

We are also familiar with additional studies on LGBTQ2SI+ issues in Italian-Canadian contexts: an MA thesis in gender studies on issues of heteronormativity and sexual diversity in third-generation southern Italian-Canadian women (Talarico, 2003) and a sociological study on the tension between religious practices and queer experiences (Pride) in Montreal's queer Italian-Canadian community (Fortier, 1999); of particular interest, in our study, is the concept of 'divided lives', which is often discussed in the above publications as a feeling of having to live a double life, particularly with respect to having to perform normative gender roles and to hide one's non-normative sexuality in Italian-Canadian cultural contexts. While many of the existing studies do not focus on cultural production, they help to provide additional context and insight to our research, with particular respect to cultural conflict and traditional values. We have also discovered information on Italian-Canadian lesbian and gay collectives in 1970s Montreal (Fortier, 1999; Wong, 2013) and are inspired to find out more about this history in order to further contextualise our study.

A field of research with which our project interacts is Italian-American studies, where a more-established record of research and outreach activities on sexual and gender diversity exists. The Italian-Canadian and Italian-American contexts share many commonalities but diverge in important ways, in addition to the connected but differing histories of the two states; one of the main differences is the often central role of Italian-Americans of the second and third generation in sexual liberation movements during the 1970s and 1980s, such as the founder of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, Vito Russo; the founder of Caffé Cino, Joe Cino, and the famous performer Madonna, to name a few. Another important difference within academia is the presence of organisations that bring together Italianists and Queer studies scholars, such as the Queer Caucus of the American Association of Italian Studies[26]. While we are interested in situating our research within a history of queer Italian-Canadian experiences and in

[26] Two important works that also mark this difference are the pioneering volumes on queer Italian-American topics *Fuori. Essays by Italian/American Lesbians and Gays* (Bordighera Press, 1996) and *Our Naked Lives: Essays from Gay Italian-American Men* (Bordighera Press, 2013).

drawing comparisons with the US context, the main objective of our project remains a comprehensive analysis of the *current* experiences of queer Italian-Canadian artists and of their creative work.

To do this, we are also collecting additional materials that can contribute to conversations on this intersection of migrant and queer identities. These include media (newspapers, magazines, film, television, radio) and social media content that deals directly with issues of sexual and gender diversity in Italian-Canadian communities; recent (2020-2021) examples of this are a set of anti-LGBTQ+ opinion pieces published in the *Corriere canadese* and Canton's documentary *Creative Spaces: Queer and Italian Canadian*. While other materials have been identified, further investigation and in-person visits are required to access these materials and to build relationships with the professionals and artists involved. Student researchers will be particularly helpful with locating additional materials.

Beyond the highly specialised field of Italian-Canadian studies, which also attracts numerous cultural and literary studies scholars, as well as scholars in migration studies and comparative literature, our research also joins important conversations in areas of queer studies that focus on diasporic phenomena (e.g. queer Jewish studies, queer migrant studies). Furthermore, our project answers the call to decentralise queer studies and theories from their Anglo-American strongholds (Holland, 2012; Driskill et al., 2011; Frascà, 2017) as well as the invitation to recognise the importance of gender and sexual diversity in diaspora and transnational studies (Eng, 2010; Manalansan, 2006; Luibhéid, 2008; Cohen, 2010; Tudor, 2017). While the ethnic history of Italians in North America is nuanced by periods of xenophobic and, by some standards, racial discrimination, this study engages very carefully with these issues as they arise, in order to ensure that white Italian experiences are not equated to those of racialised groups. And at the same time, we acknowledge the work that needs to be done to include non-white Italian-Canadian voices in this conversation.

While the aim of the project is to explore the particular intersection between queer and Italian-Canadian identities, this research takes into account the nuances and specificities that make up these two categories: queer and Italian-Canadian. Therefore, the project will yield important insights about what it means to be a queer Italian-Canadian artist, while recognising that these experiences cannot be reduced to homogenous

master narratives – the hegemonic aims of the construction of master narratives is precisely what we aim to challenge and destabilise. The use of queer theories will be particularly beneficial in articulating differences, nuances and idiosyncrasies and in welcoming these variabilities into the processes of this research. Additionally, our expertise in Italian history and migration allows for the integration of different class, regional and linguistic perspectives into our analysis.

This study will contribute meaningfully to our understanding of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of queer Italian-Canadians from the larger Italian-Canadian community. More specifically, we will study the ways in which the creative production of queer Italian-Canadians reflects the artists' relationship with their ethnic identity and community. The analysis of this relationship will take into account the considerable diversity of experiences and identities within the queer community and how these variations impact the relationship of queer Italian-Canadians with the ethnic community. This study will also benefit scholarship on sexual and gender diversity in other migrant communities in Canada, particularly those from southern Europe.

The interviews, which began in the summer of 2021 and are conducted online (on Zoom), are currently being carried out by undergraduate and graduate research assistants. The interview process is centred around a questionnaire and is supported by carefully developed ethics and distress protocols, given the delicate nature of the discussions. Our questionnaire is composed of 42 questions divided into sets that cover the following areas of inquiry:

- Demographic information and family histories;
- Ethnolinguistic vitality: ethnic self-identification, relationship with Italian language(s) and culture(s), interaction with other languages and cultures;
- Hetero/Homonormativity: being 'out' to the family, family structure and expectations, abuse and violence in the home;
- Gender performativity: need to misgender oneself, need to perform (dress, behaviour) a particular gender around family and the Italian-Canadian community;
- Marginalisation: sense of belonging in the Italian-Canadian community, intersectional factors that contribute to exclusion (race, class status, marital status, etc.), disidentification, anti-sociality;

- Kinships: support networks, role of Italian heritage outside of the community, chosen families, community building;
- Creative stimuli and praxis: culture-based creativity (inspiration, presence and influence of Italian cultures and languages in creative work);
- Public visibility and accountability: political value or creative work, audience and reader response, self-censorship and self-expression;
- Hopes for the future, in particular with respect to generative intersections between queerness and Italian heritage.

