Languages of Discrimination and Racism in Twentieth-Century Italy

Histories, Legacies and Practices

Edited by
Marcella Simoni
Davide Lombardo

palgrave
macmillan

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pp. 332–342; “Civil religion, uncivil society. A reflection on Baba Sahib Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s conception of a ‘religion for civil society’” in *B.R. Ambedkar: The Quest for Justice* edited by A. Rathore Singh, OUP, 2021.

Introduction: The Languages of Discrimination and Racism in Italy in the Twentieth Century: Mobilities, Migrations, Racisms

Marcella Simoni and Davide Lombardo

This volume adopts an interdisciplinary perspective to investigate the history and the themes of race and racism in Italy from the liberal age to the colonial wars up to the present through Fascism and the First Republic, and the intertwining of the cultural, legislative and political dynamics of

Marcella Simoni and Davide Lombardo have written this introduction jointly. For the purposes of the Italian academic system of evaluation, Simoni is the Author of pp. 1–9 and 13–23; Lombardo is the Author of pp. 9–13.

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discrimination in post-war Italy. Drawing upon the expertise of historians, political scientists, sociologists, scholars of literature and experts in cultural studies, the original chapters collected in this volume show a remarkable continuity and the persistence of racism in the Italian cultural and political discourse; they also speak of the shifting of practices of Othering from one or more groups to other groups in different historical contexts.

It was never the intention of this volume to provide a comprehensive history of racism or an exhaustive analysis of the more recent intersection between mobility, migration and racism in Italy; such a quest would be too broad to be contained in any one volume. Rather, the aim of this collective work is to point out the multiple ways in which discrimination, racism, stereotypes and gender bias intersect in Italy, in a historical perspective and in current affairs. In general, the chapters that we collected tried to privilege hearing the voices of those who were discriminated in one context or situation over those of the institutions that engaged with them, and which often ended up (mis)representing, not acknowledging or excluding them. Therefore, this volume participates to the question of how we can construct a historical narrative from below, that includes the voices, histories, feelings and political actions and re-actions of groups of individuals that—while connected to Italy for reasons of migration, birth, work, family, descendance, language, heritage, etc.—have nevertheless been marginalized, discriminated or excluded from citizenship and the rights and obligations that come with it.

One of the questions underlying this volume is, therefore, how can we make those voices, memories and histories emerge, and how can they be included in a mainstream narrative that at least acknowledges the relational aspect of dealing with the Other(s) (Lockman 1996). Relational history implies acknowledging that one's own social, political and, ultimately, national identity takes shape not only in opposition, but also through interaction, with the Other(s). A crucial question is that of sources: if national archives hold the keys to shape how national history is told, and thereby can shape how collective memory is created on a particular topic, do they also preserve and perpetuate those versions of history that rarely make the voices of non-institutional actors heard? This applies, and is equally relevant, to different historical periods. This volume aspires to be a first foundation towards this process, by hearing the voices of

groups whose experiences (and the individual and collective memory of those experiences) have been placed—in different historical moments and in different cultural and political contexts—outside the national canon, on grounds of religion, skin color, religious belief or features considered to be identity markers. As explained below, with this volume we also would like to help further the demise of the "myth of the good Italian" by addressing the core of the relationship between national identity, memory and alterity.

Setting the Scene

It would be unfair to say that questions of discrimination and racism, of migrations and mobilities are silenced at the beginning of the twenty-first century in Italy. It is sufficient to browse through the daily press to encounter numerous articles of various lengths and detail that tell stories of human mobilities, migrations and racism. Some of these articles address the local dimension; others connect these stories—which are often tragedies—to questions of national relevance and link them to issues of civil and human rights, as well as of gender equality. Still others discuss the racism that many migrants encounter in Italy calling into the picture the lack of a collective assumption of responsibility of Italians as a former colonial and fascist country. The claim here is that such a suppression bears a direct impact on the perception and representation of the Other, and therefore also on the lack of adequate and comprehensive policies to deal constructively with mobilities, migrations and racism. Through these different frameworks one can follow individual stories; another possibility is to consider them as part of a broader discourse, where questions of unresolved collective memory, migratory flows, human and civil rights, right to citizenship and episodes of discrimination and racism intertwine; this appears today to be central in Italian society and politics and to stand at the core of how Italians see and imagine themselves in the twenty-first century.

A brief look at the national center-left daily *La Repubblica* from June 5, 2021, shows such a centrality and how these themes intersect: on that day the newspaper reported on the story of Seid Visin, an Italian teenager who had been adopted as a child from Ethiopia, who could not stand the racism he perceived around him when he was mistakenly assumed to be a recent migrant from Africa, and who killed himself near Salerno. In a letter addressed to his therapist and to some friends, he denounced the pressure that ultimately cracked him, "as if I should be ashamed to be black", and his fear "of being mistaken for a migrant, as if I should show to those who

did not know me that I was like them, that I was Italian, that I was white".[1] On the same day, Saman Abbas, an eighteen-year-old woman from a Pakistani family from Novellara, near Reggio Emilia, was reported missing and probably dead (as it later turned out), killed by her own family as she was refusing to submit to an arranged marriage. In Rome, on bus no. 3, a passenger filmed "a man of about forty, who was insulting two women of Asian origin" who were being defended by another passenger. Moving on from racist to homophobic insults, the "man of about forty" threatened to beat up the guy speaking up, invoking the need to defend our "poor Italy, [caught] between foreigners and gays" [*povera Italia fra stranieri e finocchi*].[2] The brief overview of the news from one random day on the Italian center-left national daily ends with the statement by Member of Parliament Matteo Mauri of the Democratic Party (PD), at the time Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, that the *ius soli* (the right to citizenship by birth on the country's soil) "will become a law by the end of the legislature" (2023), revealing once more the slow and inadequate response of institutions and political establishment to the quick-paced developments taking place in Italian society, and the challenges they posit, that go far beyond the belated introduction of the *ius soli*, as crucial as that would be.

These few examples speak of an ongoing present (of which there could be countless other daily examples at the local and national levels); others indicate the consequences of having suppressed the individual and collective responsibilities of colonial racism, Fascism and anti-Semitism. Borrowing from Susan Neiman (2019), one could argue that in Italy (as in other European countries) that process of "working off the past" (*Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* ibid., 29)—that took place in Western Germany from the 1960s onwards in relation to the collective responsibilities for racism and its implications for genocide—was very feeble, if non-existent. As Neiman herself points out, other countries, like the UK, for example, or France, have not worked through this process (31). And only very recently—and with much delay—have the Netherlands started to walk this path in the public sphere, with an important exhibition at the Rijks museum, which explored the role of slavery in building the nation

[1] https://ilmanifesto.it/la-lettera-di-seid-visin/ accessed September 23, 2021. On the coincidence between whiteness and Italianità see Patriarca (2010, 2021).

[2] https://video.corriere.it/cronaca/roma-insulti-omofobi-tram-mi-fai-schifo-finocchio/f4982d24-c5f0-11eb-8929-1e7e5315cef2, accessed 23 September 2021.

and its fortunes (Sint Nicolaas and Smeulders 2021). To the list of countries where such a reflection is struggling to emerge with clarity, one can certainly add Italy, where the lack of such a process has carried, and continues to, multiple social and political consequences.

One of them is the widespread assumption that Italians are—and continue to be—overall good people (*Italiani brava gente*), a phenomenon that historiography described as “the myth of the good Italian” (Bidussa 1994; Del Boca 2005; Focardi 2013) that emerged during the Second World War and that has played an important symbolic and political role ever since. Whenever Italian society and politics have been confronted with an internal or external Others, regardless of the obvious different geographical provenances, they were met through the lenses of Otherness. Another is the creation of a broad and undifferentiated public discourse in which the chain of events that today we call the Holocaust appears to have lost its specificity and is often employed by politics and in the public sphere as a comparison for other experiences of displacement or discrimination, whether real or totally assumed (Schwarz 2021a).

In this context, a comparison between the deportation and extermination of the Jews during the Second World War and the hard destiny of migrants from the Middle East and Africa stranded at sea in the Mediterranean, although historically misleading, continues to appear in the public sphere. Ninety-one-year-old Holocaust survivor and life senator Liliana Segre, one of the most committed and active public testimonies to the horrors of genocide in Italy, and the initiator of a parliamentary commission on hate speech, never drew direct comparisons between her own dramatic experience as a victim of anti-Semitism and deportation and that of others. Nevertheless, she underlined that it had been widespread *indifference* that had allowed millions of Jews to become stateless, deprived of civil and human rights, be deported, imprisoned in inhuman conditions and assassinated then, and that it is the same feeling that allows “boats of migrants with no name that drown to be forgotten, with the sea closing on them” today.[3] Apparently, the works of Primo Levi—that have become a reference in Italian literature, and not only as Holocaust testimony—and the substantial legislative, economic and social investment made through the institution of a national Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27) since 2000 (Schwarz 2021b) have only partially been successful in

[3] https://video.repubblica.it/dossier/migranti-2019/sea-watch-liliana-segre-c-e-la-stessa-indifferenza-che-c-era-nell-epoca-nazista/325625/326241, accessed 25 September 2021.

awakening Italian society from such indifference and to the ultimate consequences that racism entails. Such a limited achievement appears obvious, but particularly evident when one looks at the tragic history of twenty-two-year-old Pateh Sabally from Gambia who fell/jumped and drowned in the Grand Canal in Venice on 25 January 2017—the day after the municipality had begun the commemorations for Holocaust Remembrance Day—as some people watched, others threw a life jacket, and still others shouted in Venetian dialect *Neghite Scemo! Africa!* ([Annégati!] Drown yourself idiot! Africa!).[4] As with many other instances, racism too can be local-specific in Italy, and so can anti-racism, as the scathing ironic theatre of Andrea Pennacchi (just for one example) shows.[5]

The Origins of This Volume

This volume collects and presents a number of case studies that revolve around questions of historical and more recent mobilities, migrations, discrimination and racism in Italy from the late nineteenth century to the present. The project originated from discussions, activities and exchanges with students, colleagues and leadership that took place on the Florence campus of New York University between 2015 and 2018 and that culminated in an international conference entitled *The languages of discrimination and racism in Italy in the 20th century* that took place in Florence on October 3, 2018.[6]

The presence of the word "languages" in the title of this conference had at least three implications. An obvious one: historical and current racism—as well as anti-racism—in Italy have been expressed through different registers, in the language of the law, in jokes, in the homework of children in Italian public schools (Tabet 1997) through the practice of everyday life (Saraceno et al. 2013), in politics, in education, in the media, in some images used for political propaganda or, in a very different way, in those used to advertise one or the other product; (expressions of) racism could easily be detected on the historical press and, as discourse analysis has taught us (Schiffrin et al. 2001), it appears on some of today's papers

[4] https://www.la7.it/tagada/video/profugo-annega-a-venezia-cera-chi-gridava-presto-ho-il-treno-26-01-2017-202902, accessed 25 September 2021.

[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2cOU7z-mNs, accessed 28 September 2021.

[6] https://lapietra.nyu.edu/event/the-languages-of-discrimination-and-racism-in-italy-in-the-20th-century/, accessed September 26, 2021.

in more subtle ways. In general, racism can be observed in historical and contemporary public discourses where the various Others are often constructed as unassimilable, essentialized as a security threat and as a problem of public order, or, last but not least, as extraneous to national values.

Within the medium-term historical perspective of our volume, the Other (and therefore the others) have changed, overlapped and added to one other: colonial subjects (from Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya and Dodecanese to list the major ones) in the Kingdom of Italy, Jews between 1938 and 1945, Southerners who migrated to the north of the country in the 1950s and 1960s, refugees from South America in the 1970s, migrants from Eastern Europe after 1989, refugees from former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and from Southern Mediterranean countries afterwards, Albanians arriving in the port of Bari in 1991 and migrants from various countries in sub-Saharan Africa throughout all this period. These shifts in Othering, which ultimately are all part of an integrated and intersectional racist discourse marked by historical continuity, reflect different phases and stages in the contemporary history of the Peninsula. Tabet (1997) compares such an ongoing discourse to a well-oiled automobile engine "that can be switched off, stay in neutral, go to 5000 rpm", which was never really off and whose noise remained almost imperceptible until the first migrants started to arrive in the 1980s, and in later decades (v).

The second reason for framing a conference on racism in Italy through the idea of languages is connected to the site where it took place. Study-abroad programs in Italy (and elsewhere) represent particular cultural, political and economic contexts; young students educated in a non-European system spend a semester (or longer) of their education outside the USA and the expectations of many of them are—broadly speaking—to continue studying as in an American context while residing elsewhere (Citron and Kline 2001; Ogden 2008). On the one hand, these campuses are sites where different histories, cultural models, visions of individual and collective Self and Other are challenged, embraced and/or reformulated as part of an educational process that strives to be global. On the other, they can also be places where ideas, concepts and expressions that come from American history, culture and politics, whether past or present, can sometimes be applied flatly to the histories and representations of other contexts in which students spend a semester/year abroad, causing some sense of dislocation.

When such a process occurs with terms and concepts like racism, intersectionality and critical theory, the possibility for linguistic and political

misunderstandings on these very charged terms and questions can easily generate short circuits among all the parties involved. One of the reasons why this is so can be found in the obvious statement that the terms *race* and *razza* carry different implications, and that the histories of racism in Italy and in the USA are different, from a chronological, cultural, thematic and political point of view; therefore, the categories that are used to analyze such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon need to be historicized. It is sufficient to consider the very history of the word intersectionality, which also appears as a framework of analysis in some of the chapters in this volume, and the two points that Baritono (2018) raises about it; first, when using the "concept of 'race' in the European historical and present context, one cannot ignore (…) the impact of Nazism and the Shoah" (301), to which one could also add colonialism and Fascism; second, when using intersectionality, one should be cautious about falling into an essentialist vision whereby only those who belong and/or identify with the group which is discriminated can understand (and represent) their oppression (ibid.).

The third implication of the title of the conference that led to this volume—which could only be developed partially—was an attempt to reason on the differences and on the nuances between the linguistic entries that belong to the language of race and racism in Italian and in English: what is the history of the words that have been used in Italian to indicate migrants, religious, regional or ethnic groups? How are they different from those that have been used in (American) English? What are the cultural and political implications of the choice of words connected to the semantic field of race in Italy (Patriarca 2021: 22)?

This theme is relevant in a country like Italy, where, as Alessandra Tarquini has pointed out, until very recently "the most ancient of minorities" (i.e., Jews; Pugliese 2002) was described in some of the dictionaries of the main publishing houses in derogatory terms which only reflected—and at the same time perpetuated—anti-Semitic stereotypes. Paolo Colombo's 1967 *Dictionary of the Italian Language* defined the entry *synagogue* as "Jewish temple, site of confusion, chaos" (Tarquini 2019: 239); ten years later in the *Elementary Dictionary* of the publishing house DeAgostini, at the entry *Jewish*, one could read: "adj. israelite, avid, greedy, who practices the religion of Jews"; finally, the dictionary of the publishing house Zanichelli defined the word "Jew" as "fig. derogatory of someone who shows great attachment to money" (ibid.). Throughout the whole post-war period the derogatory *terrone* (connected to the land, thus backwards, as opposed to urbanite) in its various center and northern

regional variations was used to define migrant workers and families from the south. Given these premises, it does not come as a surprise that, when in the 1980s different Others arrived in Italy from a southern South, the lack of a language to deal with alterity caused the emergence and spread of other derogatory neologisms like *vucumprà* [*vuoi comprare?* Do you want to buy?]. This is the expression that numerous African migrants used when trying to sell various items along the beaches of the hot Italian summers and it immediately became the standard to refer to African migrants especially in the early 1990s. And even if *vucumprà* was later substituted by the only apparently more neutral *extracomunitari* (of non-EU provenance), until this very day very seldom are black individuals (at whatever stage of their mobility or if born in Italy) addressed in a formal way (*Lei*, third person as opposed to *Tu*, second person). There could be many other examples that speak of a long history of discrimination through words.[7]

The question remains of how has this field changed throughout the decades. In part, a reply can be found in the different histories of Italian and American racism, and in the distinct impact that recent debates on questions of identity and diversity—and the development of a social protest movement like Black Lives Matter—have had in the USA and in Continental Europe/Italy.

In this context, this collective work would like to open a multidisciplinary and multi-vocal perspective, where diverse historiographies and methodologies of research on race and racism as a historical, cultural, social and political phenomena can engage in a productive dialogue that can generate greater awareness to the complexity, diversification and need to contextualize racism, starting from the histories and from the sites in which it has found and continues to find expression.

The Agenda of This Volume

One of the first entries on the agenda for this volume is to move the discussion beyond the premises implied by the question: "are Italians racist?" (Bocca 1988; Patriarca 2015), a query that has deep resonances in twentieth-century Italian history. Historical research on Italian colonialism since the 1970s has made this question redundant, as we shall see below; however, half a century later, this important shift in the interpretation of Italian colonial history is far from being accepted as a starting point in

[7] See Andrea Pennacchi, Ciao Terrone. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEtp8qpvcec#0, accessed 14 april 2022; see also Cassata and Schwarz (2021).

other research areas. Indeed, our ambition was to extend the interpretative paradigm that explore the specificities of the historical discriminations and racisms carried out by Italians in colonial and/or fascist times to more recent migratory phenomena that started to invest Italy since the 1980s. As historians, this meant extending to this more recent period the perspectives that were opened by those historical studies that demolished the "myth of the good Italian".

A second item on the agenda is the question of intersectionality, that we wanted to pursue in various directions. The connection between race- and gender-based discriminations was highly apparent in the history of Italian colonialism and one explored with remarkable results (Barrera 2002, 2005, 2008; Lombardi-Diop 2005), in a dialogue with Crenshaw's foundational contribution to critical race theory (Crenshaw 1991, 2017) and long before intersectionality became a widespread category as well as a buzz word in academia (Baritono 2018). Another example could be that the historical studies on Italian anti-Semitism and Italian colonialism have also started to entertain a dialogue, especially if connected through a gender perspective (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013).

A third item on the agenda is to contribute to shift the geographical premises of the conversation by embracing a comparative framework, while remaining focused on Italian matters. Adopting such a framework is essential to go beyond a national perspective while avoiding either a continental or Western perspective.

A fourth and final item in our agenda, which we will explore further in the next section, is the question of interdisciplinarity, that is, connecting different disciplines and subdisciplines—from social and cultural history to political science, from area studies to sociology, etc.—so that each discipline (different for methodology, analytical armory and sensitivities) could help create a dialogue with the others on the questions of discrimination and racism.

A Bridge Between Historiography and Other Disciplines

In relation to the Italian debate, this volume intends to create a bridge between the historical studies on Italian racism that have been published in the last thirty years, and the ethnographic and sociological studies that have explored the changing Italian society since the arrival of the first wave of migrants in the 1980s, thus adding another layer to the deconstruction

of the "myth of the good Italian". The emergence and the evolution of the "myth", and the challenges it has encountered are well known (Bidussa 1994; Del Boca 2005; Focardi 2013; Schwarz 2013). However, it is relevant to this volume to remember that the historiographical debate in the last forty years has been greatly influenced by the arrival of the first waves of migrants starting from the 1980s and by the geopolitical earthquake of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Europe this was generated by the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War; in Italy (Falsini 2020), this was coupled with the collapse of the political party system that had ruled the country for the previous fifty years. Within this context, the emergence of the challenge to "the myth of good Italian" did not come from historians working on Mussolini and Fascism, an area somehow hijacked by the presence of the monumental work by De Felice. Rather, it came from scholars who engaged with Italian colonialism in Africa, a piece of the puzzle that had remained until then marginal if not ignored, save for the interest of military historians (Rochat 1973).

It was thanks to the seminal researches in this field, and then to the groundbreaking volumes by Giampaolo Calchi Novati (1987, 1994, 2005, 2011), who had come to study Italian colonialism via decolonization and the history of the African continent, and by Angelo Del Boca (1965, 1976–1984,1986, 1992, 1996, 2007), who arrived to work on Italian colonialism by focusing on Fascism, that Italian colonialism and persecutions towards subjects of the Italian colonies and later Empire from the 1890s could become, especially since the 1990s, fully part of the historiographical panorama on post-unitary Italy. Particularly important was the volume by Del Boca, *Italiani brava gente* (2005), that succeeded in shifting the paradigm of historical analysis and in reaching out also outside academia. One of the features of this new expanding dimension of Italian historiography was that it developed within a solid interdisciplinary and multicultural framework. A possible testimony of this would be the number of volumes dedicated to this theme and that were published in English in the early 2000s; among them, the influential *A Place in the Sun* edited by Patrizia Palumbo (2003) and, in 2005, the publication of two edited collections by Andall and Dunkan, and Ben-Ghiat and Fuller. In the meantime, historians known outside academia like Giorgio Rochat (2005), as well an entire generation of scholars, began to integrate the issue of colonialism in their studies and publications. Examples of the varieties of backgrounds and approaches would include Nicola Labanca (1993, 2002) Giulia Barrera (2005, 2008), Nicola Camilleri (2018,

2020), Olindo de Napoli (2009) and Giuseppe Maria Finaldi (2009, 2017), among many others that have contributed to a new centrality and new interpretation of Italian colonialism.

Compared to the revolution taking place in the field of Italian colonial studies, the scholarship on the period of the Second World War remained less central. The most important book on the resistance of the 1990s, Claudio Pavone's *Una Guerra Civile* (1991), engaged also with the question of the "myth of good Italian" from the perspective of national unity; the challenge that this volume posed connected the political perspective and that of the scholar. It could be suggested that the historiographical breakthrough for studies that concerned the Second World War and the Resistance came a few years later than those that concerned colonialism, with the publication in 2013 of the successful volume by Filippo Focardi. His work only shows the Italian delay, for example, in a comparative perspective with the German public debate where the groundbreaking book *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* [The Inability to Mourn] by Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich (published 1967and translated in English in 1975), indeed confronts the question of the inability to face and take collective responsibility for, as well as mourn, the Nazi period.