Graduate and undergraduate researchers have been a core element in this project, not only with respect to data collection and management but also in improving its methodologies. Student researchers have used their expertise in interview-based research, data management and technology and literary-cultural studies in order to allow this project to overcome important obstacles and to be more mindful of the ways in which it extracts information from its subjects. We are especially thankful to Magliocco, whose previous experience conducting qualitative research in the field of social justice education helped to ensure the first interviews ran smoothly; she also helped to train undergraduate researchers. Student researchers have also contributed immensely to the sense of community that this project fosters, building important relationships with interviewees; these networks are fertile ground for future community-oriented and scholarly collaborations. Finally, the researchers have shared with us that the project has made a positive impact on their personal and professional journeys. In personal correspondence that we have obtained permission to share, Magliocco has described this experience as "nothing short of transformational":

> Connecting with other queer Italian-Canadians has profoundly impacted my sense of self. This project has allowed me to imagine a future in which my queerness and Italian cultural identity can exist in harmony. In reconciling and integrating these different identities, I know I am healing ancestral wounds. By documenting the stories of queer Italian-Canadians we assert that we exist – that we have always existed. This project is a reclamation and re-imagination; it is an opportunity to take up space in

> a cultural community that has often encouraged us to keep our queerness to a whisper.

Sdao, a senior undergraduate student who has been conducting interviews since the summer of 2021, shared, in personal communication, that before working on this project, she had "rarely conceptualized [her] *italianità* and queerness in tandem, rather, as separate aspects of [her] life". For Sdao, this project has fostered "a new sense of *comunità* and belonging in both queer and Italian-Canadian spheres".

Conclusion

Our article has highlighted the relevance of the field of Italian-Canadian studies in conversations that are at the forefront of sociocultural change and academic innovation. By incorporating Indigenous and queer perspectives into the study and understanding of Italian-Canadian experiences, we can provide a more whole and nuanced account of the life of our communities. This, in turn, can disrupt constructed and idealised notions of the Italian *migrante* that contribute to violent colonial pursuits and marginalise some community members. Through the study of queer Italian-Canadian experiences and of the cultural production that is often inspired by these intersecting identities, we honour the diverse realities of our communities, we foster spaces in which Italian-Canadians are able to celebrate the diversity of their communities and challenge the violence or silence/silencing often faced by queer Italian-Canadians, and we celebrate the cultural and artistic fecundity at the juncture of queerness and *italianità* (plural) in this diasporic context.

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FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS ABOUT THE ROM/ROMA, SINTI, KALE, MANOUCHE AND ROMANICHAL CULTURES[1]

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Sommario

La popolazione romanì si distingue come un 'infinito antropologico'. Una miriade di comunità differenti ma affini formano una nazione transnazionale e paradigmatica senza territorio e senza Stato. Con oltre ventidue milioni di persone, le comunità romanès sono distribuite in tutti i continenti: circa dodici milioni sono presenti in Europa. La popolazione romanì è costituita da cinque gruppi principali che hanno nel loro interno una moltitudine di comunità variegate: rom/roma, sinti, calé/kale, manouches e romanichals. Questo articolo analizza come la lingua romanì rifletta il romanipen (identità), cioè la storia e i valori etici e morali del popolo romanì..

Keywords: Rom, Roma, Romanì culture, Romanì language and identity

The Romanì[2] population is distinguished by its anthropological continuum arising from its myriad of different, and yet similar, communities, which form a transnational and paradigmatic nation that is territory-less and stateless. With more than 22 million people, the Romanès[3] communities are spread across every continent: around 12 million are presently in Europe. The Romanì population consists of five main groups, with each group comprising a multitude of varied

1 Translated by Kevin Regan-Maglione.

2 Translator's note: There is a lack of standardisation in referring to the Romanì people in both spelling and capitalisation. When possible, the translator has attempted to mimic the original orthography – for example, following the author's decision to write Romanì with an accent.

3 Translator's note: *Romanès* is another term for the Romanì people, often written without an accent and at times uncapitalised.

communities: the Rom/Roma, Sinti, Kalé/Kale, Manouche and Romanichal[4].

The Romanì language contains the Romanì people's *romanipen* (identity), history and ethical and moral values. Everything that is not intrinsic to the Romanì language is superfluous to the Romanì culture and to the *romano them* (the Rom world). Based on this assumption, many sociocultural manifestations and every aspect of the Romanì existence may be explained. Through an understanding of the language, it is possible to explain the values, culture, ethics, mindset, character, behaviours and sentiments of the Rom/Roma, Sinti, Kalé/Kale, Manouche and Romanichal. Therefore, language is reliable mirror for the *romanipen*, one that can provide all the information necessary to explain a thousand-year-old transnational population. Every term in the Romanì language encompasses a variety of meanings; some linger on the surface while others are buried in endless layers of significance. Romanì culture may be held in 'high', 'medium' or 'low' esteem, depending on who is scrutinising it and the purpose of the research. Many confuse the Romanì culture with detrimental and harmful effects provoked by discrimination. Even some social phenomena are upheld as cultural models and thus distort the truth.

Historical, economic and social events have influenced the Romanì population and its culture, so much so that these diverse communities are the conveyors of various traditions that have become unifying anchors for what is, in reality, an immense and complex cultural mosaic. Romanì culture and ethics are reflected in every aspect of life and within the actual Romanì language. Even to this day, the culture and ethics are passed on mainly through oral tradition, despite many books having been published in recent decades and the language having been standardised on an international level.

The Romanì culture is many-sided and abundant with infinite facets that exhibit this culture's richness to this day. Romanì culture is reflected in a multitude of dialects, which in turn impart Romanì

[4] Translator's note: *Rom* is masculine and *Roma* is feminine in the Romanì language. The term *Roma* is not widely accepted by the Romanì people; *Romanì* is recommended to refer directly to the language and culture. *Sinti* refers to the Romanì people found in Central Europe. *Kale* (also spelled *kalé* and *kalo*) may refer to either the Romanì people in Wales or the *gitano* Romanì people in Spain, Portugal and Southern France. *Manouche* (also spelled *manush*) refers to the Sinti people in France. *Romanichal* refers to the Romanì people in the British Isles, also known as Travellers.

folklore, Romanì art, Romanì traditions, Romanì ethics, the numerous Romanì beliefs and every other cultural manifestation the Rom/Roma, Sinti, Kalé/Kale, Manouche, and Romanichal have acquired during their endless journey over the centuries. Fairy tales, stories, legends, tales and accounts are told in Romanì language *paramiša* and are usually recounted to the younger generation by the *phure* or *papu* (the patriarchs or grandparents)[5]. The narrators, or *paramišar*, share their stories for many reasons: to instruct their youth, to distract the listener, to amuse, to entertain, to reveal a truth and to put listeners on guard against mortal dangers. Proverbs and sayings, like riddles and jokes, are expressions of Romanì wisdom (*romano barvalipen*) that has been acquired across the centuries and is the product of the vicissitudes of experience.

The concept of time in Romanì culture is punctuated by nature's rhythms and is structured in relation to life events (births, holidays, weddings, funerals, family needs, trips, etc.) and financial practices. The present is always more important than an uncertain future and a past that has already passed away.

In the Romanì language, the day (*dives*) is divided into *javìn* (morning) and *rat* (night) and the seasons are divided into *angle o nilaj* (spring), *nilaj*[6] (summer), *angle o vend* (fall) and *vend* (winter). Time (*vext*) is perceived as an endless continuity that is divisible according to the sun's observable movements and according to certain climate and meteorological conditions (*kir*, *ćir*).

Some simple and basic concepts in the *romano them* are shared by every group and Romanès community. These concepts, which are simultaneously cultural, ethical, linguistic and psychological, are Indian and Asian in origin but have been augmented with Western elements. They have not altered substantially despite distances and the passage of time because the Romanès communities, as a consequence of their constantly precarious life conditions caused by repressive policies, have

5 Translator's note: The Romanì *paramiša* (sing. *paramiši*) are tales, stories or fairy tales performed during a storytelling gathering that are based in oral traditions, which contain typical formulas with repeated subjects, points of view and content.

6 Translator's note: The term *linaj* is used instead of *nilaj* in the Romanì dialect of the Rom settlement in Italy (which arrived there in the 15th century).

never been able to develop a philosophy or outlook on life that is not based on basic needs or survival.

The Romanì culture's authenticity is reflected in the Romanì language, which is characterised in turn by a constant duality (*dujpen*). This dichotomous view leads to a division in every aspect in life according to the opposing concepts of *baxt* and *bibaxt* (fortune and misfortune), *pativ* and *laʒ* (honour and shame), *śuśipen* and *mellipen* (pure and impure), truth (*ćhaćhipen*, *ćhaćhimos*) and falsehood (*xoxanipen*, *xoxaipen*, *xoxaibé*, *xoxaimos*). These concepts are intimately interconnected and based on the law of cause and effect. A relationship exists between 'action' and 'result', and individual actions reflect on the one who carries out the actions and on the *famìlje* (family) to which that person belongs. The results of actions are manifested either in the form of enjoyment or pleasure or in the form of suffering. The human being is a result of their own actions, words and choices. Every single person's destiny (*baxt*) is marked by their behaviour. These concepts exercise a great influence on reality, whether it be individual or collective, and represent guiding criteria of ethical and moral values (*romanì kris*) that are essential to the community. They regulate all actions and behaviours of each individual, which, in turn, determine life's joys (*baxt*) and suffering (*bibaxt*). The ultimate goal is an individual's psycho-physical well-being, which is achievable through right choices, a correct approach, suitable actions and appropriate speech. This underlying dichotomy (*dujpen*) in every aspect of life (*ʒivipen*) causes each Rom, Sinto, Kalò/Kalo, Manouche and Romanichal to clearly distinguish themselves from non-Rom people and to divide the world (*them*) and existence through opposing elements: good (*mištipen*) and evil (*nafel*), men (*murš*) and women (*ʒuvl`ă*), the old (*phure*) and the young (*terne*), good (*laćho*) and bad (*bilaćho*, *nafel*), useful (*laćho*) and useless (*bilaćho*), small (*tikno*) and big (*baro*) and so on. This dualistic vision of the universe covers each aspect of existence: from personal hygiene to the human body, from food preparation to health, from herbal medicine to magic.