The spillover from the scholarly debate on the "myth of the good Italian" onto Italian public debate has been extremely slow, difficult and problematic. There could be many examples; one of these, taken from public debate (or rather lack thereof), provides a vivid picture of the difficulties, inertia, resistance and ambiguities of the Italian ruling class in relation to challenging the "myth of the good Italian". The example comes from the censorship on the movie *Omar Mukhtar* of 1981, which was distributed in English with the title *The Lion of the Desert* and never distributed in Italy, due to complicated censorship process (Tosatto 2009; Cragno 2006). The movie was financed by the regime of Muammar Gaddafi to celebrate Libyan resistance against Italian colonialism, engaging in an international production with some of the most well-known stars of the period (Antony Quinn to play Mukhtar, Rod Steiger for Mussolini, Oliver Reed to play the Italian vice governor of Libya and war criminal Rodolfo Graziani, Irene Papas in the female lead part of Mabrouka). The movie narrated the last years of the hero of the Libyan national resistance, the unequal fight against Italian forces and the capture, mock process and execution of Mukhtar by the Italian authorities that in the movie were led by Graziani. The movie shows Italians massacring a village, taking away young women to be used as comfort women for the Italian troops, and it

also shows the concentration camps set by Italian authorities for the Bedouin populations that were supporting Mukhtar, comprehensive of some black and white footage from the 1930s. Mustapha Akkad, the Egyptian director, recreated scenes with great accuracy, also thanks to the generous funds provided by the Libyan government. The movie premiered at the Cannes in 1982 and was distributed in Europe and shown at various film festivals but banned in Italy by Italian undersecretary to foreign affairs. The motivation—deftly avoiding references to massacres and concentration camps—stated that the movie was offending the royal Italian army. A movie screening at a festival was stopped by Digos (the Italian political police) in 1987 while in the ensuing years its screening was tolerated, while a *de facto* ban on its distribution and broadcasting remained in place. It was only in 2009, with the government led by Silvio Berlusconi, that the ban was officially raised, in concomitance with the signature of the Libyan-Italian pact that regulated to reciprocal advantage Libyan gas and oil to Italy and Italian funds to Libya to control migrants transiting through Libyan territory in the direction of Europe. During his state visit to Italy, and to the embarrassment of Italian media and authorities, Muammar Gaddafi exhibited in all public occasions a picture pinned to his uniform—that had been included in the footage of the movie—of Omar Mukhtar in chains before the trial surrounded by high Italian authorities. The movie was then broadcasted by the Italian satellite branch of Sky and also by the national Italian broadcasting television, RAI. It was worth following this long story to the end, to underline that the ban on the movie could be lifted not because of pressure that public opinion and intellectuals exerted, and the total silence of the more progressive political forces. Interestingly enough, the ban was ultimately lifted for international political and commercial gains, by a right wing government which included post-fascist elements in the cabinet.

The Fieldwork of Sociologists and Anthropologists

It is virtually impossible to provide a comprehensive picture of the political themes that surround the question of migrations and racism in Italy: legislation, citizenship, ethical questions, hate speech, representation in the media, cultural attitudes, sport, the impact and lives of second-generation migrants, migrant literatures, etc. Especially so, as the political debate on these questions in a swiftly changing international scenario causes a continuous repositioning of those involved on the national and local scales:

political parties, the Church, civil society and, last but not least, organized criminality.

From a historical point of view, the establishment of "Centra"—the "Centre for the history of Racism and Anti-Racism in Modern Italy" at the University of Genoa in 2021 by Francesco Cassata and Guri Schwarz—represents an important step, and an important physical and virtual site, where new research will shed light on the history, memory and representation of the historical experience of Italian colonialism, racism, anti-racism and anti-Semitism.[8] Considering the field of contemporary migrations instead, historical research has been slower for obvious chronological reasons and for the difficulties connected to collecting oral and written sources (Colucci 2018, 2020). In this context, sociologists, anthropologists and ethnographers have laid the foundations of the field, exploring the contemporary intersections between mobility, migrations and racism in Italy for many migrant groups and some of the connections between past and present (Marchetti 2013).

It seems to us that this type of research has followed at (at least) four paths: the first has adopted a vertical perspective, looking at nationality/religious or ethnic/linguistic specificity, thus focusing on single communities, be it the Filipino communities which have grown numerous in several Italian cities since the 1980s (Cominelli 2003; Zapponi 2011), labor migrations from South America, especially Perù, or those from Eastern European countries—at least Romania, Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine (Salvino 2018)—through which many women have arrived in Italy to work as caretakers (*badanti*) for aging Italian families. Other groups include Sikhs in the province of Reggio Emilia (Bertolani 2004, 2013), in particular in Novellara, where many work in the production of the Parmigiano Reggiano cheese (Bertolani 2010) and in agriculture around Latina (Omizzolo, 2010); Albanians (Barajaba 2011), whose exodus-like arrival in Italy on the ship Vlora in 1991 has left an indelible mark on the history of migration and of racism in Italy (De Cesaris 2018, 2020); and Nigerian migrants, in particular many women, who arrived in Italy through the trade of prostitutes (Beneduce and Taliani 2016) in the 1990s. Other groups could lengthen this list. This vertical perspective tends to produce separate narratives, and one of its outcomes is that it singles out each group and its relations *with* local and national institutions rather than pointing at the interaction *among* groups, including local and national institutions. Almost inevitably, this vertical approach also separates

[8] http://www.centrastudies.org/, accessed 27 August, 2021.

between citizens that have resided in the country for several generations and those whose arrival is recent, or those who are not yet citizens. Moreover, an approach based on origins or other form of identity, religion or language inherently privileges a communitarian and identitarian view of migration and discrimination. And although a history of the Roms (Roccheggiani 2014) and of the Sintis in Italy (Bravi 2009), just to mention two groups whose presence in the peninsula is historically rooted in the country's history, is enlightening under several respects, such a vertical approach rarely allows for a comparative dimension, which seems to us essential in this field.

Experiences of discrimination are also connected to other factors: to social condition, class, education, workplace and work sector, geography and urban context. Therefore, a second way through which the connection between mobility, migrations and manifestations/perceptions of racism has been researched is horizontally, by looking at various themes that cut across the different experiences of the various groups, and that concern them all, either as individuals or as a collective. As above, sociologists and ethnographers have begun to analyze some of these transformations, and one of the fields that has been extensively covered is how migrations have affected and transformed Italian towns and major cities, as the broader contexts in which interactions take place and where mutual relations are (re-)shaped (Petrillo and Tosi 2013; Fioretti 2018), in Turin (Capello and Semi 2018), Milan (Vacca and Boffi 2009; Grimaldi 2016; Saibene 2017), Genoa (Gastaldi 2013), Padua (Ostanel 2013), Rome (Amico et al. 2013), Naples (Dines 2019) and other sites.

Legislation is another broad theme that cut across national and religious groups and that has allowed for a comparative and integrated perspective (Paoli 2016, 2018; Piro 2020) that includes an Italian, European and international perspective (Salvatici 2020; Paoli 2020). Investigation into the dynamics of the job market in its multiple and manifold aspects represents yet another horizontal perspective that has been applied to conduct research across groups, in different regions and contexts of work, whether in connection to agriculture and the exploitation of agricultural labor (Colloca and Corrado 2007; Corrado and Perrotta 2012; Perrotta 2013; Rigo 2016; Chiaromonte 2018; Cortese and Palidda 2018), gender dynamics and domestic work (Scrinzi 2004), legislation, organized criminality, trade unions or blue-collar and white-collar jobs. There are numerous other themes that could be investigated across national categories: consumerism, education, gender, welfare and sport, just to mention a few.

We think that at least two more approaches should be mentioned here as fruitful research paths that have been pursued, to which historians could also participate, especially given that they entail some chronological distance: one looks at relations between generations of migrants both within each group and across groups (Cologna 2004; Piacentini 2004) or across the country. The category of second-generation migrants is very broad and, for the purposes of this brief outline, includes both children born in the receiving country from foreign parents and children who joined parents that had previously migrated to the receiving country. As such, it also includes newly formed families in which one of the partners was a migrant and their offspring, as well as the dynamics of their educational, economic, linguistic and, broadly speaking, cultural integration (Balsamo 2003; Boccagni 2011; Benedetto et al. 2007). Such a research path considers the intergenerational dynamics of the experience of discrimination and the way that second and third generation live their diversity. Sons and daughters of migrants can be seen as a mirror of the problems of a society, assuming the existence of a dominant society to which they should assimilate; they could also be considered as mirrors of two distinct processes of transformation. As Enzo Colombo (2007) has written: “on the one hand they share, at least in part, the transformations that concern the contemporary migratory phenomena; on the other, as youngsters, they share more general transformations in (…) lifestyles and in daily experiences, which are usually summarized by using the concept of globalization” (71).

Last but not least, an internal perspective to the history of migrants makes us hear—in a more direct and complex way than we could ever achieve in this volume—the voices of newly arrived migrants from various countries, their experiences, and that of the second generations, as they all help shape Italian society. These should not be understood as testimonies of migratory experiences alone (Filippini et al. 2010), but as ways to bring to light the manifold ways in which migrant groups found and built their ways in Italy, from the local press of the Chinese community of Milan (Zhang 2016) to literary production for adults (Ghermandi 2005, 2008; Piazzarossa 2011; Mengozzi 2012) and for younger readers (Luatti 2007), from local migrant associationism to the transnational horizon (Waldinger 2010) of their personal and generational perspectives and aspirations (Notarangelo 2007). Special attention should be paid to the voices of that group represented as *clandestini*, whose voices are even harder to trace (Dino 2006).

Organization of This Volume

This volume contains eleven chapters that address the intersection between mobility, migration and racism in Italy from different points of view and at different historical moments, from the end of the nineteenth century to the first twenty years of the twenty-first century. The overall order of the volume is chronological; at the same time, the editors grouped together chapters that speak to each other for thematic proximity or methodological similarity

The volume opens with an chapter by Nicola Camilleri entitled "How a Colonial Subject Became an Italian Citizen: The Life and Naturalization of Sengal Workneh Between Colonial Eritrea and Italy (1880–1929)". Camilleri's research is devoted to the quite exceptional history of Sengal Workneh, a colonial subject from Eritrea who received Italian citizenship through naturalization in 1919. Adding an entry from Africa to the history of European colonialism and its segregatory citizenship system, Camilleri explores the exclusionary citizenship policy of the Kingdom of Italy before and after the First World War and discusses what factors—among the many possible—was useful to Workneh to obtain citizenship. This chapter is followed by the contribution of Davide Lombardo, "Leave It to Dogs and Horses: Italy's Constitutional Debate on *Stirpe* and *Razza*" *(1946–1947)*, that looks at the relationship between race and institutions from a different angle, and at a successive historical moment, that is, during the debate and the drafting of the post-fascist new republican Constitution, when the question was raised whether it would be appropriate, after the experience of racist anti-Semitism, to implicitly acknowledge the existence of human races by inserting the word *razza* in the fundamental law of the country, even if only to state that no distinction should be made between them. In her "Short and Long-term consequences of the Racial Laws and the Myth of the Good Italian" Elena Mazzini moves away from matters of law, race and citizenship to focus more directly on some of the questions that the return of Italian Jews to life in post-war Italy raised. This topic is not addressed here from the point of view of retribution and/or restitution, but the author combines two other perspectives: on the one hand, she shows some of the social and cultural long-term consequences of the Racial Laws of 1938, and of the ensuing persecution, on Italian Jews; on the other, she helps debunking the "myth of the good Italian", discussing its return in the representation of anti-Jewish persecution in post-war Italy and especially during and after the

Eichmann trial (1961). By addressing the latter question, Mazzini introduces one of the leading threads of the whole volume which returns in several other chapters that do not specifically deal with anti-Jewish persecution, but with other older, contemporary or new racisms, against migrants from sub-Saharan countries, for example, Muslim women, or the Chinese community in Italy. Mazzini's work is followed by Marcella Simoni's chapter, "When Conflict Spills Over: Identities, Memories, Politics and Representations of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in Italy, the 1960s". Simoni investigates the manifold ways in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict spilled over in Europe, and especially in Italy starting from the 1960s interlocking with questions of local and ethnic identity, of traumatic memories, of youth politics and, ultimately, with perceived or real anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. This decade was crucial in shaping Palestinian, Jewish and Israeli identities in oppositional terms as a result of the traumatic memories of recent collective pasts, youth politics between 1967 and 1969 and obviously of the Six Day War. This chapter shows that these issues were not of Middle Eastern concern alone, but that they carried tremendous repercussions in Europe too. The following two chapters, by Laura De Giorgi and by Anna Marsden, move away from questions of colonialism and anti-Semitism to explore the historical and current outlook on the Chinese community, whose presence in the peninsula dates back to the late nineteenth century. Both chapters look into the origins of the recent re-emergence of anti-Chinese discourses in Italy. In "Between 'Yellow' and 'Red': Stereotypes and Racial Discourses in Italian Narratives on Communist China in the 1950s", De Giorgi considers how Orientalist stereotypes and Eurocentric prejudices inherited from the colonial era continued to shape the perception of China during the early years of the Cold War across political differences through the case studies of the political magazine *Il Ponte* and the travelogues on China published by the main daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. While Marsden—in her "Racism in Italy and the Italian-Chinese Minority"—takes an ample perspective on the presence of Chinese nationals in Italy, from the first arrival of a few families in the late nineteenth century to the present, in which they represent the third largest non-EU ethnic minority in the country, with 300,000 individuals, one third of whom were born in Italy. This chapter discusses the emergence of an Italian-Chinese identity shaped through the interaction between Chinese descendants and Italian society vis-à-vis persistent Italian perception of Chinese as perpetual strangers. Relying on a solid

theoretical framework and on examples taken from the French and the Italian cultural and political contexts, Debora Spini addresses Islamophobia as a type of cultural racism in her chapter "Islamophobia: Gender and Racialization of Religion", and analyzes how religion can become the target of processes of racialization. In particular, her chapter discusses Islamophobic discourses from a gender perspective. With "Africa's Delivery Room: The Racialization of Italian Political Discourse on the 80th Anniversary of the Racial Laws", Angelica Pesarini follows up with a gender perspective on the so-called migrant crisis of the first and second decades of the twenty-first century, with special emphasis on 2018, using the eightieth anniversary of the Racial Laws as one of the lenses through which it is possible to observe the return of a language of race, especially in the Italian general press and in public discourse, which became filled with racist and misogynistic prejudices and stereotypes, as a new right wing political leadership took office and power. Stefania Bernini, in her chapter "South of What? In search of Italy's Others", discusses the notion of Italy's Southern question and asks whether the *Meridione* still represents Italy's internal Other, notwithstanding Italy's regional variations. In her argument, three factors have significantly transformed the narrative of the North-South duality, favoring the emergence of Italy's new South and therefore, a new and even stronger Southern "Other" in the Southern rim of the Mediterranean. These are the growing presence of non-Italian migrants (and of African migrants in particular), the hardening of the Mediterranean border and the transformation of the Lega from a once separatist party into a nationalist/nativist force. In Bernini's view the Mediterranean is increasingly seen as a liminal, threatening and unregulated space. This conclusion also resonates in the chapter "The Italian White Burden: Anti-Racism, Paternalism and Sexism in the Italian Public Discourse" by Gaia Giuliani and Carla Panico. These two authors discuss iconographies of race and whiteness in Italy in mainstream media and political discourses through an analysis of the Italian white imaginary of disembarkation in the Mediterranean. Their contribution focuses on both securitarian and hegemonic humanitarian narratives, paying particular attention to Carola Rackete, the captain of the NGO *Sea-Watch 3*, who, in 2019, violated the ban imposed to Italian ports and landed forty-two migrants. Finally, we conclude this journey with a literary, personal and (broadly speaking) political reflection by Suzanne M. Menghraj, "Double-Sided Sleights of Hand: Race in the Mirror", who makes us reflect on the

presence of questions of race and racism in well-known pieces of literature and two very famous Italian films of the 1950s and 1960s. And while, from a chronological point of view, this piece could have been placed earlier in the volume, the editors have decided to place it last in lieu of conclusions, for it uses forms of artistic expression and different literary languages (humor and absurdism) to go where history and politics do not seem able to, revealing the idea of race as a costume "that alienates people from themselves as surely as it alienates them from each other and that hides the truth of shared histories, biology, and humanity."

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How a Colonial Subject Became an Italian Citizen: The Life and Naturalization of Sengal Workneh Between Colonial Eritrea and Italy (1880–1929)

Nicola Camilleri

On 15 August 1908 Sengal Workneh, an interpreter in the service of the Italian colonial administration in Asmara, addressed the Ministry of the Interior to inquire about the Italian naturalization he had requested in July 1906 and which apparently remained an open issue. In the letter, he underlined his desire to become an Italian citizen after briefly recounting his life story. Among other things, he declared: "I spent the strength of my youth in the Italian Royal Army, promising to act as a shield for the honor

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of the homeland, if opportunities to do so were to present themselves".[1] These words seem to express an intense bond with the country of which he aspired to become a citizen. Patriotic expressions of this kind were not rare in naturalization requests; candidates commonly employed them to earn the goodwill of the officials in charge of the process. Yet, the case of Workneh, detailed here, presents some peculiar features in this regard. On the whole, the request submitted in 1906 and the following correspondence with the various Italian authorities, which fortunately are available as historical sources,[2] represent a very important testimony of the rare bureaucratic process of naturalization, in which a local subject of an African colony can have a say and play a role. While historical research on colonialism has rightly been criticized for all too often downplaying or ignoring the voices of subaltern, colonized subjects, the latter will be the main focus of the present chapter.

The story of how Sengal Workneh formally became an Italian citizen unfolds across many years and involves several actors. Surely it represents an exceptional story. His naturalization must have seemed so remarkable that already in early postcolonial times the Italian journalist Giuseppe Puglisi mentioned it in its well-known biographical dictionary *Chi è? dell'Eritrea* [Who's Who of Eritrea], published in Asmara in 1952. (Puglisi 1952, 271). This book—according to Jonathan Miran an "indispensable source of information, inspiration and an invaluable research tool" (Miran 2018, 47)—succinctly traces Sengal Workneh's life and mentions that he received Italian citizenship, which enabled him to find a job at the Ministry of the Colonies.

The majority of inhabitants of colonial Eritrea never applied for Italian citizenship and thus remained in the legal status of *sudditanza coloniale* [colonial subjecthood] that had been created for them. This racialized

[1] Sengal Uorkneh al Ministro dell'Interno, Asmara 15 agosto 1908, Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (ASDMAECI), ASMAI, II, Persone operanti in Africa (1879–1925) Pos. 35, Pacco S – 1. Following the "simplified transliteration" set by the Encyclopaedia Aethiopica (EAE), the name, which in contemporary sources is spelled in many different ways, should be written Sängal Wärqənäh. For the sake of simplicity, in this chapter I transliterate the name as Sengal Workneh. I thank Denis Nosnitzin for providing advice in this issue.

[2] Sources for this paper are stored in the Diplomatic Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Rome, and Archivio Storico dell'Università di Napoli "L'Orientale" (ASUnior). I thank Gianfrancesco Lusini and Sergio Muzzupappa for assisting me in the research at the Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale. Moreover, I thank Uoldelul Chelati Dirar for the several conversations that have accompanied this research and Maria Elena Cucci for the pictures.

form of colonial citizenship was meant to exclude the local inhabitants of the colony from metropolitan citizenship. When Italians, driven by economic interests and the need to catch up with other European colonial powers engaged in the "Scramble for Africa", established their first colony on the Red Sea coast in 1890, they too—no differently from other European colonial powers—deemed it essential not to equate the inhabitants of the newly conquered colonial territories with the citizens of the metropole. One of the ideological driving forces of European colonialism was its *civilizing mission*: the idea that Europeans ought to "civilize" the inhabitants of other world regions, especially Africa and Asia, who were considered to be on a lower level in terms of race and civilization. A consequence of this attitude was the implementation of a *policy of difference* in the Italian colony. A concrete formalization of this policy was the creation of legal boundaries between colonizers and colonized, which translated into the opposition between the two categories of citizen and non-citizen: the former category applied to a tiny minority, the latter to the vast majority of colonial society. In general, the transition from one category to the other was very difficult to achieve.

That is why Sengal Workneh's life story is of special relevance in this context: born in 1880 in the north of the Ethiopian Empire, he attended the Italian school in Massawa in the early years of foreign rule in the region. His naturalization in 1919 represents the end point of a long life spent in Italy, in the Italian colony and in the service of Italian institutions. Sengal Workneh's biography and his naturalization process offer a peculiar perspective from which to approach the history of the Italian colonial administration and its laws. This chapter focuses on a naturalization process as a tool to understand how mechanisms of colonial power operated and how a local member of colonial society might experience them. Through, what can be defined as, the perspective of historical anthropology, an attempt will be made to provide a contribution to the history of citizenship in Italian colonialism which pays attention to the expectations, desires, disappointment and opposition of local actors—in short, to *local agency*. The chapter relates to a rich tradition of studies on the history of law, administration and political institutions in the Italian colonies, which have also addressed the question of colonial citizenship (Rosoni 2006; Chelati Dirar et al. 2011; Rosoni and Chelati Dirar 2012; Giorgi 2012; Dore et al. 2013). At the same time, it refers to the particular research field investigating that section of colonial society made up of clerks, translators, intermediaries and other similar figures, who have been eminently studied, for example, in the influential volume *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and*

Clerks. African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa, edited by Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily L. Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts. This strand of research has shattered the long-established dichotomy of collaboration and resistance between colonizers and colonized, by concentrating on the grey area of appropriation, mimicry and negotiation between the two groups (Lawrance et al. 2006). The degree to which a translator could acquire influence by dealing with colonial authorities has been illustrated by Ulrike Schaper, who has focused on the life story of Duala subchief and interpreter David Meetom from the German colony of Cameroon (Schaper 2016, 752–776). Set at the intersection of these scholarly strands, my brief reconstruction of Sengal Workneh's life and naturalization looks at the wide imperial space stretching between the metropolitan territories of the Italian Kingdom and colonial territories in the Horn of Africa. It considers the key categories of *race* and *class* to add a new chapter to the history of citizenship in European colonialism.