There is a strong belief in signs of things to come, a lot of superstition and a great deal of fatalism in the *romano them*. Opposing concepts are generally connected to two spiritual entities, *Devel* (God) and *beng* (devil), and to the forces of good (*mištipen*) and evil (*nafel*). These are also linked to the two entities of destiny, *baxt* (good fortune)

and *bibaxt* (misfortune), which intervene in life to regulate, discipline and condition every aspect of existence. One is always in pursuit of the truth (*ćhaćhipen*) of things and of emotions that keep negativity and falsehoods (*xoxanipen*) at bay. This process necessitates a dimension of physical and moral purity (*šušipen*) that pushes back and exorcises every damaging and contaminating (*mellipen*) entity. Hygienic norms and purity are very important and accordingly are rigorously followed. Therefore, the *romano them* is much more complex and profound than what has been superficially demonstrated by the interpretations provided so far by so-called experts.

The term *baxt* is derived from the Persian 'baht', which means both *happiness* and *fortune*; these meanings are inextricably linked and are therefore interchangeable. The term *baxt*, in turn, includes many psychological nuances, many positive emotions and many meanings that are profoundly linked to one another: 'fortune, truth, destiny, fate, positivity, well-being, harmony, success, enjoyment, joy, pleasure, delight', but above all 'happiness'. Each person accepts their own life conditions as an unavoidable fact inasmuch as these conditions are connected to the person's own existence (*ʒivipen*). The *baxt*, with all its positive implications, plays a fundamental role in the daily realities of the Romanì, everyone is incessantly preoccupied with it from the cradle to the grave, and their *baxt* is connected to everything that is successfully achieved. The Romanì people trust in their *baxt* and, ever faithful to it, embody hedonism, or in the words of philosopher Herbert Mancuse, *the polar opposite of rational philosophy*. Satisfying both pleasure and immediate gratification is an essential element to the harmonic development of an individual. The pursuit of pleasure and future happiness is always uncertain and evokes apprehension, which makes life exhausting. Romanès communities have lived a perpetual situation of precariousness, and because the future holds no certainty, they are tied to the pleasures they can experience and enjoy from moment to moment. It is useless to worry about what you do not have: it is better to enjoy immediate pleasure and try to be happy (*baxtale*) with what you actually have. From authenticity (*ćhaćhipen*) to pleasure and life. Adverse destiny or misfortune (*bibaxt*) leads to deceit and falsehood (*xoxanipen*) and can make every hope of a happy life in vain (*baxtalo ʒivipen*). So, it is better to take any pleasure or immediate well-being, like joy (*baxt*) and liveliness (*saben*, *sabbé*), that can be seized

in the present (*ʒivipen*) and shared with loved ones (*famìlje*). Even a love for music (*bašadipen*), singing (*gili*) and dance (*kelipen*, *kelibbé*) can satisfy an immediate pleasure (*baxt*) and render emotions and satisfaction as authentic. You can be happy (*baxtale*) even with very little and, most importantly, from moment to moment. This is the philosophy that the Romanì people have practised across time, since their exile from India to the present day. It is no coincidence that their philosophy is condensed into the most used and typical Romanì salutation/greeting: *But baxt ta sastipen* (may you be lucky/happy and healthy). This is said to wish a relative or friend the health and psychophysical well-being that make everyone and everything healthy and fortunate, or happy and satisfied, without worry and anxiety; this wish expresses the desire to make this into a real, profound and actual reality. So, on the one hand *happiness*, *satisfaction*, *delight*, *joy*, *enjoyment*, *fortune*, *success*, *ecstasy*, *well-being*, *harmony*, *prosperity*, *positivity* and *truth* are expressed and built into the term *baxt*; on the other hand, *unhappiness*, *dissatisfaction*, *failure*, *malaise*, *melancholy*, *disorder*, *negativity*, *bitterness* and *falsehood* are expressed by the same term with the prefix *bi-* (literally 'without'), which performs a single function: to contradict or to negate the concept that the word contains. *Bibaxt* literally means 'without fortune, without happiness, without satisfaction, without success, without well-being, without harmony, without positivity, without truth' and is therefore translatable as 'misfortune, unhappiness, dissatisfaction, failure, malaise, mess, negativity, falsehood'.

The two words *baxt* and *bibaxt* are profoundly connected to one another, and they outline the two internalised contrasting and opposing worlds. They are connected by reciprocity and by the fact that one brings out the concept of the other. It is a dualism that permeates every aspect of life and every feeling. It is a dichotomy that the Romanì people are often unaware of, but that they live by continually, from moment to moment.

Also linked to *baxt* are the concepts of spiritual origins, like good (*laćho*), beautiful (*šukar*, *šukuar*), true (*ćhaćho*), concepts that are intimately connected and linked to the realm of purity (*šušipen*), which is itself the essence of goodness (*laćhipen*, *mištipen*), beauty (*šukaripen*) and truth (*ćhaćhipen*).

As previously mentioned, one of the fundamental values of the Romanì population is honour (*pativ*), whether personal or that of one's own family. It is strictly linked to social prestige (*pativalipen*) and related to a sense of shame (*laʒ*). Honour is deeply felt within the Romanès communities (*romano them*). An action, a conversation, a behaviour or an event that heightens the prestige and honour of a one's own family member is felt with pride by the entire familial group. And, vice versa, a negative action, behaviour, event or discussion of one's own family member is perceived as a shame to all the closest family members. The concept of *laʒ* includes the modesty and decorum that must be expressed in any public circumstance; thus, any public display of private feelings or romantic affection is absolutely prohibited.