Citizenship and Naturalization in Colonial Eritrea

In the first 30 years or so of Italian military occupation and colonial rule, the local inhabitants of what in 1890 became the *Colonia Eritrea* were indiscriminately defined as 'indigenous subjects' (*sudditi indigeni*) or 'Italian colonial subjects' (*sudditi coloniali italiani*). These and similar definitions were common in the language of legislators as well as colonial administrations. From the very beginning, therefore, locals were not deemed to be citizens. In pursuing a policy of differentiation, Italy followed the example set by other colonial powers, whose similar citizenship policies had been an object of extensive research (Cooper 2018, 41–92).

This differentiating colonial citizenship was first systematically formulated in 1908, as part of an extended program of institutional reforms and (ultimately failed) colonial codification carried out by Governor Ferdinando Martini (in office 1897–1907) (Sagù 1986, 567–616; Nuzzo 2011, 205–222). Even though the *Codice civile per la Colonia Eritrea* [Civil Code for the Eritrean Colony] never entered into force, it remained a significant document. The first section of the *Codice* set the conditions for the racialized form of citizenship in force in the Italian colony in the Horn of Africa, so-called *sudditanza coloniale* (colonial subjecthood).[3] This definition of who was a colonial subject merged with the new justice system—the *Regio Decreto* [Royal Decree] *2 luglio 1908, n. 325. Ordinamento*

[3] *Codice civile per la Colonia Eritrea*. 1909. Roma: Stamperia Reale Domenica Ripamonti.

giudiziario per l'Eritrea [Judicial system for Eritrea] (Mori 1914, 232–254; Martone 2002, 71–90)—issued by Martini's successor, Giuseppe Salvago Raggi (in office 1907–1915). According to art. 2 of the *Ordinamento giudiziario*, a *suddito coloniale* was a person who was not an Italian citizen or citizen of any other European state, and was born in the colony and belonged to one of its 'tribes'. Subjects also included those Africans or people from other regions of the Red Sea who were employed in the colonial administration or had spent at least two years in the colony without interruption. The same text also dictated the legal status of those colonial inhabitants who were foreigners but were deemed to belong to a lower civilization than the European one. They were defined as *assimilati*. With little changes, the structure of citizenship regulation in Colonial Eritrea set by art. 2 of the *Ordinamento giudiziario* remained valid until the end of Italian rule in the Horn of Africa (Camilleri 2020, 27–57; Capuzzo 1995, 65–95).

These norms, imbued with colonial racism, aimed to create a society of unequals. In it, the colonizers, as Italian citizens, mainly kept their citizenship rights; the subjects instead only enjoyed a very thin set of rights, which mostly consisted in the bare acknowledgment of their personal status. Notably, colonial subjects did not have political rights. Colonial subjecthood had a political and territorial character, which bound colonial subjects—and the *assimilati* equated to them—to their colony only, and not to other Italian colonies. This point gained a certain relevance when colonial subjects and *assimilati* travelled abroad. Indeed, colonial subjecthood acquired meaning especially in relation to international questions. It must also be said that the subordinate legal condition of colonial subjects was framed within—and in turn reinforced—many forms of exclusion of such subjects from colonial life. Separation between colonial subjects and Italian citizens regarded every aspect of society, including urbanism, colonial justice, school education, although this does not mean that a total separation of the two population groups was ever achieved. Despite all the segregation attempts and the unequal conditions set by the norms, the colonized and the colonizers lived side by side and shared many grey areas, which provided plenty of opportunities for exchanges and interactions of various kinds. An investigation of colonialism and its racial substance must consider the ambivalence of a situation in which certain legal values based on racism were challenged by everyday practices.

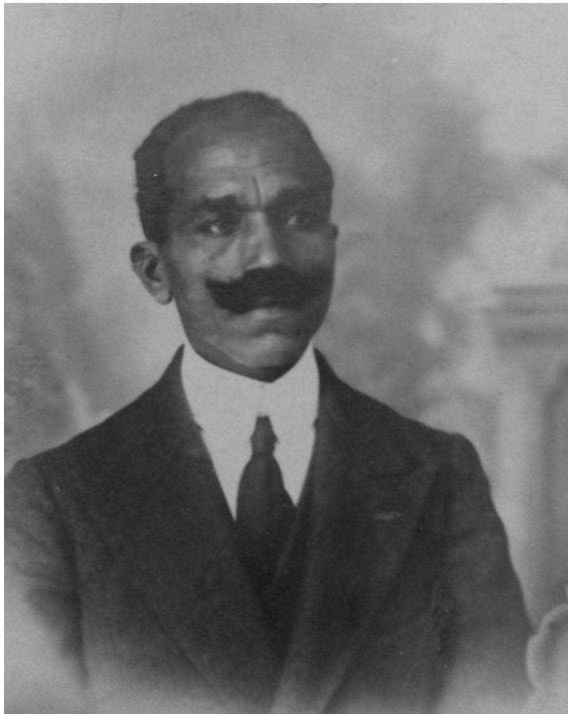
For this chapter it is now important to understand to what extent it was possible for a colonial subject to change their legal status. Given this separation between metropolitan citizenship and colonial subjecthood, could a

colonial subject cross the line of separation and achieve naturalization? Despite the legal boundaries between citizenship and subjecthood, in Colonial Eritrea no norms officially forbade the naturalization of indigenous at that time. The process, discussed in the *Codice civile per la Colonia Eritrea*, was made possible by art. 16, but only through royal decree and based on 'special personal qualities, or merits or services rendered' (*speciali qualità personali, o benemerenze o servizi resi*). This naturalization was 'personal and not inheritable' (*personale e non trasmissibile*). The reason why a royal decree instead of a simple decree by the colonial governor was made a requirement in order to certify naturalization lies in the fact that it was felt necessary to present naturalization as an award bestowed by the Italian Kingdom on a worthy subject (Scialoja 1933, 172). However, as has been said above, the *Codice* never entered into force. The new citizenship law of the Kingdom—*Legge 13 giugno 1912, n. 555 Sulla cittadinanza italiana* [On Italian citizenship]—which in art. 15 equated colonial and metropolitan territories with regard to the new citizenship law (excluding any *ad hoc* norms valid only for the colonies), did not actually prevent colonial subjects from receiving naturalization. However, it must be said that in the Italian Kingdom only a few received the Italian citizenship, and naturalization was a very rare administrative process (Gironda 2010, 277–310). Given this legal frame, a colonial subject of Eritrea could *de jure* be naturalized and so acquire Italian citizenship. Yet, this liberal attitude concealed an ambivalence which was typical of colonial law and colonial culture at the time. Indeed, on the one hand colonial powers declared themselves to be committed to their civilizing mission; on the other hand, they did not do much more than reduce the inhabitants of the colonies to second-class citizens, that is, subjects, and—in line with the paradigm underlying French assimilation—promised them equalization only at the end of a long 'civilizing' process, of course inspired and imposed by the colonizers. In practical terms, this meant that *de facto* naturalization was not granted to colonial subjects, except in very exceptional cases. What prevailed was the idea that naturalization *per se* could not make all colonial subjects citizens at once, as a contemporary observer notes in a lively manner:

> Naturalization granted to a native is nothing but a veneer that can perhaps be useful to give him some prestige among his old tribe fellows but is not enough to transform him into a citizen who has full awareness of his new rights and duties.[4]

[4] Solinas De Logu, Giuseppe. 1912. *Condizione giuridica e politica degli indigeni nella Colonia Eritrea*. Sassari: Dessì, 68.

As a matter of fact, during the liberal period of Italian rule in Eritrea only a dozen naturalization requests are documented. The majority of them was submitted by Ottoman subjects who had been residing in the region already before the Italians established their colonial rule. Other requests came from other foreigners. The process of Sengal Workneh's naturalization seems to be the only one in Colonial Eritrea started by a request from a 'native' colonial subject (Camilleri 2021). Naturalization appears like an administrative process concerning only a colonial middle class not of African origin. This makes Sengal Workneh's story particularly significant.



Portrait of Sengal Workneh

Sengal Workneh: The Stages of His Life

Sengal Workneh (Rouaud 1991, 309; Ricci 1969, 887, 906; Puglisi 1952, 271) was born on 31 January 1880 in Addi Abun near Adwa in Tigray, Northern Ethiopia. As a child, he attended the Italian school in Massawa, the R. Istituto De Cristoforis. According to a later source, he was brought to Naples in his childhood by an Italian teacher, who was working in Massawa.[5] We do not know just how reliable this information is, but we do know that Sengal Workneh moved to Italy in 1896. He himself declared to have moved to Italy 'of his own free will'.[6] A few years later, in 1899, he was allowed to enlist as a volunteer in the *Cavalleggeri* regiment in Alessandria. From February 1899 to March 1903, he performed military service in several places in Italy. He reached the rank of sergeant. As a matter of fact, we do not know what reason really brought Sengal to Italy in 1896 and to enroll. Being educated in an Italian school must have been an exceptional experience for a person born in the Horn of Africa at that time, which explains the special opportunity he had gotten to enlist in the Italian army rather than in the colonial troops (as Eritreans were allowed to do).

Mobility between colonial and metropolitan territories was a prerogative of Italians who reached the Horn of Africa: Eritrean subjects were hardly ever put in the condition to travel to Italy—surely not on their own. In Italy, Sengal Workneh may have experienced a very rare condition, since people of African origin were a tiny minority in the peninsula. Moreover, the process of Italian nation-building intensively operated through the exclusion of individuals and groups with different ethnic and racial profiles, as research on Italian racism in the late nineteenth century has shown (Nani 2006; Burgio 2000). In this context, the draft counted as 'school of the nation' and was deemed useful for achieving social and cultural homogenization in a country which was characterized by the marked heterogeneity of its inhabitants, formerly the citizens of separate states that had finally been unified under the Savoy monarchy in 1861. Sengal Workneh's experience may also have been influenced by the fact that after the battle of Adwa (1896) colonial enterprises enjoyed a bad reputation among the Italian population, and wide sectors of Italian public opinion blamed the army for the many soldiers' lives lost, although the

[5] Compagnia Carabinieri Reali, Informazioni sul conto di Sangal Wocheneh [sic], Asmara 13 marzo 1918, ASDMAECI, AE 882, Fasc. 'Sudditanza'.

[6] Sangal Worcneh [sic] a Sua Eccellenza il Ministro dell'Interno, Asmara luglio 1906, ASDMAECI, ASMAI II, Persone operanti in Africa (1879–1925) Pos. 35, Pacco S – 1.

army was considered to have been a central institution for the achievement of the unification. These years as a draftee were a crucial experience in Sengal's life: in his future interactions with Italian authorities in the colony and the metropole he frequently mentioned this phase of his life, underlining the patriotic sentiments towards Italy it instilled in him.

In 1903, Sengal relocated to Colonial Eritrea. Seemingly, the reason for this move was twofold: firstly, the climatic conditions in Italy did not suit his health; secondly, to the Italian authorities he appeared to be of much greater use in the colony.[7] Indeed, in Eritrea he was hired as a civil servant within the colonial administration, and thanks to his language skills worked as an interpreter. Until 1905 he was in the service of the Command of Colonial Troops; he then held the same office between 1905 and 1914 in several colonial administrative districts (*Commissariati Regionali*), the Prosecutor's Office (*Procura*) and the Court of the Colony (*Tribunale della Colonia*).[8] It was in this role that he met Renato Paoli, a contemporary journalist—later the secretary of the Italian Colonial Institute—who visited the colony and published a detailed record of his travel impressions in 1908. When Paoli visited the colonial capital, Asmara, the head of the Hamasien administrative district, Giovanni Salvadei, entrusted him to Workneh's care. The interpreter struck the journalist as an 'educated and intelligent native' (Paoli 1908, 67).

As an interpreter, Sengal Workneh took on a special role in colonial society. He had the central task of making the various branches of the administrative apparatus work. Without intermediaries, colonial trials could barely take place in a multilinguistic context like Eritrea, where jurisdiction at the time was in the hands of Italian administrators, who very seldom spoke local languages and knew local customs, and claimants spoke different languages, mostly Tigrinya and Arabic. This multilingualism was not typical only of the court rooms but marked all human interactions in the colony. In this sense, the interpreter Sengal Workneh was a cultural broker between two worlds and was constantly asked to cross the border between them.

This act of crossing the border between the colonizers' world and that of the colonized did not occur in merely abstract terms. As has already been partially revealed, Sangal Workneh's life was physically played out

[7] Ministero della Guerra, Segretariato Generale, Stato Maggiore, to Ministro degli Affari Esteri (Ufficio Coloniale), Roma 2 giugno 1902, ASDMAECI, ASMAI, II, Persone operanti in Africa (1879–1925) Pos. 35, Pacco S – 1.

[8] ‚Stato di servizio e di carriera' (s. d. but after 1921), ASUnior, Fondo Personale, *ad nomen*.

between colonial and metropolitan territories. His very mobility in the imperial space of the Italian Kingdom became an instrument of the colonial project. For instance, in autumn 1914, Workneh moved again to Italy, this time to Naples, where the Ministry of the Colonies had transferred him all of a sudden in order to be employed at the *Istituto Orientale*, which had turned into the main educational institution in Italy for the study of the languages spoken in the colonies (Guazzini 2007, 221–222). From the academic year 1914–1915 until 1922–1923, he taught Amharic and Tigrinya. A rich file of documents stored in the archives of the Neapolitan university provides insight into his teaching activities, salary conditions and relations with bosses and colleagues; in some cases, these sources also provide intimate details about his personal life. The impression of Sengal Workneh as a committed worker reflects the good reputation he would appear to have enjoyed at his workplace. In July 1916, in a letter probably addressed to the director of the *Orientale*, Prof. Francesco Gallina, a distinguished Ethiopianist of those years, warmly supported some claims of Sengal Workneh and referred to him as his colleague.[9] This was not a matter, of course. All over Europe those indigenous from the colonies who had received an education (mostly in missionary houses or colonial schools) and were deemed more 'civilized' were employed in colonial schools and universities in the colonizing countries. As European countries conquered overseas territories and established colonial rule over them, in the motherland, schools and institutes were established *ad hoc* and old universities were partially refashioned in order to give the imperialistic agenda a scientific foundation—as the rich scholarship on the relationship between colonialism and science has demonstrated (Habermas and Przyrembel 2013; Stuchtey 2005). More specifically, indigenous language assistants coming from the colonies had a twofold task: firstly, they had to help train European officers, clerks and soldiers who were moving to the colonies and needed language skills for their work and life oversees; secondly, they helped local researchers to enlarge and improve their knowledge of frequently little-known foreign languages like those spoken in the colonies. Despite the important role they played, indigenous language assistants were generally exposed to discrimination based on their race. Moreover, the view prevailed that scientific research was the Europeans' domain, and that Africans or non-Europeans in general could, at most, serve as informants or assistants. Much as in Imperial Germany, where

[9] Francesco Gallina al direttore, Napoli 31 luglio 1916, ASUnior, Fondo Personale, *ad nomen*.

'native' lecturers were referred to in a derogatory way through the term *Sprachgehilfe* (Pugach 2012), sources on Sengal Workneh's employment often refer to him as 'native assistant for the practical teaching of Amharic and Tigrinya'.[10]

During his time in Naples, Sengal Workneh—who was officially a colonial subject from Eritrea—had different assignments. In addition to his activities at the *Istituto Orientale*, he continued to work as a translator from Amharic and Tigrinya, especially on official occasions. When in the spring of 1919 the Ethiopian Empire sent three diplomatic delegations to Italy, France and Britain with the official goal of congratulating those countries for their victory in the First World War, but also—as recently argued by Massimo Zaccaria (Zaccaria 2019, 31–54)—to pursue its peculiar agenda of safeguarding the territorial sovereignty and political independence of Ethiopia (as though to pave the way for the admission of the country into the League of Nations, which happened in 1923), it was Sengal Workneh who accompanied the delegations in their visit to Rome and other Italian cities.[11]

An important chapter in Sengal's time in Naples is his participation in the First World War. During the general mobilization, he was enlisted in the military and served from 24 May 1915 to July 1919, while also keeping his job as lecturer of Tigrinya and Amharic. He was promoted from the rank of sergeant to that of second lieutenant and finally lieutenant. Mostly, he operated at the Deposito del *Cavalleggeri di Lodi* regiment in Naples; then, after the bombing of Naples on 11 March 1918, he engaged in the anti-aircraft defense of the city and the coastline. His commitment left good memories among his superiors. One of them highlighted that Sengal Workneh never missed his duties as a lecturer at the *Istituto Orientale* and even sacrificed his leisure time teaching in order to fulfil his commitments to his students.[12] As a matter of fact, the event of the war would appear to have helped Sengal Workneh to define his identity and sense of belonging to the Italian Kingdom. Driven by patriotic sentiments

[10] Regio Commissario (dell'Istituto Orientale?) al Ministero delle Colonie, Direz. Gen. per l'Africa Orientale, Napoli 7 ottobre 1925, ASUnior, Fondo Personale, *ad nomen*.

[11] Answering a request of the Ministero delle Colonie, the Presidente del R. Istituto Orientale recommended Sengal Workneh as a translator for the diplomatic encounters, a task that Workneh in fact accomplished. See Telegramma del Presidente R. Istituto Orientale – Napoli al Ministero delle Colonie, 24 maggio 1919, ASDMAECI, ASMAI I, Pos. 54/24, Fasc. 85. The file contains other documents and newspaper articles related to this event.

[12] Il Colonnello Comandante del Deposito Reggimento Cavalleggeri Lodi (15), (Nota), Napoli, novembre 1918, ASUnior, Fondo Personale, *ad nomen*.

and a desire to inform the colonial subjects in Eritrea about the cruel conflict, for which he blamed the central European powers of Austria and Germany, Sengal Workneh wrote an anti-war poem, 'How the World Was Set Alight Because of Two Wild Beasts', published at his own expense in Rome in 1916. This is considered to be one of the first expressions of Tigrinya literature (Ricci 1969, 887) and—as recently underlined by Uoldelul Chelati Dirar—can be seen as a rare testimony of the First World War written 'with African eyes' (Chelati Dirar 2019, 18–24).

Portrait of Sengal Workneh in uniform

From Subject to Citizen

In July 1906, Sengal Workneh submitted a request for Italian citizenship to the Minister of the Interior.[13] In a short, two-page letter in his own elegant handwriting, he summarized his life and work experiences: 'Now, since the writer desires to receive Italian citizenship, he is respectfully submitting an application for the royal deed to be issued by which he can acquire said citizenship'. Furthermore, he declared himself ready to provide all the information required for the procedure and to swear loyalty to the kingdom and its laws ('to take an oath of allegiance to the King and of observance of the law'). A proper explanation of the motivations behind his request is not provided in the letter, which comes across as a conventional piece of writing, part of a bureaucratic, formal and impersonal procedure. Sengal may have formulated the request with a sense of confidence that it would be approved. He may have considered himself a foreigner, as he was born in Imperial Ethiopia, yet not a colonial subject, given his education and long life experience in Italy. Yet, the procedure did not run as smoothly as he had wished it would.

The request, which Sengal submitted at the head of *Commissariato Regionale* [Regional Commissioner Office], passed from there to the Colonial Government before being forwarded to the Ministry of the Interior in Rome. This ministry in Rome invoked some ill-defined special circumstances with regard to this request, but all in all it did not seem to raise any objection to the whole procedure: ultimately, the request could be treated like any other similar request made by foreigners applying for Italian citizenship.[14] A different position was taken by the colonial government, and specifically by its pro-tempore ruler Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi. With regard to the naturalization request, he referred to the ongoing work of codification, which was mentioned earlier in this chapter. Pecori Giraldi highlighted that the forthcoming *Codice Civile Eritreo* did not define Ethiopians as foreigners and assigned them the condition of subjects; furthermore, it allowed subjects to receive Italian citizenship upon request, but only as far as civil rights were concerned. Sengal Workneh's naturalization request could be examined according to these new dispositions, once they were issued. Nevertheless, a subtle, unspoken element of

[13] Sengal Uorcneh a Sua Eccellenza il Ministro dell'Interno, Asmara luglio 1906, ASDMAECI, ASMAI, II, Persone operanti in Africa (1879–1925) Pos. 35, Pacco S – 1.

[14] Ministero dell'Interno al Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma 31 agosto 1906, ASDMAECI, ASMAI, II, Persone operanti in Africa (1879–1925) Pos. 35, Pacco S – 1.

racial disapproval appears here: accepting Sengal Workneh did not seem appropriate.[15] The political argument of preserving the colonial order based on a racial distinction between colonizers and colonized prevailed. Shortly after this exchange, as already noted above, the legal status of colonial subject was created, although the codification project failed.

Anyhow, Sengal Workneh did not back off from his plan to become an Italian citizen. He contacted the colonial government again and even addressed a naturalization request to the King of Italy.[16] Having received no answer, in August 1908 he addressed one more letter to the Minister of the Interior which clearly reflected his argumentative skills.[17] Sengal Workneh expressed the desire to have his request approved as soon as possible; at the same time, he declared that he felt confident about the positive outcome of the whole process. What is interesting is that in this context he referred to other personalities in the colony who—to his knowledge—had received Italian citizenship: among many others, he mentioned interpreters like Nag'īb al-Hay and Antonio Fares, both former Ottoman subjects from Syria, and Afäwärq Gäbrä Iyäsus, a lecturer at the *Istituto Orientale* born in Ethiopia.[18] After being informed of the colonial administration's opinion about his request, Sengal Workneh soon appealed to the Minister of the Interior again with a long, undated letter to support his request.[19] This letter can be seen as a true expression of resentment for what he deemed to be a serious act of injustice. In it, what the author perceived as a discrimination found its way to get expressed in words. The reasoning followed different points: Firstly, according to Sengal, he was not a colonial indigenous, as he was born in the Ethiopian region of Tigray; secondly, if he could not have the honor of receiving the Italian citizenship, he should not have been accepted as a candidate for enlistment in the Kingdom's armed forced—that was his objection; thirdly,

[15] Governo dell'Eritrea al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Asmara 28 Novembre 1906, ASDMAECI, ASMAI, II, Persone operanti in Africa (1879–1925) Pos. 35, Pacco S – 1.

[16] The letter sent to the King in February 1908 is unfortunately not available.

[17] Sangal Workneh al Ministro dell'Interno, Asmara 15 agosto 1908, ASDMAECI, ASMAI, II, Persone operanti in Africa (1879–1925) Pos. 35, Pacco S – 1.

[18] On the naturalization of al-Hay and Fares, see Nicola Camilleri. 2018. "La cittadinanza negata nella Colonia Eritrea", *Altreitalie* n. 57: 52–68 (58). With regard of Afäwärq Gäbrä Iyäsus there are no evidences of his naturalization; for a biographical profil, see Alain Rouaud. 1991. *Afä-Wärq: un intellectuel éthiopien témoin de son temps (1868–1947)*. Paris: Éd. du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

[19] Sangal Workneh al Ministro dell'Interno, (s.d., s. l.), ASDMAECI, ASMAI, II, Persone operanti in Africa (1879–1925) Pos. 35, Pacco S – 1.

he mentioned again the cases of Afäwärq Gäbrä Iyäsus and lieutenant Maasciò Melcheziadik, who had seemingly received Italian citizenship ('at his word', *in parola*, that is: it had been promised to them). Finally, Sengal Workneh highlighted that laws enter into force after they are published and wondered why his case had to be judged on the basis of a code (the *Codice Civile Eritrea*), which was still being drafted and far from its publication. In fact, he wrote: 'Besides, based on my tenuous knowledge, codes and laws as institutions enter into force, I think, the day of their publication'.

Faced with these confutations, the governor of the colony, Giuseppe Salvago Raggi, reacted with irritation. He deemed unacceptable that an indigenous dared argue in this way with Italian authorities. Purely for the sake of fairness, he forwarded the two letters from Sengal Workneh to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. However, he remained strongly opposed to the request: 'for no reason can a native in the colony be allowed to hold Italian citizenship' (*per nessuna ragione può ammettersi che in Colonia vi sia un indigeno che abbia la cittadinanza italiana*.) Indigenous of the colony and neighboring territories had to be kept far from metropolitan citizenship. For the moment, Sengal Workneh's naturalization was ruled out.

At this point in the story of how the colonial subject Sengal Workneh became an Italian citizen has a break. Later, a crucial role is played by the First World War. As has been illustrated, Sengal's involvement in the war was considerable and went beyond strict military duties. The publication of his above-mentioned poem in Tigrinya testifies to the political interests and patriotic feelings which Sengal Workneh cultivated in the imperial space between colonial and metropolitan territories where his existence and activities took place. Sengal's service during the First World War was warmly praised by his superior in rank, Captain Adolfo Gambardella, who underlined his honesty, intelligence and commitment: 'One of his moral traits is his great attachment to Italianness and the homeland. (...) I have the fondest memories of Lieutenant Sengal, as an officer and gentleman'. Archival records show that Sengal Workneh submitted a new citizenship request in 1917. Unfortunately, this request is not available. References to the document, which was seemingly submitted to the Command of the Army Corps (*Comando del Corpo d'Armata*) in Naples, can be found in the correspondence between the Ministry of War, which received the request; the Ministry of the Interior, to which it was forwarded; and the Ministry of the Colonies, which contacted the Colonial Government in

Eritrea. Despite the current restrictions regarding the concession of citizenship, the Ministry of War deemed the request worthy of a positive response, as it represented a special case (on naturalization policy during WWI see Caglioti 2017, 495–530). Yet, the Colonial Government was requested to collect in the colony information about Sengal Workneh and his reputation and to forward it to the Ministry of the Interior.[20] The *Carabinieri* royal company in Asmara, acting on behalf of the Colonial Government, reported information on Sengal Workneh that fully matched the good reputation he had enjoyed so far. For example, the reports states:

> Sengal, for the time he resided in this colony, always kept a good behavior. He used to get dressed like Europeans, eating like Italians, thus renouncing to the lifestyle of the natives. He has a mixed-race wife named Maria, not well identified, with three children, all in Italy. (…) It was not possible to determine which course of study Sengal might have done, but it turns out that he has a certain culture, and he is serious and respectful.[21]

These positive words directly touch upon those criteria of respectability that in Europe had represented elements of distinction for the bourgeoisie and bourgeois culture in the long nineteenth century (Hettling and Hoffmann 2000). For example, the fact that Sengal Workneh had stopped wearing the kind of clothes that Eritrean men usually wore and that he 'dressed as a European' was seen as proof that he had abandoned his old 'uncivilized' habits and had entered modernity and 'civilization' (this relationship between clothing and 'civilization' has been clearly pointed out by Jürgen Osterhammel in his *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Osterhammel 2009, 1100; see also Ross 2008). The way Africans and non-Europeans dressed became a contested issue: on the one hand as the projection of an imagined exoticism, on the other hand as display of achieved civilization or the lack of it—conceived, of course, from the Europeans' perspective. Similar observations can be also made with regard to diet, as mentioned in the report. Sengal Workneh's education, lifestyle and good reputation essentially contributed to making him

[20] Ministero delle Colonie a Governo dell'Eritrea, Roma 24 Dicembre 1917, ASDMAECI, Archivio Eritrea (AE), Pos. 882 Fasc. "Sudditanza".

[21] Regio Corpo di Truppe Coloniali, Compagnia Carabinieri Reali a Governo dell'Eritrea, Direzione Affari Civili, Asmara 13 marzo 1918, ASDMAECI, Archivio Eritrea (AE), Pos. 882 Fasc. "Sudditanza".

an Italian citizen. The naturalization procedure ended with Sengal's exceptional naturalization due to the Royal Decree issued on 13 July 1919.[22] This occurred a little after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which marked the end of the First World War.

Conclusions

Sengal Workneh died on 10 October 1929 in Asmara. According to archival sources, the diminished need for Tigrinya and Amharic classes in Naples led the Italian authorities to dispatch the former lecturer of the *Istituto Orientale* back to Eritrea. There a plan was drawn to employ him as a teacher of Italian in Addis Ababa. Seemingly, the teaching of Italian in the Ethiopian Empire had started becoming an issue for the Italian authorities.[23] How far this can be seen as a soft power policy is a topic that goes beyond the main questions addressed in this article.

The story of Sengal Workneh's life presents much food for thought and this article has looked at it only from the perspective of his transition from subject to citizen within the legal frame of Italian colonialism. The legal status of local inhabitants of Italian Eritrea was colonial subjecthood. The naturalization of subjects in the colony was not forbidden, but nor was it encouraged. It only concerned exceptional cases and counted as an arbitrary acknowledgment of a supposed process of civilization which the candidate had completed, rather than as the fulfilment of a bureaucratic act by a modern state. The racial identity and degree of civilization of the local inhabitants of Colonial Eritrea made this citizenship and naturalization policy necessary—this was the ideology of Italian legal scholars, political actors and colonial administrators. How far Sengal Workneh was a 'civilized native' or a 'black Italian' is a controversial issue, surely colonialism and its mechanisms of power dominated his life. His cultural embourgeoisement might raise questions about him as an expression of the kind of African elite in colonial times that now serves as an empirical basis to rethink the concept of the bourgeoisie in global terms (Dejung et al. 2019, 1–39; for a case study on colonial Africa, see West 2002). Yet, as the chapter has shown, Sengal Workneh's life was heavily marked by racial

[22] Municipio di Napoli, Stato Civile, Atto di Workneh Sengal (Acquisto della Cittadinanza italiana), Napoli 3 settembre 1919, ASUnior, Fondo Personale, *ad nomen*.

[23] Governo dell'Eritrea al Ministero delle Colonie, Asmara 2 novembre 1927, ASDMAECI, ASMAI I, Pos. 54/24, Fasc. 87.

discrimination and always laid on the border between inclusion and exclusion, the former condition being determined by the needs of the colonial project, the latter by racial and national prestige. The ultimate success of Sengal's naturalization request should not lead to misinterpretations, for it represents merely an exception to a citizenship policy marked by discrimination and proves the essential importance of the First World War in the redefinition of identities also in European imperial and colonial spaces. Beyond this exception, the main rule continued to hold: a colonial subject could not be an Italian citizen in Eritrea. And this was not to change in the following years.

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"Leave It for Dogs and Horses": Italy's Constitutional Debate on *Stirpe* and *Razza* (1946–1947)

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On March 3, 1947, the Union of Italian Israelitic Communities presented the members of the Constituent Assembly with a suggestion, "a subdued request", that the word *razza* (race) should be substituted with that of *stirpe* (stirp, descendance, lineage) (UCII, Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane 1985). The proposal was a timely one, for the Italian Constituent Assembly[1] would be debating the draft constitution in a

[1] In the coming pages there will be references to both the proceedings of the Commission for the Constitution (the commission of 75), sub-commissions, and the Constituent Assembly. Reference will also be made to the Committee of 18 (the commission coordination group) and the Forti Commission. The sources of the different institutions are not consistent, however, so that reports for the work of the Commission are summaries that do not report the debates word by word, while the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly are word by word transcriptions, and the Forti Commission produced a report that collates the works of its various sub commissions.

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plenary session starting the very next day. But it also went somewhat against the political tide, for , in those same years, the word "race" was being introduced along with "sex", "language", and "religion" in several European constitutions as well as in the burgeoning international legislation.

Arguably, there were two main, immediate sources of constitutional relevance for introducing the word *razza* in the Italian fundamental law that were present to everybody involved in the debates at the time: the Racial Laws passed in 1938 by the fascists that discriminated against the Jews, and the obligations coming from the 1947 peace treaty's political clause. Beyond and preceding these reasons lay the political and moral ones generated by the war and the fascist and Nazi persecutions, deportations, and exterminations. However strongly these moral and political reason were felt by the establishment while drafting and approving the constitution, there was also a marked tendency in the ruling class, as well as in the bulk of the Italian population, to downplay fascist Italy's responsibilities vis-à-vis Nazi Germany's deeds, typically expressed, also in the debate under review here, with the hyphenation "Nazi-fascist", when referring to racial persecutions. Beyond that, there were the glaring absences of significant dimensions of Italian racism and discrimination. First, the racist or quasi-racist beliefs and practices that divided Italians in relation to the various regional origins of its inhabitants. Second, possibly swept under the carpet of the conscious mind with the convenient excuse of the loss of colonies and territories, were the legacies of colonial legislation, racial policies, and ethnic repression in the colonies in East Africa. And third, the persecutions, massacres, and concentration camps in Dalmatia for the Slavs and for the Bedouins in Cyrenaica, which Italian scholars have extensively researched since the 1990s.[2]

Another dimension that was present in the background and informed more silently the debates on race concerned the layers of meanings and usages of the word "race"—*razza*—in Italian. There was also the often contradictory debates and opinions on the scientific and normative value of the concept of race at the time, something that emerged even in the usual sequence in which the list of categories in the various documents—sex, race, language, religion, political opinion—is usually ordered from the allegedly biological to the anthropological to the historical.

[2] Among others I mention here the research by Giampaolo Calchi Novati, Nicola la Banca, Angelo Del Boca, Nicola Camilleri, Ruth Ben Ghiat, Giuseppe Maria Finaldi.

Italy had lost a war and the new constitution was one of the—good—results of the defeat. After the end of World War II, Italy had been grouped for the purpose of postwar arrangements and treaties as one of the five countries allied with the Third Reich on the European war theater, together with Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Finland. The provisions of the peace treaty, eventually laid down at the 1946 Paris Conference, would loom over Italian politics after Italy's surrender in 1943, casting a shadow on the country's international status and future (Lorenzini 2007). The unfolding of the peace treaty, which included a provision on race discrimination, overlapped chronologically and politically, as we shall review in this article, with the drafting of the country's new constitution. The need for consistency between these two very different structural adjustments, peace treaty and constitution, and the political hierarchy between them were very clear to Italy's political actors at the time.

It is likely that the vast majority of the ruling class within the anti-fascist coalition thought and felt that the inclusion of *razza* among the principles of nondiscrimination was one of the moral and political duties that the legacy of fascism and the war comported. However, one of the *decalages* that this situation—peculiar to Italy but not so exceptional—generated by the inclusion of *razza* in the constitution, placing it along with religion, language, and gender, is that this inclusion could be felt, or considered, by people in certain political and cultural positions as a sort of validation of the notion of race as an actual category applicable to humans. According to radical anti-fascist position, the principle that humans belonged to different races had been introduced explicitly in the Italian legal system by the fascists, building on an alleged scientific validity of the category, and its inclusion, even resignified for the purpose of combating discrimination, elevated race from the status of fascist aberration to constitutional principle. However, they were not the only ones. Feelings and considerations of this sort were also available and present in at least two other groups of people: those who doubted or opposed the scientific validity of the concept of race as applied to the human species, and those, mostly the Jews, who had been targeted by the introduction of racial legislation and had been the victims of discriminations and persecutions. From these two latter positions descended, on the one hand, that if the concept of race had no scientific value then it should not have normative value and hence should not appear in laws, and on the other, that if the notion of "race" had been applied to segregate, discriminate, persecute, and exterminate, its inclusion in the constitutional text, even if intended to prevent those

crimes, would in itself provide a validation of this category as applicable to humans. From these positions, erasure would be evaluated as a preferable option. In addition, the inclusion of race, if taken from an uncritical and/or interested perspective, could be pursued by the many nostalgic of the pre-war regime or hard-liner radical fascists, the ones that had collaborated more enthusiastically with the Nazis during the war.

Italians struggled with these *decalages* and contradictions, and, in the historical contingencies of 1946 and 1947, had to find their own solution.

This chapter outlines and unpacks the debates in the constituent assembly and commissions regarding the inclusion of the word *razza* in the constitutional text as it was eventually finalized in 1947. "Race" was inserted in the opening general principles section, in Article 3, which stipulates the basic principle of equality before the law and forbids racial as well as sexual, religious, linguistic, and other forms of discrimination (Leo 2020; Patriarca 2021: 6–8). A caveat on the translation of the word *razza* into "race" is necessary. Twenty-first-century English speakers, and readers, are used to the word race being used quasi exclusively for humans and mostly in relation to skin color. However, this is not the case in other languages, including—not exclusively—many European languages, and in other historical periods. Thus, race and *razza* evoke different connotations, and consequently generate misunderstandings, which is one of the dimensions addressed in this chapter. Moreover, each word has its own history and usages in the various languages and nations and is influenced by the words close to them, their synonyms and antonyms, the evolution of their usage, and the evolution of their translations. Connotations also vary depending on speakers' (in this case, readers') education, birth, origins, experience, and political leaning. For instance, the generation of people that populate the coming pages experienced during their lifetime the appearance and popularization of the term "racism", which, emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century—in Italy with Fascism—and was an unknown word, albeit a common attitude, to their mothers and fathers. Most of the documents from the 1940s do not include the word "racism", reserved for the "nazifascist" policies, within the constitutional debate here reviewed the only significant mention of this relatively new word, "of this racism" will come in the conclusive intervention of the president of the Constituent Commission. This chapter considers—within the limits of its author—the legacies of all these differences with regard to today's readers and with regard to the actors at the end of the 1940s.

I will first outline the context of the debate around the inclusion of race in the Italian Constitution to bring out its complexity and relevance. Second, I will reconstruct the various stages of the preparatory drafts and debates around the wording of Article 3 (previously Article 2 in the debate, and 7 in the draft project): "All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions".[3] Third, I will focus on the request by the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (then called, Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane, UCII) to substitute the word *razza* for *stirpe*, unfolding the layers intrinsic in the petition and deepening the analysis of the issue of the constitutional validation of the word *razza*. Finally, I will analyze the response to UCII at the Constituent Assembly that led to the final inclusion of the "cursed word".[4] The move by the Jewish Community was essential to an eventual definition of the concept of race in postwar Italy, a process that was full of nuances, fissures, and paradoxes.

A Changing National Framework and the Peace Treaty

Racial discrimination on the basis of origin and birth in the Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa can be traced back to colonial legislation since before World War I, and increased throughout the fascist period. The word *razza* had been included explicitly in the Comprehensive Law for Somalia and Eritrea in 1933, in relation to the identification of uncertain paternity. Race was introduced more comprehensively in Italian law in 1937 as part of the policies that tried to prevent marital relationships between individuals classified as belonging to different races in what was then called Italian Oriental Africa (Camilleri 2020; De Napoli 2009; Barrera 2004; Di Porto 2016). With the so-called Racial Laws of the second half of 1938, race as a normative category was extended from the colonies onto the metropolitan territory of Italy targeting citizens of Jewish faith and descent.

[3] I reproduce here the official, and usual, translation. See Senato della Repubblica, Constitution of the Italian Republic. Parliamentary Information, Archives and Publications Office of the Senate Service. p. 5. https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf, accessed on June 12th, 2021.

[4] From the final speech in favor the inclusion by Constituent Commission President Meuccio Ruini at the debate on Art. 3 at the Constituent Assembly on March 27, 1947.

These anti-Jewish laws—as Michele Sarfatti labelled them (Sarfatti 2002, 2006)—posed the legal and administrative basis for the successive policies of discrimination, persecution, expulsions if non-national and, during the war, deportation of the Jews, Italians, and non italians present in Italy. After the fall of fascism in July 1943, the repeal of the Racial Laws was included in the Instrument of Surrender presented by Gen. Dwight Eisenhower to prime minister Pietro Badoglio as part of the Armistice reached between Italy and the Allied forces (Aga Rossi 1993). Racial laws were arguably considered as one of the most emblematic, certainly the most shameful, of the legacies of fascism that the Italian government, an alliance of anti-fascist political forces, had to tackle after Mussolini's fall (Toscano 1988; Schwarz 2012). Article 31 of the Instrument of Surrender, signed in Malta on September 29, 1943, as the war still raged on, specifically demanded that

> All Italian laws involving discrimination on grounds of race, color, creed or political opinions will insofar as this is not already accomplished be rescinded, and persons detained on such grounds will, as directed by the United Nations, be released and relieved from all legal disabilities to which they have been subjected. (…)[5]

Article 31 in its formulation had a wider reach than the 1938 racial laws. It reflects the Allied and primarily the US perception and assumptions regarding which categories of people should be freed from ongoing discrimination, incarceration, and persecution. The words "race", put in first place, and "creed" (third) clearly targeted the 1938 racial laws, but they also went beyond them, for "creed" refers not only to religion but to any system of belief. The large number of people who were imprisoned or had been deported or exiled for political reasons were addressed by the inclusion of "political opinion", while "color"—with the US spelling, and placed second in the list probably targeted colonial legislation, like those already mentioned and other racially bounded policies in the colonies and occupied territories. Interestingly, and correctly in relation to the situation in 1940s Europe, this parameter was added as distinct to that of race. Notwithstanding this wide outreach one could nonetheless consider,

[5] ("Armistice with Italy. Instrument of Surrender" 1943) Accessed June 10, 2021. Art. 31. The text reproduced is only the first half of the article. The second half is more general in aim and more political in content, addressing the Italian government's obligation to abolish "fascist legislation".

looking at the situation in 1943, which categories were not included. Other than the expected (sex and sexual orientation, which were not considered relevant in the context of the conflict), there was no mention of "language", "ethnicity", or "nationality"[6] that could in particular apply to the Slavic population under Italian administration and occupation, as well as to other populations in the colonies and other occupied territories.[7] The demand to repeal racial legislation and other persecutory legislation was thus one chapter in a complex process that involved military campaigns and a forthcoming redefinition of national borders. Internal and international political scenarios intertwined in a complicated set of relations that included allied powers, co-belligerant entities, political parties in the anti-fascist coalition, public opinion, and the institutions of the Kingdom of Italy—including the monarchy itself—that had negotiated with the Allies in view of the Armistice. It also had to consider other socially and institutionally relevant actors, such as the Vatican. The problems for the Allied authorities and Italian leadership in the transition years between 1943 and 1948 and beyond were of a very different nature compared, for instance, with those of Germany, where the *debellatio*—that is, the complete defeat and total annihilation of the German state—had left Germans in the hands of allied military authorities. They also differed from those of France, which, although occupied by the Germans, claimed continuity via the de Gaulle cabinet in exile and was able to get a front seat among the Allies.

The second half of 1946 saw some important elements of the new national framework taking shape. First, the form of the future state was decided by a popular referendum. Second (albeit on the same day), a Constituent Assembly that would draft the constitution according to the referendum's results was elected in the first post-conflict popular vote, which served as a first electoral test for the political parties. Third, the Paris Conference disclosed the term of the Peace Treaty and conditioned Italy as a defeated country under Allied hegemony.