Members of the diverse Romanès communities are very careful within the Romanó world to maintain the elevated sense of honour that guarantees respect and positions of prestige (*pativalipen*). Personal reputation (*pativ*) is carefully managed within Romanì society and is proudly defended. Social prestige is maintained through irreproachable behaviour toward other members of the *famìlje* (family) and toward one's community. Traditional and moral norms (*romanì kris*) and Romanó etiquette are scrupulously monitored within the community and guarantee respect, cordiality, conviviality, solidarity and hospitality. Solidarity (*phralipen*) gives, above all, immense prestige to the individual and to their own family: it is a duty, for example, to participate in a funeral or hurry to someone's sickbed. Not participating in the funeral of a member of the community or, even worse, the funeral of a member of one's own *famìlje* is reason for great shame (*bari laʒ*) or loss of social prestige (*pativ*).

Every individual within a Romanès community carefully avoids being criticised (*kušado*) or mocked or bringing shame (*laʒ*) to themselves. In this way, honour (*pativ*) and shame (*laʒ*) become social elements of approval or disapproval, of respect (*pativalipen*) or disrespect (*kušiben*).

The two fundamental concepts of pure (*šušpien*) and impure (*merime, marime, mellipen*) are connected through this dualistic life view. The vast number of terms that exist and are utilised in the Romanì language to distinguish the concepts of pure and impure underlines the preoccupation of the various Romanès communities with 'dirtiness' and 'cleanliness', whether physical or moral. The difference between 'pure'

and 'impure' is identical to the difference between life (*ʒivipen*) and death (*meripen*), between truth (*ćhaćhipen*) and falsehood (*xoxanipen*). This difference's foundation is predicated on the fear (*traš*) of death (*meripen*) and of sickness (*nasvalipen*); both are considered to be impure elements (*melale*). Impurity (*mellipen*) and contamination are closely related. Members of many Romanès communities are therefore always in pursuit of real, actual things that are meaningful and achievable and give honour and immediate happiness. It is an instinctual and psychological pursuit that embraces emotions and the unconscious.

Words, behaviours and actions with positive implications that honour an individual and provide joy and satisfaction are connected to the concept of purity (*šušipen*). Qualities connected to the realm of purity include respectability, personal hygiene, cordiality in social relationships, modesty, manners, helpfulness and sympathy. In contrast, the concept of impure (*merime*, *mellipen*) is connected to all of the negative qualities, actions and behaviours that make an individual unworthy of respect: indecency, immodesty, rudeness, incest, adultery, homicide, vulgarity, incompetence and idleness.

The root of the word *ućo* (*šušo*) can be traced to the Sanskrit *ućita* and can be translated as 'pure, excellent, magnificent, noble, honourable'. The concept of *ućo* (*šušo*) is directly connected to the concepts of *šušipen*, *šukar*, *Òukaripen*, *šušar-*, *sunakaj e sunakajpen*. *O šušipen* ranks among the first of Romanì society values. This simultaneously includes many aspects of life with a heavily positive connotation: purity, virginity, personal hygiene, moral hygiene, incorruptibility, honorability, decency, respectability, reputation and modesty, and it is closely linked to the concepts of *pativ* (honour) and *baxt* (happiness). Purity (*šušipen*) and moral beauty, a beauty that goes beyond the physical (*šukuaripen*), are intimately linked and have to do with the feminine realm. Women must remain virgins until their wedding as physical purity (*šušipen*) suggests a moral purity that, within Romanì culture, is a guarantee of beauty (*šukaripen*), appeal, prestige (*pativalipen*) and honour (*pativ*). What is pure (*šušo*) is therefore beautiful (*šukar*) and true (*ćhaćho*), but above all, it is uncontaminated (*šušo*).

Within their own communities, every young man (*terno ćhavo*)[7] chooses the most beautiful (*šukar*) bride, meaning the most reputable (*šušì*). There is a close relationship between beauty (*šukaripen*), preciousness (*sunakajpen*) and gold (*sunakaj*), all terms that are tellingly derived from the same linguistic root. Women of the diverse Romanès communities prize adorning themselves with many gold necklaces, which also serves to improve one's 'purity' (*šušipen*) and 'beauty' (*šukaripen*), because precious metal (*sunakaj*) is pure (*šušo*). Gold performs the apotropaic function of exorcising forces that are malignant (*nafel*), negative (*bibaxt*) and deceitful (*xoxanipen*). The verb *šušar-* (to clean, decontaminate, make pure) is continuously present in daily language.

Sperm is a pure substance, both for its fertility and because it gives life (*ʒivipen*) and therefore contrasts to death (*meripen*). Other pure elements are milk (*thud*), breast milk, fire (*jag*), the sky (*svato*, *them*), water (*pani*), breath (*dox*), exhaling (*phurd-*), red objects. All products of any kind of metal forged with fire (*jag*) are pure given that metal is a pure element and fire is an element that purifies.

As shown earlier, in the Romanì language *ućo* includes the concept of 'beauty' (*šukar*) and this connection between 'pure' and 'beautiful' transpires not only in the Romanì language but also in aesthetic and ethic understanding as well as in food practices. As a matter of fact, the term *ućo* is often used as an attribute to the noun *aro*, which means 'flour' and is usually connected to food[8]. Anything that may be ingested or used within the body must be pure and not contaminated. Great attention, then, is directed toward food but also toward silverware, plates and dishware. These objects are washed separately and carefully. When a Rom woman cooks, she must put on *i fàld* (apron) so as to separate the food from her body, especially from the intimate parts. The non-Rom housewife's apron has the completely opposite function of keeping her clothes clean.

Members of the Romanès communities trace a clear distinction between the internal and external parts of the body. Skin (*morti*) and hair (*bala*), due to their contact with the outside world, accumulate dirt

[7] Translator's note: In the Romanì dialect of the long-standing Rom settlement in Italy, this expression has become: *ćhavò tarnò*.