[6] The use of the term "nationality" will be discussed later. "Ethnicity" was introduced in Art. 4 of the Annex VI of the Treaty of Peace concerning the situation in the free territory of Trieste.

[7] Evidently, the main target of Art. 31 was the Italian peninsula situation and the oldest colonies. A survey of the documents exchanged at the time confirms that the situation in the occupied Yugoslavian territories, where the policy of Italianization had been taken place with the recourse to concentration camps, was considered from a military and diplomatic perspective.

While there was public consensus that a new constitution should be introduced, the end of the war brought a major institutional and public debate regarding the form of the future Italian state. This question was decided through a popular referendum celebrated on June 2, 1946, which provided a clear victory for the republican option. Political elections were held together with the referendum to elect representatives to a Constituent Assembly. This body acted also as a provisional legislative body while it drafted and approved the country's future constitution. When the Constituent Assembly met for the first time in late June, it decided on the creation of a constituent committee (called Committee of the 75, because of its 75 members) to draft the constitution.

To what extent would the new republic be able to break with the legacy of fascism while having to maintain some continuity with the kingdom of Italy? This constitutional issue intersected with concrete national and nationalistic interests and immediate concerns which were dealt at cabinet level and that were under scrutiny in the immediate postwar years. What territorial price would the victorious Italy of 1919 pay in 1947 for the belligerent Italy of 1940? What would happen to the territories in the northeast gained after World War I and now claimed by Yugoslavia, the only country to liberate itself in World War II, and which was therefore in a much stronger position than the defeated Italy? What would happen to the colonies conquered before or under fascism? The eventual solution of these issues would impact the way the country would be reconstituted and reframed in relation to minorities, linguistic differences, ethnic and national groups.

Regarding religion, a dimension that, as we have seen, partly overlapped with race, were the Lateran Pacts signed by Mussolini as prime minister in 1929, between the Kingdom of Italy and the Vatican (which was the basis for the existence of the Vatican State) to be incorporated or altered? The Lateran Pacts was an international treaty whose weight in the coming constitutional and institutional setting was significant at a moment when the influence of the Vatican on the allies and on national politics was very marked. Because of the centrality given to Catholic religion in the Pacts, it directly and indirectly affected the status of religious minorities such as the Jewish population, but they also affected structural aspects of the coming institutional setting, such as school and civil law. The protection and status of religious minorities in Italy would thus be a litmus test of the new republic's ability at breaking with the racist, fascist past, and of its capacity to restore Italy's status on the international stage.

In the months that preceded the Constituent Assembly elections, the tasks of providing preliminary frameworks and scenarios for a reorganization of the Italian state and its institutions was carried out by the Commission for the Reform of the State, which worked from November 1945 to May 1946, and was known as the Forti Commission after its president Ugo Forti. The commission presented its report to the government on May 30, 1946, just a few days prior to the referendum that determined that Italy would become a republic. The report elaborated a series of scenarios and indications that were taken up by the Constituent Assembly (d'Alessio 1979).

On July 26, 1946, after about a month of preparatory work to set up the framework for the work of the Constituent Committee, three sub-commissions formed within this committee started their work, to discuss and draft the various parts of the new constitutional document.

In the same summer weeks of 1946, there was a growing expectation for the preliminary documents for the Peace Conference set to take place in Paris in the fall of 1946. Alcide de Gasperi, who served as Italy's prime minister from 1945 to 1953, as well as most of the country's leadership, knew that a price would have to be paid for the fascist war. However, most journalists, public opinion, and politicians hoped, that the price would not be too great. Italy, in their view, had surrendered in September 1943, the peninsula had then been occupied by German troops and the Italian Kingdom had declared war on Germany in October, with the Italian Resistance—drawing its ranks from all the political forces that were now sitting in the cabinet intent to the renovation of the country—contributing to the liberation of the country after the fall of Fascism. These hopes drew on many factors. Among others, on a perceived US sympathy for Italy as well as on the famous 1940 speech by Churchill that solely accused Mussolini of Italy's entry into the war on Germany's side. However, these hopes were also grounded in a generalized tendency to downplay Fascism as a parenthesis in the country's history, a single step in the wrong direction, in a temptation to sweep fascism and its legacy under the carpet of the postwar rebirth and anti-fascist renovation. But considering military-political grounds alone, Italy's invasion of Albania, the aggressions on Greece and France, the partition of Yugoslavia, the participation in the war against the Soviet Union, the conflict in Africa against the British, all this left little actual ground for such hopes.

On July 29, 1946, just as the sub-commissions were starting their work on the constitution, the text of the draft peace treaty that would replace

the 1943 Instrument of Surrender was transmitted to the Italian embassy in Washington. The hope for benevolent treatment, which had permeated Italian public opinion, vanished: the treaty's dispositions included loss of territories, very heavy financial reparations, the division of the navy among the allies, the reduction of the army, and the dwarfing of the country's military capacity. To these very concrete measures were added the political conditions, identical for the five European countries involved, which demanded respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In Italy, these last were felt less as part of a dispositif that was common to the defeated countries than as a final political humiliation; a slap in the face for the country was treated as if it did not possess democratic and liberal history and sentiments (Lorenzini 2007, 99–129).

The text of the peace treaty caused national, political, and institutional shock, and Italian commentators started comparing Versailles 1919 to Paris 1947, generating a widespread debate on whether the treaty should be signed and ratified at all by the various branches of the Italian government, president, cabinet, and parliament.

The political provisions imposed upon the Axis countries in the peace treaty set a framework for upcoming and future legislation. Article 15 of the Treaty of Peace with Italy stated that

> Italy shall take all measures necessary to secure to all persons under Italian jurisdiction, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, the enjoyment of human rights and of the fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, of press and publication, of religious worship, of political opinion and of public meeting.[8]

Compared to the text of Article 31 of the 1943 Instrument of Surrender, which only targeted the discriminated, and had a wartime framing, the text of Article 15 Paris Peace Treaty targeted the entire population in the country, for years to come, clearly setting a framework of constitutional relevance. In Article 15 of the Peace Treaty, which replaced the above quoted Article 31 of Italy's Instrument of Surrender, the provision on discrimination was more juridical in its wording and more general in its

[8] Quoted from the English version as taken from ("Treaty of Peace with Italy" 2021) For an Italian version, see Lorenzini (2007, p 164). Lorenzini's volume include the treaty's full text in Italian.

value. The formulation "all persons under Italian jurisdiction" is very precise and, in the confusing postwar situation, correctly inclusive. The words that followed, "without distinction as to race, sex, language and religion" place race as first in the order and are overall very similar to those that would be chosen for Article 3 of the new constitution, with the same first four categories although not in the exact same order.

"Sex" was thus included and "color" disappeared, a sign that "color" was not considered an issue in the countries targeted by the Paris Conference, possibly because they no longer ruled over any colonies, or alternatively because it could be considered covered by race and the approach to constitutional language at the time tended less to extending than to reducing the number of principles.[9] "Religion" replaced "creed", while "language", a major issue in all five countries, and in Europe in general, was introduced, but not "ethnicity". "Political opinion", had also been taken out, arguably a sign of the advancing Cold War.

The inclusion of the term "race" in the 1943 Instrument of Surrender and then in the 1947 peace treaty framed the Italian political and constitutional debate in a variety of ways. Overall, it made it impossible, at least at the level of jurisdiction, to sweep the issue of legacies of the Racial Laws under the carpet, notwithstanding the strong impulses running through the Italian social and political body to consider fascism a shameful parenthesis in the history of a liberal democratic country to be considered closed with the end of the war (Schwarz 2012; Toscano 1988).[10]

During the months of September and October, as the Paris Conference continued with no apparent intention of lightening the conditions imposed on Italy, the constituent sub-commissions in Rome continued debating the wording of specific constitutional articles. On January 31, 1947, the final project of the new constitution was presented by the Committee of the 75 to the Constituent Assembly, and, ten days later, on February 10, the Italian government signed the peace treaty.

[9] The tendency veered clearly in the direction of extended lists in the latter decades of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first century. See, for instance, the 2017 constitution of Ivory Coast that lists 17 different principles of nondiscrimination.

[10] On the problem of the stereotype of the good Italian, which is one of the fundamental dimensions of the tendency to consider Fascism a parenthesis, one should mention the fundamental works, among others, by Angelo Del Boca and Filippo Focardi.

Advices and Debates: From the Forti Commission to the Commission of the 75

The preparatory work of the Constituent Assembly was carried out by the Commission for the Reform of the State, also known as the Forti Commission because it was presided by Ugo Forti. A professor of Administrative Law in Naples and respected advisor to the cabinet, Forti was a Jewish intellectual of firm liberal convictions and one of the signatories of the 1925 Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals (Caravale 1997). After having been appointed to lead the more technical commission for the reform of the administration, Forti had been chosen by the Ministry for the Constitution, Pietro Nenni, head of the Socialist party, to preside over the more political Commission for the Reform of the State (Focardi 2004; Caravale 1997).

From November 1945 to May 1946, the Forti Commission worked on a variety of scenarios and eventually it produced a "Relazione all'Assemblea Costituente", a report which is a collection of the various works of its own specialized sub-commissions. The Forti Commission thus worked in the period between the 1943 armistice and the 1946 Institutional Referendum and before the provision of the peace treaty. The report included few indications on the changes to be made in relation to specific fascist policies; however, the legacies of racial legislation were hardly discussed. This report constituted one of the main sources for the elaboration of the articles and provisions in the constitution. (Ministero per la Costituente, Commissione per gli studi attinenti alla riorganizzazione dello Stato 1946).

The word *razza* appeared several times in the Report presented to the Ministry for the Constitution. The issue of race is included mostly in two sections, first in the section devoted to political rights and equality of citizens, where it is included alongside religion, social condition, and language as categories for which to procure nondiscrimination, with the caveat that they should not be repeated in different sections of the constitution to avoid possible interferences. The other section that mentions race is the sophisticated analysis on the protection of minorities, which included a long and detailed examination of existing minorities in Italy and explored various options for their protection by the State while dismissing race's usability as a normative category.[11]

[11] The section on citizen rights is in pp. 119–128. The section on ethnic minorities is in pp. 175–190.

In the draft article on political rights and equality, which included the word among the principles of nondiscrimination, *razza* was discussed mainly among the points of reference regarding the universal provision of equality that functioned as a protection for minorities. A special mention was made of the Czechoslovakian constitution of 1920, which included in its provisions "full and absolute protection of life and liberty, with no difference whatsoever in relation to origin, nationality, language, race, or religion" (Ministero per la Costituente, Commissione per gli studi attinenti alla riorganizzazione dello Stato 1946, 185).[12]

The opening pages of the section on minorities constructs a framework that discards other categories to focus on linguistic minorities, following a very specific agenda. Minorities, it argued, can be grouped under two categories, religious and ethnic, and religious minorities should be treated separately. After explaining that ethnic minorities could be categorized according to various concepts and traditions, as racial, national, or linguistic (Ministero per la Costituente, Commissione per gli studi attinenti alla riorganizzazione dello Stato 1946, 175) (adding that the last two could be further divided between allogenic and alloglot), the commission gave its definitive opinion on the issue, suggesting the exclusive adoption of the discriminatory category of language in the Italian case:

> This is so because, either on positive ground, and in relation to our concrete situation, the concept of race appears empiric, dubious, or irrelevant, while the concept of nationality non-discriminatory; the first is thus to be integrally abandoned in our jurisdiction, the second to be unified with the concept of belonging to the state, as ours is purely a national state. (Ministero per la Costituente, Commissione per gli studi attinenti alla riorganizzazione dello Stato 1946, 175–176)[13]

Hence, in the end ethnicity is discarded by being elevated as the general category for minorities; religion is taken out because it should be treated separately; nationality is deemed irrelevant as supposedly there are no non-Italians living in Italy and Italy is a national state; and race is not only

[12] "… piena ed assoulta protezione della vita e della libertà, senza differenza alcuna di origine, di nazionalità, di lingua, di razza, di religione". My translation.

[13] "Ciò perché sia sul terreno positivo, sia su quello della nostra situazione concreta, il concetto di razza appare empirico, equivoco o irrilevante, e il concetto di nazionalità non discriminante; il primo quindi da abbandonarsi integralmente nel campo del nostro diritto, il secondo da unificarsi col concetto di appartenenza allo Stato, essendo il nostro prettamente Stato nazionale". Capitalization in the original; my translation.

irrelevant but equivocal. Language thus emerges as the sole organizational category for Italian minorities.

There were important, structural, and political reasons for choosing and providing a framework that privileged linguistic minorities. One, in relation to religion, was the major and growing influence of the Catholic Church and the Vatican and the legacy of the Lateran Pacts. A second issue, regarding ethnicity and nationality, was the loss of some multinational or multiethnic territories such as Istria; the third, the dangers implicit in providing "national" ground to minorities such as the German-speaking population in the areas bordering Austria. The single "language" parameter also simplified the question of the inevitable overlapping of categories of nationality (the South Tyrol, the areas bordering with Yugoslavia), religion (Valdesians, Jews), and ethnicity (Ladino, Roma). Language had the advantage of fitting within the nation-building tradition that the republic would inherit from the kingdom, which relied on a strong identification and overlap between national identity and Italian language and literature. In this framework, race could be entirely removed, as irrelevant, without challenging the centrality of language.

Not only did the commissioners dismiss all markers of ethnic minority status other than language, but they also dismissed outright the very validity of the concept of race as a legitimate or useful normative category. The three adjectives chosen, empiric, equivocal, irrelevant, left no room for discussion. "Empiric"—which should not be confounded with empirical—refers to practical knowledge devoid of ideological and scientific underpinnings, thus not suitable as a discriminating category.[14] "Equivocal" to the misleading and unreliable character of the concept, for when applied to humans it did not and could not denote discrete and separate populations, as it might have done when applied to domestic animals. "Irrelevant" is arguably the most problematic adjective, for it did describe the non-applicability of the concept in relation to its being nonscientific and dubious, but also, and more importantly, in relation to the specific Italian situation as seen by the members of the committee, probably in analogy with what was being said about nationality. Not another word is spent confuting the scientific or eugenicist use of *razza*, and neither to its widespread usage in Italian—what contemporary scholars would perhaps

[14] From Tommaseo-Bellini Italian dictionary of common use during the 1940s, my translation. In English, "empiric" (adj.) is defined as "derived from experiment and observation rather than theory". See "Empiric—Definition of Empiric by The Free Dictionary" (2021).

call "cultural construct"—notwithstanding the common use of race in many domains and disciplines. I believe that the Forti Commission's dismissal of race as a normative category for differentiating human populations shows how, in the 1940s, such dismissal was an available and viable position that could even be stated without much argumentation. However, this clear dismissal was not adopted by many of the report's recipients, for they continued to refer, or to pay lip service, to the common sense, at the time, that the human species was divided into various races.

Although, and possibly exactly because, the Forti report did not possess authorial unity, the overall indication about race that emerged from the two sections where the concept and the word *razza* are discussed point towards what I outlined in the opening page, the apparent contradiction between a rejection of race as valid normative category and its inclusion, for nondiscriminatory purposes, in the general principles and dispositions. Overall, this was the direction that was taken in the Constituent Assembly.

The first sub-commission of the constituent committee (the Committee of the 75) was tasked with drafting the articles on citizens' rights and duties, under the presidency of Umberto Tupini, a Christian Democrat and former Minister of Justice between 1944 and 1945 in the cabinets that followed the fall of Fascism (Mazzei 2000; Di Cosimo 2011). The debate on the principles of nondiscrimination took place on two main occasions, first on September 11, 1946, in the discussion of Article 2, on the general principles, and on November 14, discussing the articles on political rights.

On the morning of September 11, draft Articles 1 and 2 of the constitution were presented by two of the most morally authoritative members of the commission, Giorgio la Pira for the Catholics, and Lelio Basso for the Socialist group. The draft of Article 2 contained the following provision for nondiscrimination:

> Men, regardless of their differences in attitudes, sexes, races, classes, political opinions and religions, are equal before the law and have a right to equal social treatment. (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 11 Settembre 1946, 36)[15]

[15] "Gli uomini, a prescindere dalla diversità di attitudini, di sesso, di razza, di classe, di opinione politica e di religione, sono eguali di fronte alla legge ed hanno diritto ad eguale trattamento sociale". My translation.

The word "men" at the onset (which referred to both men and women) resonated with the legacy of the classic constitutional texts from the French tradition, and the list proposed is elaborate and progressive, with the adoption of plurals and with "attitudes" placed in first place. However, the ensuing debate showed that some members of the Constituent Assembly preferred a formulation of more juridical or political value. The radical democrat and highly authoritative criminal lawyer Mario Cevolotto proposed substituting "Citizens" for "Men" and reformulated the entire article, adding birth, social condition, and unbelief: "birth, sex, race, social condition, religious beliefs, the fact of not having creeds, cannot constitute a base for privilege or legal inferiority" (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 11 Settembre 1946, 36).[16] However, his proposal was rejected.

During the same session, the word race (*razza*) was further mentioned, but not discussed, in relation to an amendment presented by Giuseppe Dossetti, one of the leading intellectuals among the Christian Democrats, who was often independent of his party line. He proposed to add a reference to nationality after the term *razza* as another parameter to be protected from discrimination (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 11 Settembre 1946, 36).[17] Subcommission President Tupini frowned upon this, warning that including nationality could turn any differentiation between Italian and non-Italian citizens into a constitutional problem. The discussion focused on the consistency between starting the article with "Men" or "Citizens", and the different possible interpretations that the inclusion of nationality might generate. Dossetti argued his position by clarifying that nationality did not mean citizenship, and Tupini responded that the association between the two terms was immediate (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 11 Settembre 1946, 37). The discussion seemed to turn toward a dismissal of the amendment, when Aldo Moro—one of the emerging leaders of the Christian Democrats—intervened, arguing that leaving the word men and including nationality would provide a base for the nondiscrimination of foreigners, especially in the

[16] "La nascita, il sesso, la razza, le condizioni sociali, le credenze religiose, il fatto di non avere alcuna credenza, non possono costituire la base di privilegio o di inferiorità legale". My translation.

[17] Giuseppe Dossetti was representative of Social Catholicism, a branch of Catholic social theory focused on social equality and participation.

field of civil law (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 11 Settembre 1946, 38). Hence, with the blessing of Moro and notwithstanding the notations of the president of the sub-commission, Dossetti's amendment was eventually approved (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 11 Settembre 1946, 38).[18] There was no discussion around *razza*. In the transition from the work of the Committee of the 75 to the Committee of the 18—the intercommission committee tasked with coordinating the work of the various sub-commissions—"nationality" was eventually expunged from the text, and Article 3 (Art. 7 in the draft) starts with "All citizens" instead of "Men". This change has indeed created a grey area in the constitutional text regarding the protection of foreigners (noncitizens) (Luciani 2020, 13, 37).

A second discussion on discriminations took place on November 14, as the debate focused on political rights (Articles 48–54 in the definitive version). Umberto Merlin, Christian Democrats, and Pietro Mancini from the Socialist party jointly presented a draft article to the sub-commission that, with some changes, notably the addition of sex was taken directly from the text penned by the Forti Commission for political rights.

> All citizens, independently of their sex, language, race, social condition, and political opinion, having once reached maturity, if naturally capable, uncensored, within the limit of determined by special legislation, have the right to passive and active electoral participation in universal and equal conditions. (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 14 Novembre 1946, 377)[19]

As we can see, the draft formulation of the article incorporated some of the notions brought up in the debate on Article 2, for instance, by starting with "All citizens" instead of "Men". However, in relation to the

[18] The reference to "nationality" was later removed and did not appear in the draft of Article 7 proposed by the Committee to the Assembly, even though Dossetti's proposal would have in part remedied the problems generated by the change from men to citizen. The inclusion of "nationalities" could also have been a sort of gesture towards the communists and the socialists, as one of their referents was the Constitution of the Soviet Union and its rejection of discrimination based on nationality and race (Art. 123 of the 1936 Constitution of the Soviet Union).

[19] "Tutti i cittadini, indipendentemente dal sesso, dalla lingua, dalla razza, dalla condizione sociale e dalla opione politica, quando abbiano raggiunto la maggiore età, siano naturalmente capaci, incensurati, a termini della legge speciale, hanno diritto all'elettorato attivo e passivo in condizioni di universalità e eguaglianza". My translation.

principles of nondiscrimination, it made no mention of nationality, moreover, the list included *razza* and introduced language, placing it second, before race, in the list, and - notably not including religion in the principle for non discrimination—notably—.

As already mentioned, the Forti report had pointed out that problems could arise from a reiteration between fundamental principles and political rights (Ministero per la Costituente, Commissione per gli studi attinenti alla riorganizzazione dello Stato 1946, 122). Because of this, the formulation on discrimination was eventually expunged from the article on polical rights (Article 48 in the Constitution), to focus solely on political rights.

It was in the debate over this article that the first discussion on *stirpe* and *razza* took place. Immediately after the presentation of the article, Roberto Lucifero, who had just moved from the Monarchical to the Liberal political group, maintaining a strain of radicalism in his political views, proposed using the word *stirpe*—descendance, lineage—as it was more apt to represent "human dignity" rather than *razza*, which he disregarded as inappropriate (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 14 Novembre 1946, 377). Lucifero's speech was short, and it was neither well articulated nor strongly argued. He had been present and vocal on September 11 during the discussion of Article 2 and had said nothing about *razza*. However, two months later, he proposed this amendment, a lukewarm change that was probably more related to his and his party's political position than to a shift in his understanding of the words *razza* and *stirpe*. Lucifero was a representative of the monarchical right wing, which in November of 1946 was moving towards a confluence with the Liberal Party. Within the work of the Committee and later in the Assembly, he tried to push the text of the constitution towards neutrality regarding Fascism. In one of his interventions a few months later, he declared that he wanted the constitution to be "a-fascist" (Sircana 2006; Assemblea Costituente, 24 Marzo 1947, 1728).[20] By "a-fascist" Lucifero meant that it should not be anti-fascist but rather avoid any reference to (or connotation of) fascism whatsoever. His proposal to eliminate the word *razza* fit this agenda, which, while not defending fascism, was squarely against anti-fascism as the ideological cement that, in 1946, kept together a vast diversity of political forces, from the Christian Democrats to the Communists.

[20] See also Roberto Lucifero D'Aprigliano, on the historical portal of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and on the page of the Italian Senate.

The fact that his argument was made in the name of human dignity is also consistent with the uneasiness and ambiguities that race as connected to fascism generated. From this point of view, *stirpe* was a better word because it was unaffected by the events and ideas of the Italian recent past that colored race with the memories of black and brown shirts. Alternatively, "human dignity" could instead refer to the fact that in Italian the word *razza* is used commonly also for domestic and nondomestic animals while the word *stirpe* is usually reserved for humans. The reactions to Lucifero were unsurprisingly not positive. Immediately after his intervention, Cevolotto spoke against the proposal, arguing, first, that *stirpe* could not be considered a synonym of *razza* because the two terms did not overlap, and, second, that the word *razza* was of more common usage than *stirpe* (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 14 Novembre 1946, 378). Moreover, as a scholar of penal law (M. Caravale 1980), Cevolotto knew that *stirpe* was used in the title of section X [ten] of the Italian Penal Code, "Crimes against offspring's [*stirpe's*] integrity and health". Its articles (45 to 55) were devoted to abortive and anti-procreation practices, and the meaning of the word *stirpe*, used in the section-title but not in the articles themselves, was that of offspring or immediate family descendance.

The two presenters of the article, Merlin and Mancini, added their voices and weight to Cevolotto's opposition to Lucifero. Merlin, of the Christian Democrats, argued that *razza* had already been included in international legislation. His point of reference was arguably as much the peace treaty as the fresh memory of the Constitution of the French Fourth Republic, approved on October 13 of that same year and promulgated on October 27, which contained a preamble that stated that "each human being, without distinction of race, religion or creed, possesses sacred and inalienable rights".[21] The equality of the rights of men and women was specified separately, as "especially necessary for our times".[22] The adoption of "race" in the constitution of a country like France, an Allied power, introducing the list with the same word choice "sans distinction" adopted

[21] "…tout être humain, sans distinction de race, de religion ni de croyance, possède des droits inaliénables et sacré".(Conseil constitutionnel 2021), accessed 6/6/2021. The English translation is available at https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/en/preamble-to-the-constitution-of-october-27th-1946 (accessed 6/6/2021).

[22] "The law guarantees women equal rights to those of men in all spheres". https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/les-constitutions-dans-l-histoire/constitution-de-1946-ive-republique, accessed 6/6/2021.

at the Paris Conference for the peace treaties of countries allied with Germany, might have been somewhat comforting for the Constituent Assembly of a country forced to address (and redress) race in the Peace Treaty. Mancini, presenter for the Alliance of Socialists and Communists added that the word *stirpe* was related to the *ceppo familiare* and thus mainly to family descendance, and hence could not replace the word *razza* "properly speaking". Palmiro Togliatti—party secretary and leader of the Italian Communist Party as well as head of the Third Communist International—also spoke against Lucifero's proposal, fleshing out Mancini's point with an example: "there could in fact be the case of a citizen who is of Jewish race but of a different lineage (*stirpe diversa*) from another citizen of the same race". however, Togliatti's main point was political, and reinforced Cevolotto's note on the adoption of *razza* because of fascism: "at any rate, and beyond any other consideration, the word *razza* should be included to show our repudiation of just that racial policy that fascism had introduced" (Assemblea Costituente, Commissione per la Costituzione, Prima Sottocommissione, 14 Novembre 1946, 378).[23] Togliatti's intervention shows that he considered race a somewhat valid category, which, however, should be politically appropriated and resignified, after having been used for evil deeds during fascism. After Togliatti's intervention, sub-commission president Tupini considered the issue closed. It was at this point that Aldo Moro raised to propose removing the entire paragraph on discrimination from the articles on political rights, because its point was already established in the general principles, that is, in Article 2. Moro's proposal of cutting the paragraph was probably expected, as it solved the problem of repetition within the text of the constitution.

Thus, the first proposal to change the term *razza* to *stirpe* came from the radical right wing, which had an agenda to de-potentiate the anti-fascist drive, specifically from Lucifero, an authoritative albeit histrionic politician, mainstream in his political sensibilities but marginal in relation to the main forces that were controlling the constitutional process. In response, three main points were raised: the juridical, on the inadequacy of *stirpe* as substitute, with the ambiguous corollary of the pseudo-scientific validity of race;

[23] "Vi potrebbe essere infatti un cittadino il quale sia di razza ebraica, ma di una stirpe diversa da un altro cittadino della stessa razza. Ad ogni modo, a parte ogni altra considerazione, la parola "razza" dovrebbe essere usata appunto per dimostrare che si vuole ripudiare quella politica razziale che il fascismo aveva instaurato". My translation.

the second, the international legal framework; and the third, a political argument that held that the inclusion of *razza* was directly connected to the rejection of fascism.

If the Union of Italian Israelitic Communities had not decided to include their few lines on *razza*, the situation would have probably stopped at this, rather clear, point, with race being included in response to fascism and in accordance with international trends and obligations. However, it is the intervention of UCII at this point that makes the complexity of the fissures and the nuances of the situation emerge more fully.

The UCII's "Subdued Request"

The final draft of the constitutional project, to be debated in the upcoming sessions at the Constituent Assembly, was submitted by the Committee of the 75 on January 31, 1947, and its text was made public. In this final draft, the provision on discrimination shifted from Art. 2 to Art 7. On March 3, the Italian Union of Israelite Communities, which had been reconstituted after the war (Schwarz 2012; Catalan 2020), submitted a nine-page document to the Italian Constituent Assembly one day before its very first plenary meeting to debate the final constitutional draft entitled "To the Deputies of the Constituent Assembly, Remarks and Proposals" (henceforth "Remarks and Proposals") (UCII, Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane 1985, 467–476). The petition, signed by the UCII's president Raffaele Cantoni, started by remarking that the publication of the draft project of the constitution had caught the attention of the Jewish community as that of all other Italian citizens, but that as a religious minority, the bi-millennial Jewish community in Italy had a particular stake in the process, not only as the religious minority predating christianity in Rome but with the added moral authority conveyed by the persecutions experienced in the very recent past. In this light, the UCII declared that it could not but express its "opposition"—a very strong term—to the constitutional project because of the lack of parity established between the different religions and the absence of any stated protection of religious minorities (Schwarz 2012, 30–35).[24] The new republican Italy, a democratic state, it was argued, was called to go beyond the "tolerance" and "admission" of religions different from Catholicism

[24] Schwarz clarifies that UCII's text came out of a larger debate and opposition to the constitutional project in which other religious minorities had been engaged as well.

that had characterized the Italian state during, as well as before, fascism. The analysis of the draft constitution's provision for religious matters continued, very punctiliously, for four pages, before turning to the relevant and related issue of civil marriages and divorce, which was practically forbidden by a clause on the indissolubility of marriage in the draft constitution included to appease the Catholic Church.[25] The document's conclusion, in a demonstration of firmness, moderation, and national sentiment, focused on the Paris Peace Treaty that had been just signed by the Italian cabinet. The UCII argued that in their text they had stopped short of raising the argument that Italy was under the obligation of ensuring nondiscrimination on the basis of religion, and instead tried to appeal to the conscience of the deputies by reminding them that Italy was being observed and would be judged according to what it was able to show. "And the request for the revision of the unfair provisions of the treaty that is in the hopes of every Italian, will be more grounded and will raise more attention from the other peoples, in the measure that Italy is able to show that in civil jurisdiction it has raised itself to the level that modern civilization demands" (UCII, Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane 1985, 476).[26]

Squeezed in between religious parity and civil divorce, marked by a typographical separation before and after, there were five lines on the use of the term *razza* in the proposed constitution. The UCII's authors suggested substituting the word *razza* with the word *stirpe*, arguing that:

> Art 7, first paragraph states: "the citizens with no distinction of sex, race, and language, of social condition, of religious or political opinion, are equal before the law". There would be nothing to object to if not the subdued request to substitute the word "stirpe" for that of "razza", leaving the latter for dogs and horses. (UCII, Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane 1985, 473)[27]

[25] The indissolubility of marriage was eventually excluded from the constitution, thus leaving room for a future law on divorce.

[26] "E la richiesta di quella revisione delle ingiuste clausole del Trattato che e nella speranza di tutti gli italiani risulterà tanto più ben fondata e tanto più si raccomanderà all'attenzione dei popoli, quanto meglio sarà possibile dimostrare che in tutto quanto attiene ai civili ordinamenti interni, l'ltalia si è posta al livello che la civiltà moderna postula ed esige." My translation.

[27] "L'art. 7, primo comma dice : "i cittadini senza distinzione di sesso, di razza e lingua, di condizioni sociali, di opinioni religiose o politiche, sono uguali di fronte alla Legge". Non ci

Compared to the high register of the nine-page text's onset and the thoughtful analysis of the issues of religious freedom and parity, and civil divorce, the five lines and the linguistic register devoted to the word *razza* mark a clear break, a low-key, somewhat eccentric tone with a hint of irony. Moreover, as the authors themselves qualify it, it is a "subdued suggestion"—not an opposition—to use *stirpe* instead of *razza*, which should be left to its common usage, that is, for domestic animals, to the inexact science of dog and horse breeders.

In a few words and a punch line, UCII's "Remarks and Proposals" was able to evoke and engage with key and undiscussed layers of the issue surrounding the word *razza*. First, it complied with the peace treaty's demand to be explicit about forbidding racial (and other) discrimination, and thus it proposed an alternative suited for the constitution and for describing human intra-species phenotypical, or belief-based, variation. Second, it dismissed the recent connotations that the word *razza* had acquired in service of racist theories. Third, it dismissed the word's value as a scientific term, proposing not to expunge it from the dictionary but to confine it to its popular use and to practices that were deemed innocuous. Thus, UCII's remark engaged at least four dimensions: the political positioning towards fascism and racism; the judicial legacy of fascist racial laws; the normative value of the concept of race for differentiating and classifying human populations; and the multi-layered meanings and usages of the word.

This question of word choice raised again by UCII set the spotlight more clearly on the specific Italian situation. As already discussed, the term *razza* had been appropriated and institutionalized, by the fascist regime which gave it a new national status, first introducing it in the legislation in the colonies and then in the metropolitan territory through the Manifesto della Razza (Race Manifesto). This document, probably written by Mussolini himself, signed by several Italian scientists, proclaiming that it was time for Italians to declare themselves frankly racist, was followed by the approval of the Racist Laws of 1938 and was supported by official publications like "La difesa della razza". Thus, its inclusion in the basic principles of the Italian republic could be felt, paradoxically, as if it established an astonishing validation of the concept, based on dubious scientific and normative grounds, that had been set as the basis of one of the most

sarebbe nulla da obiettare se non la sommessa richiesta di sostituire la parola "stirpe" a quella di "razza", lasciando quest'ultima ai cani e ai cavalli". My translation.

emblematic fascist policies. And hence the UCII's request to leave race "for dogs and horses".

The reference to "dogs and horses" was far from being an improvised *boutade*. Its source was the authoritative and well-known Tommaseo-Bellini dictionary of the Italian language. In its entry for *razza*, an authored note by Bernardo Bellini at the end of the second meaning of the word explained that

> we call races those modifications of the characters of a species that are kept via reproduction. Thus, the many races of the species Dog, of the species Horse, etc. (see Varieties). (Tommaseo and Bellini n.d.)[28]

Since its first complete publication in 1879, this dictionary, in full or abridged form, had become a familiar presence in educated Italian households. Of the seven meanings and usages that the dictionary listed and commented for *razza*, the first was that of family descendance, in line with the—at the time widely accepted—possible etymological parentage with the Latin *ratio* or *generatio*.[29] The second was "for the particular species of animals, in particular domestic".[30]

With the reference taken from the Tommaseo-Bellini, UCII's "Remarks and Proposals" evoked the complicated and rich layers of *razza*'s usages and meanings. Including the popular expression that used *razza* to designate (often with negative connotations) a people or a family lineage. A common example of this usage (not included in the examples in the dictionary) is in the air from Verdi's 1851 opera Rigoletto (1990), "cortigiani vil razza dannata" ("courtiers, vile, damned race"), arguably one of the most well-known literary quotes with the word *razza*, in which it

[28] "(Zool.) [Bell.] Diconsi Razze quelle modificazioni dei caratteri di una specie, le quali si conservano colla riproduzione. Così le molte razze della specie Cane, della specie Cavallo, ecc. (V. VARIETÀ)". My translation. One of the particularities of this dictionary was the presence of notes signed by the authors, in this case by Bernardo Bellini.

[29] This etymology from Latin was the most accepted at the time. In the late 1950s new discoveries posited that Italian's *razza*—the term that was spread throughout other European languages, including the English race—came from old French *haraz*, which was related to horses.

[30] The third was specific for horses and other animals; the fourth extends it to plants; the fifth to other things such as spices as a synonym for quality, kind; the sixth specifically for the expression of "franca razza" referred to people of frank and direct manners; and the seventh to refer to men of the same kind, same profession, same inclinations. The entrance continued with several examples and single cases.

denotes a social type. Indeed, to most people in nineteenth- and twentieth century Italy, *razza*, besides the scientific and pseudo-scientific usages, evoked also a vast, common and diverse set of everyday usages, mostly associated with animal breeding and with social types.[31] The term's association with fascist policies and Nazi eugenics of the early to mid-twentieth century was too recent to have eliminated these older, more established meanings. The inclusion of the word race in the constitution, one could argue, would have given a privileged new position to this last usage of the word closely associated with fascist racist theories.

Why did the UCII decide to propose a substitution instead of a cancellation? And why *stirpe*? Why did UCII propose *stirpe* as a viable alternative, after it had been rejected only a few weeks earlier and by the highest political representative of the Constituent committee? The dictionary could have for instance suggested a third alternative "schiatta", a more ancient word, present in Dante's Divine Comedy—while "razza" and "stirpe" emerged later—and a word adopted in most dictionaries at the time as one of the closest words to either "razza" and "stirpe". "Stirpe", as discussed above, had already a place in the Italian juridical language and was a relatively popular language; "schiatta" was perhaps considered too remote from the "popular" language that it was requested for the constitution. At the moment, I cannot go beyond these hyphotheses and preliminary reflections. However, I believe that the inclusion in the constitution of *razza* (or synonymous or substitutive terms such as *stirpe*) was not a major battleground for anyone at the time: the Catholics, communists, socialists, liberals, or the UCII acknowledged the symbolic significance of the concept of race, but, in the eyes of UCII, for instance, this issue was minor compared to the major stake of religious parity. And regarding the absolute rejection of Lucifero's proposal to substitute *razza* with *stirpe*, perhaps Cantoni and the UCII safely presumed that their moral authority would force the Assembly to reconsider "stirpe" as an alternative to "razza", not because UCII would repropose Lucifero's proposal, but because the weight of UCII would shed a new light on "stirpe"—and they were right.

[31] The complicated issue of the overlap between anthropomorphism and racism, cannot be fully followed within the space of this article. As an example, I mention here the debate around anthropomorphism in Maus and Art Spiegelman's own assessment made in MetaMaus (2011).

The Response to UCII's "Remarks and Proposals" at the Constituent Assembly

The Constituent Assembly started discussing and amending the draft constitution on March 4, 1947. On March 24, on the third anniversary of the Ardeatine Massacre in Rome, which the Assembly solemnly commemorated at the onset of the session (Assemblea Costituente, 24 Marzo 1947, 2414), the discussion reached draft Article 7 (which would become Article 3), including the reference to discrimination and *razza*. It was presented by Renzo Laconi, member of the Communist Party, highly trusted by Togliatti, and whose work in the Committee of the 75 had been well respected. There were many amendments that proposed changes in specific wording, but none touched the word *razza*, until Mario Cingolani, a representative of the Christian Democratic party, raised to present an amendment to replace *razza* with *stirpe*. Referring to the UCII's "Remarks and Proposals", he stated that his amendment was an act of "due courtesy" to the Jewish communities, and argued that accepting their suggestion would constitute a "recognition of their restored status of perfect parity with the rest of the population after the racial persecution by the Nazi-fascists"(Assemblea Costituente, 24 Marzo 1947, 2422; Albertazzi 1981).[32] Laconi replied that the issue brought up by UCII's "Remarks and Proposals" had been debated by the political groups, and that there was an agreement among the Christian Democrats as well as among Socialists and Communists that the word *razza* should stay in the constitution "as a reference to something that has really occurred in Italy, i.e., that certain racial principles have been adopted as instruments of policy-making". The main reason for including the word was thus eminently political. However, Laconi, a chemist by formation, continued by arguing that the existence of races was a known fact that need not entail racism: "it is sufficient to open a geography textbook to find that humans are divided into four or five races, and this division per se does not imply a negative meaning". He concluded by distinguishing between the word race and the concept of racism, arguing that "maintaining the term to negate the concept" was a way to reiterate the absolute equality of all citizens

[32] In relation to Jewish loss of full citizenship and the need for restoration and recognition of perfect parity, see Guri Schwarz, After Mussolini, (2012) pp. 4–5.

(Assemblea Costituente n.d.).[33] Laconi's positioning, analogous to that expressed by Togliatti a few weeks earlier, manifest some of the difficulties and the ambivalences in relation to the race and racism at the time shared arguably by Marxists, Liberals, and Catholics. The existence of race as a social construct, as a category widely in use among people, is recognized but disassociated from racism. Race is here considered only for its supposed taxonomical value and not as a principle, leading, per se, to the construction of a hierarchy of sub-species; on the basis of this distinction, a net separation is made between race, considered a descriptive term, and racism, considered phobic and hierarchical.

The president of the Committee of the 75, Meuccio Ruini, took the floor to give the committee's opinion on the proposed amendments to Article 7, saving his remarks on the proposed word change for the conclusion of his intervention. He started by going against the prevailing opinion expressed so far and argued for the equivalence of *stirpe* and *razza* as words of both scientific and common use. He continued, "I understand that there are those who would like to be free of this cursed word, of this racism that appears as a posthumous verbal persecution [...]". However, and here Ruini reiterated and amplified the point made by Togliatti in November, it was exactly to react against the use of racist theories in Nazi-fascist regimes that it was essential, "with a meaning of historical contingency", to affirm "the human and civil parity among races" (Assemblea Costituente n.d.).[34] At this point, as it would be expected, Cingolani withdrew his amendment to avoid a vote.

Thus, Ruini amplified, institutionalized, and, at the same time, bended some of the elements that had appeared in the earlier debate. He avoided casual, empiric remarks, such as those spoken by Laconi, but, unlike most

[33] "(...) in questa parte dell'articolo vi è un preciso riferimento a qualche cosa che è realmente accaduto in Italia, al fatto cioè che determinati principi razziali sono stati impiegati come strumenti di politica (...). Basta aprire un qualsiasi testo di geografia per trovare che gli uomini si dividono in quattro o cinque razze e questa suddivisione non ha mai comportato per se stessa alcun significato spregiativo. Il fatto che si mantenga questo termine per negare il concetto che vi è legato, e affermare l'eguaglianza assoluta di tutti i cittadini, mi pare sia positivo e non negativo." My translation.

[34] "(...)Comprendo che vi sia chi voglia liberarsi di questa parola maledetta, di questo razzismo che sembra una postuma persecuzione verbal; ma è proprio per reagire a quanto è avvenuto nei regime nazifascisti, per negare nettamente ogni diseguaglianza che si leghi in qualche modo alla razza ed alle funeste teoriche associate a riguardo, è per questo che—anche con significato di contingenza storica—vogliamo affermare la parita' umana e civile delle razze".

of the other commentators, he did not dismiss the word *stirpe* as an unsuitable alternative to *razza*, but instead validated the normative value of both terms. He made no direct reference to either the UCII or Italian fascism, preferring instead to frame the issue more conventionally in terms of opposition to Nazi-fascism and racist theories, and in support of a general statement on the parity of races. His remarks on the "cursed word" and "historical contingency" suggest that while absolutely insisting on keeping the word, Ruini was not completely opposed to the use of *stirpe* instead of *razza* in the constitutional text.

However, this is not all, Renzo Laconi's reference to the internal debates that took place following the receipt of UCII's "subdued request" suggests that this text generated a fuller elaboration of the issue regarding the appropriation of the notion of "race" in the provision on equality and nondiscrimination of Article 3, which went beyond the obligation of the word's incorporation. This elaboration is reflected in Meuccio Ruini's final intervention. His "posthumous verbal persecution" makes sense and engages—this is in fact the significance of "posthumous"—with the paradoxical situation in which the presence of the word race, even if uttered in a completely different context and with a different meaning, could legitimately be felt as an offence by the very victims of the policies it was deemed to oppose, and be felt paradoxically as establishing a sort of validation of the fascist idea of race. Ruini also acknowledged this paradox and the ambiguous situation that it generated in the label "cursed" that he attached to *razza*. Thus, he acknowledged the desire and the reasons for leaving race "for dogs and horses", but made clear that "historical contingency" and the obligation to take a clear stand against racism made the inclusion of the "accursed word" in the new republic's constitution a necessary step.