[8] Translator's note: In the Romanì dialect of the Rom settlement in Italy, the word is *varrò*.

(*mellipen*) and are therefore impure (*merime*). The internal part is kept pure and unviolated. Orifices represent the point of demarcation between the internal parts (*andral*) and the external ones (*avrì*). This influences social and human behaviours beyond the realm of food (*xaben*): an individual's social status fundamentally depends upon the state of the body's incorruption (*šušipen*), which in turn depends upon what enters the body. How certain foods (*xaben*) are considered ritually pure comes from the Indian caste system. Members of the same *jati* (a socioeconomic group from the caste system) can eat together without running the risk of being contaminated, but they can be contaminated if they eat with members from other *jati*. To this day, amongst Romanès families, the custom of not eating off a plate or with silverware used by an outsider is still in force; that dishware is thrown out or destroyed. Only people whom the host knows well are invited to share their meal. The attitude of mistrusting and act of slandering (*ʒiungale lava*) one's neighbour and the need to triumph and have a preeminent role, which are typical of some Rom/Roma, Sinti, Kalé, Manouches, and Romanichals, are also derived from the caste system. These are ways to outperform others and to protect oneself.

Prohibited food (*bibaxtalo xaben*, *ʒiungalo xaben*) during fasting (*divesa bi xaben*), such as when in mourning (*kalipen*), usually includes meats (*mas*) and other animal products, like milk (*thud*), eggs (*vare*) and cheeses (*kerala*). Muslim Rom (*xoraxane roma*) do not eat pork (*balo*), while snake (*sap*) is not eaten in any Romanès community because it is a negative symbol (*melalo*, *bibaxt*, *nafel*) in Romanì cultural cosmology. The connection between impurity (*merime*) and misfortune (*bixbat*) is demonstrated by the fact that for some Romanès communities in England, in Austria, in the United States and even in the Balkans, merely mentioning the name of some animals, birds or reptiles, such as *o sap* (the snake), is thought to bring bad luck (*bixbat*, *nafel*). Many communities do not eat horsemeat out of respect for an animal that has a strong symbolic value in the Romanì culture.

At the table during meals, the positions of prestige (*pativalipen*) of every family member are evident. Customarily older men or the patriarchs (*phure*) are served first, followed by younger men (*rom*), older women (*phuræ*), younger women (*romnæ*) and lastly children (*ćhavore*). Adults do not eat if others of their age or gender have not been served first. It would be equally rude to not offer something to a

guest or to not wish them: *Te xas sastimaça* (literally, 'may you eat heartily', translatable as 'bon appetit'). Eating together (*khetanes*) and sharing a meal (*xaben*) is a sign of sincerity (*ćhaćho*) and mutual respect (*pativ*).

Some foods in particular are considered to be beneficial (*laćhe*) or lucky (*baxtale*). Foods of this kind, called *baxtalo xaben*, are the ones with strong flavours: chili, black pepper, mustard, chili peppers, garlic, lemon, pickled food and salt. It is possible to notice a certain compatibility to the culinary culture of the Rajputs of Rajasthan. They divide their food into hot and cold foods with a specific way of consuming them and an appropriate designation for these foods in a daily diet. These foods have a direct relationship to general health (*sastipen*) and well-being (*laćhipen*).

Romanès communities, also like the Indian Rajputs, categorise sicknesses (*nasvalipen*), at least the ones that are considered absolutely impure, according to whether the sicknesses are in direct relationship to the community's activities. Advice about illnesses is sought from a *drabarni* (an expert healer woman who is also a palmist), which is the equivalent of the *slana* in the Rajput culture. Often, it is the oldest Romanì woman who serves as the *drabarni*. For example, amongst the Italian Rom, the *drabarni* removes the evil eye by dripping some oil into a plate full of water while repeating a ritual incantation and making the sign of the cross. The connection between healing and divination can be quickly explained: the root of *drabarni* is *drab* which means 'medicine' and is also the base for *drabaripen* (divination). *Drabarno* is the term commonly used to indicate a 'spiritual advisor'. The Indian Rajput believe that sickness can occur by either not observing laws or not respecting the Gods. Another cultural practice that can be seen in both the Indian Rajput and the Romanì cultures is the belief that sickness (*nasvalipen*) is spread by a female spirit. This negative entity in the Romanès dialects is called either *xoxajni* or *ćhoxanì* (almost like a witch).

The most impure element par excellence is death: *meripen*. This term also means 'war', and it is precisely because it is impure that the Romanì people have never declared war on anyone.

Other elements that are considered 'impure' are suicide and blood. Suicide is almost nearly in nonexistent in Romanès communities because life (*ʒivipen*), which is pure (*šuši*), no matter the situation, is

always worth living. In the different Romanì language dialects, the words that are connected to the idea of the impure are *mel*, *melalo*, *merime*, *mellipen*, *marime* and *magardo*, and they stem from the Sanskrit root *vmrī*, which means 'death', 'world of the dead', 'to kill' and 'to annihilate'. The concept of *meripen* (death) is found in many forms and in many dialects: *meripe*, *meriben*, *merribbé*. The idea of the impure (*merime* or *mellipen*) is therefore closely linked to death and sickness (*nasvalipen*) and means contamination as well as impurity. This also influences certain behaviours. For example, to define a mean, arrogant or rude person, Rom Italians who have long-established settlements use *mardò*. This adjective derives from the verb *mar-*, which means 'to kill, to murder, to hit', but its participle is what allows it to be translated as 'the murdered dead, killed, beaten'. In other dialects of the Romanì language, we find the term *mudar-* (to kill, to annihilate, to extinguish). This means that a 'dead' person is bad in the sense of being 'impure' and a bringer of 'evil curses' (*bilaćhipen*, *nafel*) and 'unfortunate tragedies' (*bibaxt*). This is why they are afraid (*traš*) of the dead (*mule*). Totally different from this is the consideration and attitude in regard to their 'own dead', for whom the Romanì population have a real and private worship. There is a clear separation between the 'insider' dead, of one's own family and community, versus the 'outsider' dead, who are perceived as ghosts. This idea also lends itself to the dualistic viewpoint that we have considered so far.