Conclusions

In the context of the postwar defeat of fascist racism and while facing the tectonic shifts that were taking place in the structural configuration of the national community, the question of race was perceived by all the parties included in the debates, even the victims of racial persecutions, as not being of great relevance. More specifically, the question of the presence of the word *razza* in the Italian constitution of 1947, was, for all the actors involved—high advisory bodies, political parties of the most different ideological matrix, representatives of the victims of deportation and

persecution—a minor issue. Notwithstanding, in discussing *razza*, the question of the political positioning of the Republic in relation to fascist legacies emerged as the central element of the debate, of the issue. Around this central element there were at least three other decisive dimensions that required a positioning. The first regarded the concept's scientific or normative value (Were human beings of different races? Does this category have a descriptive or normative value?). The second was lexicological (the multi-layered meanings of the word and the resulting ambiguity in both scientific and common uses as well as its resignification in popular culture and high culture before, during, and after fascism). And third, juridical (what consequences and interpretations might arise from its presence in the constitution?). The wording of the constitution, the choice between *razza* and *stirpe* is the result of a complex positioning between these various elements.

Racial discrimination emerged as intrinsically connected with other forms of discriminations. The word race in normative texts such as peace treaties and international declarations and constitutions is never alone but is and was part of a set of parameters that attempted to define the problem of discrimination. Tackling one of these parameters without taking the others into account would be, as the past pages have, I hope, shown, impossible and meaningless. Moreover, national debates on the inclusion of this and other terms in national legislation and constitutions have been (and continue to be) framed by a supranational tradition and an international framework that influences them at various levels and in different ways. This framework often has more weight than a national approach is prepared to acknowledge, but it is in itself insufficient to provide a meaningful picture of the particular circumstances taking place at the national and lower levels, so it is useful for scholars to address both dimensions if they are to understand the issue at hand more clearly.

There is an evident distance between UCII's "leaving it for dogs and horses" and Ruini's "accursed word", a distance that should not be artificially bridged into a synthesis. Between these two poles lies the variety of meanings of the word and concept of race/*razza* and the intricate layers of the issue of its inclusion in the constitution. However, UCII's move and the response that it generated captured and defined the Italian situation, a country with a fascist legacy that sought to appropriate the obligation to include *razza* and exclude racial discrimination in the definition of the national community.

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Short- and Long-Term Consequences of the Racial Laws and the Myth of the Good Italian

Elena Mazzini

The European Context of Anti-Jewish Persecution

The persecution and extermination of the Jews in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s represents one of the most infamous pages of European history. Between 1933 and 1945, in a dramatic chronological and geographical progression, the vast majority of European Jews came to be discriminated against and suffered injustices and a growing persecution: this started with the denial of most civil rights and ended with denial of the right to life itself—as it is well known, between 1941 and 1945 at least six million Jews were eliminated in mass killings or in gas chambers.

Many elements converged and combined, in the context of World War II to produce the Holocaust: remnants of ancient Christian anti-Semitism, pseudo-scientific racism, modern nationalism, a totally new technological spirit, a profoundly reactionary worldview and recent political and

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economic anti-Semitism. The anti-Semitic political and social movements that had spread to a large part of Europe in the last two decades of the nineteenth century—and that provided the ideological basis for European fascisms—represented a new phenomenon that was quite different from the Christian anti-Jewish hostility of the past (Michael 2008, 163–204; Laqueur 2008, 39–90; Lebovitch Dahl 2012, 1–14; Nirenberg 2013, 198–303).

At the same time there was at least one thread that united them: in the same way as hostility towards Jews as theological adversaries had favored sectarian unity in the Christian world (Kertzer and Mokosch 2020, 456–486), denouncing Jews (and *the* Jew) as an internal foreigner, as an infiltrated and dangerous alien and as a cosmopolitan dissolver of the national spirit in the making of modern states and in the age of nationalisms served as a catalyzer of national(istic) cohesion. This picture was different in Eastern and Western Europe: in the former, Jews had not really experienced a process of emancipation; in the latter, anti-Semitism targeted Jewish communities that had been largely emancipated and that were integrated in the surrounding society, where Jews could not be differentiated from other citizens, whether in terms of appearance, dress, or lifestyle (Beller 2007, 21–46). Precisely because of this, at this point were introduced into the public sphere those anti-Jewish clichés that turned into new stereotypes, that in the 1920s and 1930s reappeared embedded in the ideologies of the Fascist regimes. The elements of this new anti-Semitism were therefore different: Religion as an essentializing factor weighed less, and Jews were now depicted as the agents of international finance, who aimed at seizing world power, linked to a supranational tribal network and, in general, as foreigners. In the very states that had granted them citizenship, Jews—now indistinguishable from others—were represented as obscure enemies plotting in the shadows. In this context of nationalism, new anti-Jewish myths took root and were formalized within secular and emancipated societies, in Italy as well as in the rest of Western Europe. Composite constructions combined themes from traditional myths (the Jew as Pharisee, Christ-killer, fanatical murderer, diabolical sorcerer and anti-Christ) and more contemporary elements (the Jew-freemason, the conspirator, the already mentioned agents of finance) took their place. In a state system which required absolute adherence to the values and identity it constructed for its citizens, Jews were now accused of "double loyalty", i.e., to their own nation without a state and to the modern state that was (just about) tolerating them.

The stereotype of the Jew who is disloyal and a traitor to their country has a long tradition, best represented in the nineteenth century by the Dreyfus affair in France; however, that was not the only case in Europe, and other Jews were also accused of betraying their homeland; this created a vicious circle where, through repetition, the tension implicit in the "double loyalty" paradigm became consolidated as true (Lindemann 1991, 118–225; Brice and Miccoli 2003, 28–43). An example for the Italian case can be taken from the authoritative periodical of the Italian Jesuits, "Civiltà Cattolica" which, in 1890, thus before the Dreyfus affair broke out, published an article where one can read how Jews were perceived:

> Given their (the Jews') presence in the various countries, and given their intrinsic nature as foreigners in every country, as enemies of the people of every country that hosts them, and as a society always separate from the societies with which they coexist; given the morals of the Talmud that they follow and given the fundamental dogma of their religion that spurs them to seize, by whatever means, the wealth of all peoples, because it would confer on their race possession and dominion of the world. For the experience of many centuries, and of the present time, have shown and prove, that the equality of rights with the Christians, granted them by the States, results either in the Jews oppressing the Christians, or in their slaughter by the Christians. Given all this, it follows that the only way to reconcile the Jewish sojourn with the rights of Christians is to regulate it by laws that prevent Jews from offending Christians and Christians from offending Jews. (Mazzini 2012, 28)

The extent to which these anti-Semitic stereotypes were widespread in the Italian Catholic public sphere, on the one hand, attests to the profound participation of the Church in the modern culture of European anti-Semitism; on the other, it also explains how the expectations and claims put forward since the nineteenth century by Italian Catholic circles partially coincided with the anti-Jewish measures promulgated by Fascism in 1938. The use of such derogatory language through which anti-Semitic stereotypes continued to circulate took place in the context of liberal Italy in which there were no political parties inspired by organized anti-Semitic programs nor, with a few notable exceptions, were there any public figures or members of Parliament who had made anti-Semitism the central and aggregating element of their activity and political identity. Post-unification and liberal Italy had a strong commitment to respecting and guaranteeing

religious, civil and political equality for all its citizens, at least until the 1920s (Green and Levis Sullam 2020, 1–20).

When Mussolini took power in 1922, Fascism did not have any of the superior-race or "blood-and-soil" manifestos in its political agenda, but its ideological constitutive elements and beliefs were illiberal, violent and nationalistic. When it became an authoritarian regime, over time one of its defining features became the use of propaganda to construct many internal enemies: the socialist, the anarchist, the Catholic anti-Fascist and the character that responded to a not better defined traitor of the homeland; all of them had to be fought in the name of blind and absolute loyalty to the regime and its leader (Gentile 2019). In this context, the progressive reintroduction of many nineteenth-century anti-Jewish stereotypes in the public discourse from the late 1920s onwards brought a transformation of the original content into something endowed with new and different political elements and meaning (Burke 2009, 11–21).

The Racial Legislation of Fascism and the Persecution of Jews in Italy (1938–1945): Steps and Stages

As mentioned above, racism and anti-Semitism were not part of the ideological agenda and political actions of Fascism in Italy at the beginning of its history, even though some early signs of what would follow in later decades could already be detected in the 1920s. Presenting itself as a *natural* continuation of the nation-building process, Fascism also attracted many Jews, who were convinced of the "goodness" of a movement that presented itself as bringing to completion the nation-building process started in the previous century (Zimmerman 2005, 1–16; Patriarca and Deplano 2018, 349–353). Despite this, in the early years of Fascism, anti-Jewish sentiment was fueled above all by the suspicion and concerns that Jews would show signs of double loyalty, thus undermining the unitary character of the nation that the Fascist movement, and later the regime, postulated. The recurring discourse in the early days made also reference to the question of dual nationality: in this view, it was considered alarming that Jews should be concerned with affirming the unity of their people and nation in spite of the nationalities that they had acquired in the meantime.

During the 1920s, anti-Jewish polemics appeared sporadically in the columns of a minor press specialized in defamatory campaigns such as "La

vita italiana" [The Italian Life] and "Il Tevere" [The Tiber]. Jews remained on the background of these campaigns, while other internal enemies were considered more threatening to the stability of the regime. Indeed, in those early years anti-Jewish sentiment was limited to small circles of the Fascist élite and there were even several Jews among prominent Fascists. Among the *Sansepolcristi* (primitive fascists), it is worth mentioning Aldo Finzi, who then became Undersecretary of the Interior in the first Mussolini government and one of his closest collaborators; it is also important to remember the prominent role of the intellectual and journalist Margherita Sarfatti in the cultural formation of the Duce. The presence of Jews in the ranks of provincial Fascism should also be remembered: suffice it to mention the cases of Renzo Ravenna, the *podestà* (mayor) of a provincial town, Ferrara, who remained in office for twelve years; or that of Marco Levi Bianchini, founder of one of the first Fasci of Southern Italy (Pavan 2006); or, finally, that of Ettore Ovazza and of his openly fascist movement and newspaper *Nostra Bandiera* (Ventura 2002; Pinto 2011, 51–72). These few examples demonstrate how, over the course of fifteen years, the perception of the existence of a "Jewish question" gradually changed, from an initial phase in which it was not even perceived to a later moment in which racism became slowly accepted. Overall, an interpretation of "spiritual" racism continued to prevail over a more biological one, for a long time.

At the same time, as many scholars have pointed out, the erosion of religious freedom and equality began precisely during the 1920s, when the Mussolini government promulgated specific legislative acts. First, in 1923, came the reform of the educational system, which took the name of the Minister of Education of the times, the philosopher Giovanni Gentile. Defined by Mussolini as "the most fascist of reforms", it introduced the Catholic religion throughout the educational curriculum, creating distinctions for those who professed non-Catholic religions. The *Riforma Gentile* thus sanctioned the coincidence between being Italian and being Catholic (Moretti 2004, 77–107). As it is well known, Fascism continued to address the status of religious minorities, and the successive step was the Lateran Pacts, the agreements between the Kingdom of Italy under King Victor Emanuel III and the Holy See under Pope Pius XI to settle the long-standing Roman Question. Signed on February 11, 1929, the Lateran Pacts consisted of a Treaty, which defined the reciprocal relations between the Italian state and the Holy See in terms of international law, and a Concordat, which regulated the relations between the state and the

Catholic confession. The Concordat established the Catholic religion as the only religion of the State, relegating other religions to the category of being "admitted by the State". In 1930 came the Falco Law, which established that all Jews should belong to a congregation and that all Italian Jewish communities should be represented by the Union of the Italian Israelitic Communities (UCII). Thus, the full equality of Italian Jews with the rest of the Italian citizens—that had been obtained with the unification of Italy (Ceci 2016)—suffered several other blows. Though the 1920s did not show clear and open signs of a widespread anti-Semitism, they laid the political and cultural premises for the persecution that followed.

The "question of race" became increasingly important for Mussolini and his *entourage* after the Ethiopian campaign (1935) and the subsequent founding of the Fascist Empire (1936). In this context, racism against the Jews became one of the factors that favored the process of "totalitarian acceleration" of the regime after 1936 (Gentile 2019). It should also be kept in mind that it was this totalitarian nature of the regime that had led to the diplomatic agreements with a regime as totalitarian as Nazi Germany (1938). In order to establish a link between colonial racism and anti-Jewish racism and to determine the continuity between them, it is fundamental to understand how the majority of the population got gradually used to racism and to a racist public discourse, and to the absolute lack of open manifestations of dissent, beyond isolated cases.

I will not focus here on the precise steps that led to the enactment of legislative measures against the Jews, nor will I analyze them from a linguistic or philological point of view, especially as these aspects have been dealt in detail in the studies by Michele Sarfatti (2006, 2017). Rather, I am interested in underlining the ways in which the Fascist regime achieved, by law and in the facts, the revocation of the emancipation of the Jews, or rather the denial of their equality.

At the end of August 1938, Mussolini and his establishment started a census of the Jews, which represented the first concrete persecutory measure against them by the regime (Sarfatti 2000). The propaganda spoke of a "spiritual" racism, that was more suitable to ensure the ideological autonomy of the regime and to reassure both the Italian Catholic Church and the Holy See; in reality, it was a census based on biological-racial criteria, as stated in the "Manifesto of Fascist Racism" published on July 14, 1938, in the newspaper *Giornale d'Italia* (Pugliese 2001, 147–148). The Jews present in Italy, both Italians and foreigners, were registered with an accuracy and speed perhaps unmatched in the history of the Fascist police.

The files were distributed, collected and checked, authorizing overtime for the staff of municipalities and prefectures. From 1938 onwards, the personal data that the census-takers collected were placed on individual cards that were constantly updated, punctually recording births, deaths, transfers, marriages, changes of residence and assets. The total number of people that they succeeded to record was 58,412 (just over 1 per thousand of the population), of which 48,032 were Italian Jews and 10,380 foreign Jews (Sarfatti 2018, 163). Thanks to this tool, the regime was able to file, identify, isolate and, a few months later, persecute the Jewish minority (Sarfatti 2006, 95–177). After this census of the "Jewish race", the regime speedily proceeded to enact one anti-Jewish legislative measure after the other, which came to form an organic body of laws, which affected every aspect of the lives of Italian and foreign Jewish citizens present on Italian soil.

The racial laws were a broad and articulated legislative corpus made of seventeen laws and decrees, most of them issued between September 1938 and July 1939, to which one should add dozens of circulars and decrees issued by the various ministries that specified and made more stringent the norms that were outlined in the legal texts, especially with regard to accessing given jobs, even the most humble ones[1]. The first victims of the new measures were foreign Jews who were denied residence status, whose Italian citizenship was revoked and who were expelled according to the Decree of September 7, 1938. Of all these pieces of legislation, this in particular appears exemplary of the illiberal spirit that inspired the entire anti-Jewish legislation: providing for the immediate expulsion from Italy of all foreign Jews—a measure that placed Italy ahead of the most radical anti-Semitic laws enacted in Europe—the decree annulled a historical tradition that, overall, had been of hospitality and which had offered Jews guarantees of survival and, at times, prosperity; in general, it deprived of a shelter, albeit a "precarious" one (Voigt 1993), those among them who had succeeded to escape the persecution of the Nazis or other anti-Semitic regimes until then, and who had found momentary shelter, or even a new homeland in Italy. The norms that revoked citizenship granted after January 1, 1919, to foreign Jews, together with those that regulated expulsion, provide a full picture of the racist and nationalistic character

[1] For the long list of prohibitions see the website of the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contermporanea[CDEC]https://israelkalk.wordpress.com/materiali-di-corredo/gli-ebrei-non-possono/, accessed 19 May 2021.

contained in the entire legislative corpus of the Racial Laws (Sarfatti 2017, 21–56).

The first measure that codified the separation of Italian Jews from the rest of the population was their expulsion from public state schools. According to the decree of September 5, 1938, in "Defense of the Race in the Fascist School" promoted by the Minister of Education Giuseppe Bottai, Jewish students were forbidden to attend schools which, until that day, had been open to all citizens, just as Jewish teachers were forbidden to continue teaching in schools that were supposed to be everyone's school. The choice of the Fascist regime to strike the first blow at education is significant. This measure had not been dictated by practical needs, as it has sometimes been suggested looking at the dates of this decree; according to this chronological reading, passing the law before the beginning of the school year would have prevented any disruption of the regular class activities, as if the expulsion of Jewish students and teachers was not in itself a terrible element of disruption already. This measure had a precise political meaning and a strategic one. It showed that the regime assigned a priority role to schools as the institutions that would lead the political and cultural transformation of the country and that the campaign on race was fully part of such a transformation. Starting with schools meant highlighting the image and mission of the *new* type of Italian man and woman—i.e. Fascist—whose regeneration had always been among the objectives of Fascism; it also meant mobilizing those sectors of society—first and foremost the young—which were presumed, and not always wrongly, to be more sensitive to the instances of voluntarism and youthful urges that the regime intended to satisfy. Intervening in such a way in the educational system also meant humiliating a group of citizens who belonged to a minority that, in general, had a higher level of education than the rest of the Italian population; it also represented an attempt to involve a key sector of society in a process of mobilization towards racism, that would have long-term effects in the social transformation it engendered, causing great political and emotional resonance (Collotti 2011, 45–76; Melis 2018, 16–45).

The decree of September 5 mentioned above also created the "General Directorate for Demographics and Race", known as Demorazza, which represented the bureaucratic and administrative brain of the persecution, under the direct authority of the Ministry of the Interior. Making reference to the transformation of the administrative apparatus is particularly important not only to underline the responsibility of an important sector

of the ministerial bureaucracy in setting in motion the mechanism of persecution, but also because it highlights the capillary nature with which it was practiced, and the wide circle of complicity that it entailed (Zuccotti 2000, 133–152).

The forced abandonment of school and work certainly represented one of the most dramatic and serious changes that the Italian Jewish population had to endure, but it was not the only one. From November 1938 the Jewish press ceased publication; this meant losing a means of communication and a source of information. In addition, the ban on kosher (according to ritual) slaughter, that was decreed in October 1938, prevented Jews from following one of the fundamental precepts of the Jewish religion, whose impact in daily life was immediately felt (Pavan 2011, 141–160).

On November 17, 1938, a decree-law entitled "Provisions for the defense of the Italian race" sorted systematically the anti-Semitic measures that had been approved by the Grand Council of Fascism and the decree laws that had appeared in previous months. Losing an education, a job, a business, the Jewish press, the possibility to socialize with non-Jews—these and other losses brought not only serious personal impoverishment, but also the disappearance of a network of relationships on which Jews were orienting their existence. In a few weeks, a whole system of relations—on which everyone had built their life and through which they had achieved their own personal integration—collapsed.

The Reactions of the Jews: An Overview

How did the Jews react? Those who had the chance, emigrated: one of the effects of this "regime of segregation" was the emigration of thousands of Italian Jews (about 6,000) between 1938 and 1941. Most of them went to the Americas, others to Palestine (by October 28, 1941, 5,966 Jews of Italian nationality had left the Kingdom). The decision (and the possibility) to emigrate, more difficult and painful the deeper one's roots, was largely connected to class, reserved only to those who had the means to undertake it. Among those who could emigrate, the percentage of university professors, or young graduates, expelled from Italian universities was high. Sometimes the need to leave the country was mixed with the desire to realize one's own adherence to Zionism, so the choice fell on Mandatory Palestine (Marzano 2003, 44–62). The outbreak of war halted this migration and further exacerbated the living conditions of many Jews: given the disappointing results of the conflict, they became an easy scapegoat, were

accused of defeatism and the episodes of violence against them increased in number and in type (Mazzini 2010, 160–179).

Disoriented by persecution, some Jews saw converting to Catholicism as a possible way out. We should remember that even before the Racial Laws there had been numerous conversions, often linked to intermarriages. After the summer of 1938, the reasons for conversion were different and there was a wave of abjurations. However, since the Fascist oppression was not based on the category of religion but on that of race—a *mark* that could not be deleted with baptism—the decision to convert did not really guarantee any salvation in that dramatic situation (Mazzini 2015, 346–369). Some renounced the Jewish faith (3,880 cases between 1938 and 1939) while others succeeded in obtaining a certificate of being Aryan, often obtained by presenting false documents and paying large sums of money. A few took advantage of a law whereby Jews could be considered "Aryan" if they proved to be the result of adultery (Sarfatti 2006, 41–46). A small number committed suicide, most dramatically Angelo Fortunato Formiggini, a journalist and publisher, who was among the first to realize the implications of Fascist persecution.

In spite of their own deteriorating conditions, many Italian Jews continued to assist their co-religionists who had escaped from Germany to Italy (approximately 3,000 between 1938 and 1941, despite the Racial Laws). In 1939, the government authorized Dante Almansi, the president of the Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane (Union of Italian Jewish Communities, UCII), to create an organization to help Jewish refugees who had arrived in Italy from other parts of Europe. This Delegazione per l'Assistenza Emigranti Ebrei (Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants, DELASEM) was able, between 1939 and 1943, to help over 5,000 Jewish refugees leave Italy and reach neutral countries, thus saving their lives (Picciotto 2017, 112–122).