The verb *mukh-* (to leave, to liberate, to free) is connected to the verb *mudar-*, which implies a separation and a state of affliction and has the same root as *mulo* (cadaver, dead, deceased).

Simple impurity is expressed by the noun *mel*, whose adjective *melalo* means 'dirty' in the moral sense. Ritualistic impurity can be provoked by words, by actions or even by objects. For example, it is an impure act to point at a cemetery, dump or urinal.

The Romanì population also divides animals into pure and impure. For example, dogs (*ʒukela*) and cats (*cicaja*) are impure because they lick themselves.

Birds, because they are contaminated by atmospheric forces, are generally impure (*merime*). Birds that are black and crows in particular (*kale ćilikle*) are believed to be heralds of death (*meripen*) and of misfortune (*bibaxt*).

Some groups of the Rom/Roma in the Balkan territories, so as to not risk contamination or impurity, do not eat certain chicken parts, like the feet (*pre*), head (*šero*), wings (*kakh*`ă) and entrails (*por*`ă). The Finnish Rom do not eat chicken meat at all, while Italian Rom do not eat the chicken tail (*i porì*). This winged animal's impurity comes from the fact that chickens peck at the ground, which is an impure place.

There are two verbs in the Romanì language of Rom Italians that are closely connected: *maxurin-* and *mejar-*, which literally mean 'to make impure, contaminate, to make dirty'. The first term refers to the realm of morality and is also correlated to food, while the latter is intrinsic to the realm of the material and physical. Basically, they are synonyms for 'to pollute, to corrode, to infect, to mar, to stain, to dishonour', and they suggest an emotional or physical disruption of sanitary practices or of individual or traditional values. The concept that the two words express is in clear contradiction of the word *šušar-*, which means the exact opposite, or 'to clean, to render pure, to decontaminate'. *Maxurindò* or *melalò* (dirty, impure, contaminated) food should absolutely not be ingested, tasted or touched, and it is *ʒung* (literally 'disgust', in the broad sense of 'contamination, repugnance'). It is no coincidence that a physically 'ugly' boy is described as *ʒungalò* (disgusting, repugnant), or rather 'contaminated' or 'impure', and is the exact opposite of *šukuar* (handsome), which is a synonym of 'pure' and 'uncontaminated' (*šušo*). The words *maxuripé*, *merime* or *mellipen*, translatable as 'contamination, pollution, impurity', have a major influence on the moral, psychological and spiritual domain and are lived or perceived as a deprivation of dignity (*pativ*). If food has been contaminated, materially or morally, this will somehow contaminate whoever eats it. This happens if, for example, the food falls on the ground; if it is touched by a 'dirty woman', whether she is 'dirty' physically or morally (for example a menstruating woman or a prostitute); if in conversation words connected to the food are used in an impure way: *this food tastes like ...*; if during a meal unpleasant smells (*xand*) come in or if hair (*bala*), dust (*puši*), insects (*makœ*) or other impurities (*mellipen*) are found in the food. Food (*xaben*), in that case, is contaminated (*melalo*) or made impure by the mixing in of outside elements or by dishonourable expressions or attitudes, and therefore it cannot be ingested. In every circumstance, it is essential to take the necessary measures to not be contaminated or, in the case of necessary or

inevitable defilement, like giving birth or menstruation for women, to scrupulously follow categorical rules of purification. The ritual rules have a fundamental value in Romanì society and define behavioural limits within their spiritual and social environment (*romano them*) and condition relationships with the external world (*gaćkano them*). Such a distinction first and foremost looks at the human body, but it also extends to the spiritual world, to one's dwelling, to animals and to things. Every aspect of life is distinguished between pure and impure. The sun (*kham*) is considered pure inasmuch as it is an element that emanates heat (*tatipen*) and light (*dut*), which are also pure elements. Even space is influenced by them. The East, where the sun rises, is the expression of life (*ʒivipen*) and is pure (*šušo*); the West, where the sun sets and is extinguished (*mudarelpe*), is impure (*merime*). The day (*dives*) is pure because it is under the sun's influence. In addition, the sun is the propagation and representation of God (*Devel*), and the two words in the Romanì language have the same Sanskrit root, *dyàuh*, whose meaning is 'light, brilliant, blinding, resplendent', like the Romanó *dut* 'light' (in Latin *divus* 'resplendent', *dies* 'day', *Deus* 'God'). In Sanskrit, 'God' is *Deva*, from which *Devel* is derived. In contrast to the day, night (*i rat*) is impure (*melali*) because it is subjected to the moon (*i ćhon*) and darkness (*kalipen*).

Even the human body is subdivided into pure and impure parts: the upper part is pure, while the lower half is considered impure. The waist area marks the border between pure and impure. The important parts from the pure half are the head (*o šero*) and the mouth (*o muj*), while the impure parts are the genital area (*kar*, *pele*, *bul*, *minʒ*) and the feet (*prne*, *pré*). The head is pure also because there can be nothing impure above it. The sky, inhabited by the stars and celestial bodies and various spiritual beings (*Devel* 'God' and the Saints), is pure. At the other end of the body, we have the feet, which are considered impure because they touch the pavement and the ground. The latter is infested with various beings and impure spirits (*beng* 'devil', *mule* 'spirits or ghosts', *ćhoxanæ* 'witches') and therefore is itself a source of impurity. For everything else, even in the Christian religion, God and the Saints live in the Kingdom of the Skies and the devil lives in the infernos in the centre of the earth.

The hands (*vašta*) are in a transitory state because they have to perform acts that are both pure and impure; therefore, they must be washed in particular way and continually.

Impure clothes (*melale*), like socks and underclothes, must always be washed in the appropriate way by clearly distinguishing them from the pure clothes (*šuše*), like tablecloths and napkins, which need to be washed separately. All women's clothes during their menstruation are impure, so they are washed with *melale* items in a separate batch.

The place you live in and work in must be kept clean, pure and uncontaminated. Bodily functions must be completed in the appropriate places. The home, the trailer and the camper must all be clean and hygienically acceptable, ready to welcome family members and guests. It is a great shame (*bari laʒ*) to host someone in a dirty and impure place, especially if that person belongs to your community or is your social equal.

Within the *romano them*, the woman is thought to be gifted with the considerable power (*bari zor*) of 'contaminating' (*mejarel*) a man (*murš*) or food (*xaben*) because female sexuality is considered impure (*melali*). The vagina (*minʒ*) is contaminated (*melali)* by menstruation, birth and secretions. Women must pay careful attention not to expose too much of their body so as to not excite men, and they must be careful to not put their body in contact with men publicly. They must, above all, pay attention to their movements and postures, especially the legs since the legs must always be kept tight and closed, never spread open if she is sitting. A woman can never bend over forward from an upright position. Women's clothing, demeanour and behaviour are constantly subjected to public judgement from the entire community. Long ago, it was considered impure for a *romnì* to be touched by a doctor or gynaecologist, and that is why women would give birth in a tent with the help of older women; Italian Rom refer to this in dialect as *vastèngre*. A child's birth is necessarily an impure event (*melalo*), and traditionally childbirth took place in isolated tents outside the camp, far from the presence of men. Today all *romniæ* give birth in hospitals. After the child's birth (*biandilipen*), the mother is considered impure (*melali*) for several weeks, especially during the first week. In this period, the woman cannot be in contact with pure elements, perform activities like cooking or washing flatware or even appear in public, especially in the presence of the elderly. After the birth, the woman

usually withdraws from society into her home and generally uses personal silverware for a few weeks. Other women, possibly older non-menstruating daughters, are responsible for taking care of food preparation and cooking. These stipulations were mostly enforced in the past as today the customs are being lost.

Even today, death and the entire sexual realm are taboo (*merime*) in the Romanì culture. One never publicly evokes the name of the deceased, just as the members of different Romanès communities avoid discussing sex.

Amongst the impure elements (*merime*), blood must be mentioned because in the Romanì language it is *o rat*. It is not coincidence that the words for 'blood' and 'night' in the Romanì language are expressed by the same word (*rat*) because they are closely connected to the same concept of impurity (*merime* or *marime*). What distinguishes them is the masculine definite article for 'blood' and female article for 'night'.

This cultural overview clearly shows how state-mandated nomadic camps in no way reflect the cultural and ethical exigencies of Romanès cultures. Instead, such camps serve to control and promote the media-based images and economic and political speculations of the non-Rom vis-à-vis the Romanès people in order to pass off as understanding what in reality shows no understanding at all – the difference between knowledge and deception.

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INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS / INFORMAZIONI PER I COLLABORATORI

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2) **XIV Convegno Internazionale/International Conference:**
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Numero speciale/Special issue vol. 31, no 1 e/and no 2 (2018). Articoli scelti tra le relazioni presentate al convegno/Selected articles from the papers presented at the conference.

3) **XIII Convegno Internazionale/International Conference:**
***Antichi moderni.* Gli apporti medievali e rinascimentali all'identità culturale del Novecento italiano/The contribution of Middle Ages and Renaissance to Italian cultural identity in the 20th century** (Città del Capo/Cape Town, 4-5 Settembre/September 2014).
Numero speciale/Special issue, vol. 28, no 2 (2015). Articoli scelti tra le relazioni presentate al convegno/Selected articles from the papers presented at the conference.

4) **XII Convegno Internazionale/International Conference:**
***Finis Terrae Finis Mundi*. L'Apocalisse nella cultura e nella letteratura italiana/The Apocalypse in Italian culture and literature** (Durban, 26-27 Settembre/September 2013).
Numero speciale/Special issue, vol. 27, no 2 (2014). Articoli scelti tra le relazioni presentate al convegno/Selected articles from the papers presented at the conference.

5) **XI Convegno Internazionale/International Conference:**
Tempo e spazio nella cultura italiana e oltre/Time and space in Italian culture and beyond (Città del Capo/Cape Town, 7-9 Settembre/September 2000).
Numero speciale/Special issue, vol. 14, no 2 (2001). Articoli scelti tra le relazioni presentate al convegno/Selected articles from the papers presented at the conference.

6) **Identità e diversità nella cultura italiana**
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8) **Immagini letterarie italiane della donna / Immagini dell'Africa nella letteratura italiana**
Atti dell'VIII Congresso Internazionale dell'API (Città del Capo, 1993).

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Proceedings of the VIII International API Congress (Cape Town, 1993).

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Atti del VI Congresso Internazionale dell'API (Johannesburg, 1989). Questi Atti sono usciti in un numero speciale doppio della rivista (n.4/1990 - n.1/1991).

The minor writers
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