The outbreak of World War II worsened the situation for those who were persecuted. Regarded as an *alien* body and as a threat to the security of the nation, even more so when the country was at war, Jews became *de facto* suspects and were often accused of acts of sabotage, agents of a defeatist propaganda and espionage. A substantial number of them, above all foreign Jews, were considered dangerous and came under the surveillance of the public security authorities. From June 1940, provisions were made for internment—that is the arrest and detention—in sites specifically chosen and prepared for this task. Among the persecutory measures that were introduced during the war, one can also find requisitioning for work

purposes; introduced in May 1942, it involved Jews that had been previously interned as well as the others. Both Jewish men and women between the ages of 18 and 55 were obliged to work "separately from the Aryans" and could not to be employed in sectors where "the defense of the national territory" was involved (Sarfatti 2006, 178–191).

With the fall of Mussolini on 25 July 1943 and the establishment of the Italian Social Republic (RSI) at the end of September, anti-Semitic policies were further exacerbated both in terms of the loss of rights and of the persecution of the Jews. The ideological and political manifesto known as The Manifesto of Verona, issued in November 1943, established that "the members of the Jewish race are foreigners. During this war they belong to an enemy nationality" (Pugliese 2001, 191–195). On 30 November 1943 the Minister of the Interior Guido Buffarini Guidi signed a new circular that decreed the arrest of all Jews present in the peninsula and their internment in special camps located on Italian territory. The hunt for the Jews had begun. On January 4, 1944, a detailed decree of the Duce ordered the seizure of all their assets; at the end of the month the regime also decreed to dissolve Jewish communities and the requisition their assets.

At the end of the war the count of the victims began: it was estimated that the number of Jews arrested and deported from Italy had been about 8,000; to this number we should also add what we would call today clandestine or illegal Jews, those who had entered Italy without registering at the borders, who had been arrested and for whom we do not have a record. Italian, and more in general, European Jewry, emerged devastated and impoverished by persecution, conflict and genocide. In Italy, from the 47,000 Jews that had been counted present in the country at the time of the racist census of 1938, numbers had dropped to 30,000 in 1945 (Picciotto 2017, 131–142; Levis Sullam 2018).

The Aftermath of World War II

With the ending of World War II began a process of denial of the crimes committed by the Fascist regime. The Nazi occupier—the former German ally—was now identified as being solely responsible for the disasters of war and genocide, and for all the atrocities committed against Italy and the Italians during the war (Judt 2005, 13–40). Italians laid a veil of oblivion over their recent past; in these two elements we find the origins of the myth of "Italians, good people" created for various diplomatic and political reasons, and also to make the contrast with the Germans stronger. In

this context, the lack of an *Italian Nuremberg*, i.e. failure to establish judicial trial against approximately 850 alleged Italian war criminals identified as such by the United Nations, and the amnesty for political crimes (including collaboration with the Germans) granted in 1946 by the Minister of Justice Palmiro Togliatti (the leader of the Communist Party), stopped (and the same time completed) the process of de-Fascistization (Focardi 2020, 95–114). Moreover, as in other Western European countries, in Italy too, both in civil and in political society, the so-called resistance paradigm emerged powerfully; this emphasized the role of the Resistance as a moment of redemption of an entire people from the "yoke" of Nazi Fascism. Historian David Bidussa has defined this experience as a "second Risorgimento", or as the "universal regeneration of all Italians" (Bidussa 1994).

The re-inclusion of Jews in Italian society took place in this cultural and political context in which the Resistance and anti-Fascism satisfied the natural requests for "reassurance" of the Jewish minority: oppressed by years of harsh persecution, the Jewish communities needed to be assured as to which was the authentic nature of the country and of the people who lived in it; Italian Jews chose to believe the virtuous and courageous partisans of the Resistance over those who had supported a dictatorship for twenty years.

In the fifteen years after the end of World War II, there was no room for a public discourse that would go beyond this reinterpretation of the recent past, nor was it possible to reflect collectively on the massacre of the Jews. This question raised at least two types of problems that were difficult to confront: first, the degree of individual and/or collective responsibility of Italians—people and authorities—during the persecution of the Jews; second, the passive image of the Jewish martyr who perished not because they were fighting the enemy but because they were considered "racially" inferior. Connecting these two issues meant that the persecuted and deported Jew entered the national collective mind within the Resistance paradigm, i.e., within the framework of political persecution. This transformed the original condition of a victim that had not been persecuted for political reasons, and favored an ideologically motivated and "active" representation of Jewish martyrdom (Schwarz 2012).

The first weak signs that some differences between racial and political persecution were being introduced in the public discourse in reference to who had experienced which type of persecution before and during the war, began to emerge between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of

the following decade. The urge to reflect about what was defined at the time as "Nazi barbarity", as well as about the Italian responsibility for the persecution, came in the first instance from within the Italian Jewish community, which provided the first methodological inputs to rethinking the history of this recent past in critical terms. 1960 began with serious and worrying anti-Semitic demonstrations to the point that it came to be called the year of the "Swastika epidemic". The reappearance of swastikas in many Italian and European cities—Rome, Cologne, Hamburg and Paris (Loeffler 2018, 233)—led the Jewish communities of the various countries to openly denounce this return of anti-Semitism. The Italian political context moreover did not give encouraging signs: 1960 was also the year of the Tambroni Government, supported in power by the Movimento Sociale Italiano [Italian Social Movement] (MSI). This was the party that was the heir to Fascism, which exhorted the Jewish communities of the Peninsula to rethink in different ways the communicative and pedagogical strategies that they had put in place until then to transmit the memory of World War II and of genocide.

In 1961 also started the so-called trial of the century, which began in Jerusalem in 1961 against the SS *Obersturmbannführer* Adolf Eichmann; from the point of view of historiography, this event is credited with placing the Holocaust in a symbolic space, transforming its memory into a type of civic religion (Wieviorka 2013, 17). Indeed, with the Eichmann trial, the memory of the genocide started to become a constitutive element of a Jewish postwar identity which became strongly anchored to it; at the same time, it also began to be present in the public sphere and in international public opinion. This was a trial that, for the first time, established the goal of giving a lesson in history; for the first time the question of how to educate new generations to the memory of the Holocaust and how to transmit that memory across generations emerged as an imperative that aimed at keeping alive the memory of those millions of deaths in the Nazi concentration camps (Lipstadt 2014, V–XIII). Despite the historical significance of the trial, in Italy it represented one more opportunity to strengthen the "myth of the good Italian" which received a renewed impetus.

At the trial the Israeli Attorney General Gideon Hausner pronounced his introductory remarks, touching on the Italian chapter of the final solution and dismissing the Italian case as one of an occupied country, therefore without its own internal and independent anti-Semitic legislation. In the understanding of Hausner, anti-Jewish persecution in Italy could be

described as a tenuous oppression when compared to the one that had taken place in other European countries; the number of victims counted in Italy, lower than that of other countries, appeared to corroborate this idea that ultimately represented Fascist anti-Semitism in reference to the persecution and/or loss of human lives rather than as a whole repressive apparatus, and one that was less effective than others. According to this formulation, the Italian situation could be categorized as peripheral if compared to the Nazi apparatus of extermination. The already widespread belief that Fascism had carried out an altogether "light" repression against the Jewish population (Weitz 2009, 31) in part also played into the myth of the good Italian, giving it an international legitimization.

Such an assessment of the period of the Fascist racial laws, and of the following one, commonly referred to by historiography as the period of the "persecution of lives" was partially called into question, on 11 May 1961, by the testimony of the Florentine Jew and Israeli citizen Hulda Cassuto Campagnano (Romano 1962, 238–247; Minerbi 1962, 47–51), who was the only Italian witness called to testify at the trial. During her statement, the witness was not silent on Italian informers reporting Italian Jews, nor did she neglect to mention the widespread participation of the institutional apparatuses of the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) in carrying out the Holocaust in Italy; Hulda Cassuto Campagnano drew a precise picture of the dramatic situation in which Italian and foreign Jews found themselves thanks to the zeal that many Italians showed in helping the Nazis capture and then deport Jews (Galimi 2019, 115–128). However, the testimony of Campagnano was totally distorted in some articles that appeared shortly afterwards in some Italian newspapers that only strengthened the myth of the good Italian (Campagnano 1992, 656; Cesarani 2005, 92–99). Interestingly enough, Campagnano chose one the most popular Italian Jewish weekly, *Israel*, to address the question that the distortion of her words raised. In a letter to the magazine's director she wrote:

> I received after some delay some Italian newspapers containing my deposition at the Eichmann trial, I was unpleasantly surprised and saddened to see how my words were misinterpreted, perhaps due to the translation from Hebrew. Much of my deposition was totally misrepresented. I never said that "we were totally intoxicated by the privileges that had been granted to us in Italy up to then". On the contrary, I began my deposition by talking about the racial laws in force since 1938 and I pointed out how these laws,

> while involving enormous restrictions on economic and professional orders, nevertheless were not detrimental to the right to life of Jews. I then spoke of the fundamental change that took place in September 1943 and of the difficulty my brother Nathan had in convincing Jews to leave their homes. The prosecutor asked me: "Why did the Jews not want to flee?" My response was not that some Jews were blinded by the fact that they had been discriminated against by the fascists and therefore felt safe (Romano 1962, 246).

The nuances that Campagnano introduced in her letter are not only of a linguistic nature but also substantial. She continued:

> Perhaps I did not explain myself clearly, certainly I was not understood and what came out was the unfortunate phrase above, reproduced with slight variations by two Italian newspapers: "La Nazione" and "Il Resto del Carlino". I did not speak of "unanimous help from the Italian people" but of help that came to us from all strata of the population. And that is quite different! If the help had been truly unanimous, how many fewer victims would there have been! I pointed out clearly the constant danger of encounters with fascists, or the wandering from house to house, night after night and finally returning to the person ready to risk his or her life to help the persecuted. When, after all this, I find myself so misunderstood, I find my words misinterpreted and distorted with such extreme superficiality, I cannot help but be bitter and struck by this strange form of misunderstanding (Romano 1962, 247).

The witness needed to correct what had been reported above all by *La Nazione* and *Il Resto del Carlino* and her words signified that, despite the aid and assistance received, more could have been done to save the Jewish minority; if aid had been more widespread and generalized, there would have been fewer Italian Jews (than 6,885) who did not return from the Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

During the trial, Italian newspapers published editorials and reported on its various phases underlining how the extermination of the Jews represented a historical episode whose responsibility clearly rested with Nazi Germany. In this context, the trial became not so much an opportunity to (re)-discuss Italy's anti-Semitic past but almost a theatrical setting whose actors on the scene were the Jews and the Nazis. It is worth considering also the reporting of another main Italian newspaper, *La Stampa*, where renowned intellectuals and jurists such as Arturo Carlo Jemolo, Alessandro Galante Garrone and Francesco Rosso used to write. During the entire

trial *La Stampa* too was silent about the racial laws of the Fascist regime and the involvement of those Italian "good people" in the persecution of thousands of Jews, while it did not neglect to highlight how Italian soldiers fighting on the various war fronts were engaged in the rescue of Jews. Historiography has demonstrated that the individual and collective behavior of Italian military in the occupied zones should not be generalized; and while there is no doubt that representatives of the Italian military and diplomatic machinery had acted honorably in given contexts, praising such meritorious acts by the media, and not only by *La Stampa*, left in the shade episodes in which the Italian military had remained indifferent to the massacres of Jews. Moreover, this emphasis on rescuing Jews downplayed the actions of the Fascist regime and its bureaucracy between 1938 and 1943 and the subsequent collaboration between the Social Republic of Salò and the German occupiers (Franceschi 2019). The testimony of Hulda Campagnano was therefore exemplary of this binary interpretative framework: it revived the myth of the "rescue" and of the widespread help that the national community extended to persecuted Jews while identifying the Germans as the only ones responsible for the final solution to the Jewish "question". In this context, the Eichmann trial was seen as something that was extraneous to the Italian national history and the Holocaust was explained not so much as a crisis of a European cultural, political and ethical system, but as a catastrophe for which certain nations—considered to be the only ones responsible—had to answer.

Conclusion

At least since the 1990s historians have progressively questioned the image of "the good Italian", exposing the gravity of actions of fascists and Fascism and their co-responsibility in carrying out a genocide; however, these studies do not appear to have reached the broader public, which continues to use ready-made definitions that ultimately diminish the significance of the events. Italian public opinion, flanked by populist political cultures, continues today to look at Fascism, at the war years and at the persecution and extermination of the Jews through the juxtaposition of the "bad Germans" and the "good Italians", prompting a bitter conclusion that no sense of responsibility can emerge if the oppressor continues to embrace the representation of themselves as victims, an idea that can be summarized with the expression the "paradigm of the victim" (Focardi 2020, 37–58). Such a process can take many forms: representing fascist

violence in a trivial or reductive way, both considering quantitative and qualitative aspects; emphasizing Mussolini's humanity rather than his political motives. This creates an interpretative canon that emphasizes two opposite and complementary processes: by silencing the crimes that Italians committed, also the sufferings they inflicted become invisible. The list can also include using instrumental historical and political analogies. These are some of the most obvious rhetorical tools through which public opinion can be shaped, so that their knowledge of that tragic past gradually seems to become and belong to that of someone else's.

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When Conflict Spills Over: Identities, Memories, Politics and Representations of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in Italy—The 1960s

Marcella Simoni

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been fought also outside the Middle East, reverberating into the domestic political and social dynamics of many countries. Even considering the European scenario alone, individual states (and later the European Union), political parties and leaders, civil societies, Diaspora communities, and the media have all been engaged with this conflict and with the many questions it keeps raising. In past decades, European capitals have been the theatre of terrorist attacks specifically connected to this conflict, while a few others have hosted peace summits and conferences that were hoped to be conclusive, like Madrid in 1991 and Oslo in 1993. As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continued to be

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punctuated by recurrent outbreaks of armed violence in the Middle East, in Europe (and elsewhere) the Jewish, Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab Diasporas also became involved, bringing into this already complex international picture questions of religious belief, of national and political belonging, and of individual and collective ethnic identity. The riots in the Parisian immigrant neighborhood of Belleville in June 1968 between Muslim and Jewish residents are a case in point (Mandel 2014: 100). And so are the responses on conflicting mutual perceptions collected more recently among Jewish and Muslims residents in the UK (Egorova 2017).

Considering Italy, alone or in comparative perspective, scholarly literature has covered extensively how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been represented in left-wing or in the general press in the second half of the twentieth century (Scherini 2009–2010, 2010; Marzano 2011; Zanier 2018), and the changing attitudes of Italian political parties (Riccardi 2006; Marzano 2010; Tarquini 2019); Marzano and Schwarz (2013) have looked at the convergence of historical and new forms of anti-Semitism during the Lebanon war of 1982. Considering the eventful decade of the 1960s until about 1975, in this chapter I discuss how the unfolding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affected the social and political positioning of the Diasporic communities involved, their collective identities, and their mutual relations. By investigating these dynamics, and therefore the cultural and political aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Italy, I analyze how this conflict came to be inextricably connected with political and existential questions of local relevance, and therefore with the lives, the memories, and the positioning of Italian Jews on the one hand, of Palestinians living in Italy (and/or Palestinian Italians) on the other, and with Italian politics in general. Inevitably, I also investigate how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict interlocked with anti-Semitism and, in part, also with Islamophobia. These phenomena should be understood as part of a European broader picture; for reasons of space and internal coherence, here I limit my analysis to the Italian case, while other European experiences remain on the background.

I have divided this chapter into four distinct parts. First, I provide a general introduction on the many ways in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has resonated in Europe, with greater emphasis on the Italian case. Second, I focus more directly on the Italian situation, looking at how the Italian press reported on the Six Day War, especially at the stereotypes it used that stigmatized both Jews and Arabs in different (but compatible) ways. Third, analyze how the Palestinian narrative gradually entered the

Italian public discourse in universities, civil society, and politics—before, during, and after the Six Day War (1967)—also thanks to the grassroots work of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS). Finally, I conclude considering the reaction of some young Italian Jews to this state of affairs, how their identity changed throughout the decade, and why some decided to relocate to Israel at the end of the 1960s.

The European Front

The 1960s was a crucial decade in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict spilled over into Europe, including Italy. The decade opened with the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem (1961) and ended with the Six Day War (1967) in the Middle East; in Europe (and elsewhere) 1968–1969 was the year of the student barricades, with protests on university campuses and in the squares. In this short period, the spillover from the Middle East to Europe took a least four different forms, only one of which was armed. The others concerned the individual and collective memory of Jews and of Palestinians in the Diaspora, their political and national identity, and how the generations born after 1945 imagined their future. The spillover also led political parties—and especially left-wing ones—to reorient their support towards Palestinians rather than towards the State of Israel, and saw European cities becoming the theatre of actual terrorist actions and warlike situations, especially during the 1970s and 1980s.

a) Memories and identities. The connection between individual and collective memories of the Holocaust on the one hand and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the other represents one of the complicated and toxic cores of this spillover. In line with what happened in Jewish communities (almost) all over the world, in the postwar years Jewish identity progressively consolidated around the two poles of the Holocaust on the one hand and of the State of Israel on the other (Bashir and Goldberg 2018). These became central for obvious reasons of chronological proximity, and because most Jews in the Diaspora (and therefore also in Italy) had been involved directly in both experiences, as victims of persecution, as visitors to Israel, or as family members of *Italkim* (Italian Jews immigrated to Israel, Hebrew). In part, this polarization also responded to the narrative—which the State of Israel transferred onto Diasporic Jewish communities since the 1950s—of the Diaspora as a site of collective destruction, and of the old-new Homeland as a site of rebirth and redemption. Not everyone subscribed to it: in the words of Prof. Luciano Segre,

who had joined the Resistance during the Second World War, who later volunteered in the War of 1948 and then settled in Milan,

> It was right to join the fight to help the newly founded State of Israel in 1948, but not to subscribe to the idea of an ethno-national state, as that type of political entity was what we had been fighting against until a few years earlier.[1]

And although Segre's words only bring the testimony of one, they show that structuring a collective identity between the two poles of genocide and rebirth was a process that some tried to resist. The short period between the Eichmann trial (1961) and the Six Day War (1967) de facto put an end to any such resistance and Jews (in Italy as elsewhere) gradually shifted towards it.

As it is well known, one of the unintended consequences of the Eichmann trial was the emergence into the public sphere of the traumatic memories and public testimonies of Jewish survivors, whose voices had remained buried in the private—if not in the intimate—sphere until then (Cesarani 2005). This concerned Italy too (Consonni 2004); here, moreover, the Italian responsibilities for the extermination of the Jews had not been acknowledged in the public discourse, neither as a specific crime per se, nor for the active role that many Italians had played in it (Focardi 2010: 20). In Italy the few trials that had been celebrated for collaboration with Nazism before the general amnesty of June 1946 did not even acknowledge the racial aspect of the crimes committed (Flores and Galimi 2010); moreover, the State proved particularly slow in translating into law various pieces of international legislation which could help indict persons that were guilty of racial persecution. A good example is the International Convention Against Genocide, to which Italy had adhered in 1952, that was fully adopted only in 1967. Even slower were the decrees that allowed for the compensation of the surviving victims from the State's coffers; in 1955 the State recognized the possibility that individuals persecuted on grounds of political opinion or race would receive monetary compensation, but the actual process was set in motion only in 1980 (De Cristofaro 2010, 2011). There could be many other examples; obviously this context did not help acknowledge Jews as victims of racial persecution nor did it help making their voices heard.

[1] Interview of the Author with Prof. Luciano Segre, Milan, 2 October 2010.

b) Jewish youth politics. Another factor that connected the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after the Second World War came from the experiences of Jews born after 1945. Inevitably, this generation took it upon themselves to maintain and transmit the memory of the Holocaust that their parents had experienced (Volkan 2001); at the same time, in constructing their postwar Jewish identity, they also started to look at the State of Israel as a new determining factor (Schwarz 2004; Simoni 2010, 2018). In the 1950s and 1960s many of them had travelled to Israel, to visit relatives or on trips that had been organized by Jewish schools and youth movements. In general, and with very few exceptions, their reaction had been nostalgic and enthusiastic, and later prompted many of them to leave for Israel as volunteers when the Six Day War started (Simoni 2010, 2018; Lederhendler 2000).

Two Jewish youth movements had been established in Italy after 1945: *Hechalutz* (The Pioneer) in 1946—that encouraged the immigration of those youths who had survived the war and wanted to start a new life in Palestine/the State of Israel—and the Youth Jewish Federation of Italy (Federazione Giovanile Ebraica d'Italia, FGEI) that had been founded in 1948. Unlike the former, the latter was not Zionist, and its membership was made of young Jews that were "strongly anchored to Italian reality and at the same time tied in various degrees to their Jewish identity" (Schwarz 2012: 83). Youth associationism also meant a whirlwind of parties and summer camps, but questions of post-Holocaust collective identities were central in these associations: on the one hand, the FGEI's newsletter was entitled *Ha-Tikwah* (Hope), which explicitly recalled the title of the State of Israel's national anthem; on the other, the association challenged the approach of the Union of the Italian Jewish Communities (UCII), questioning the Zionist normative vision of its older leadership. Like many of their non-Jewish peers, this generation had grown up politically on the legendary narratives of the anti-Fascist struggles and of the Resistance, and their political orientation leaned towards those (left-wing) parties that best embodied this legacy. In 1953 FGEI defined its identity as based on the "indissoluble bond uniting of Judaism and anti-Fascism" (Schwarz 2012: 88), thus forgetting that many Jews had also been supporters of Fascism until 1938 (Stille 1991).

Since the mid-1950s two international Zionist Jewish youth movements started to be active on the Italian scene, the *Bene' Akiva* (Sons/Daughters of Akiva, religious, BA) and the *Hashomer Hatzeir* (The Young Guard, socialist, HH). Though coming from different ideological backgrounds,

both promoted an active Zionist identification among teenagers, setting up a process that helped transform the local/national/Italian identity of young Jews into an ethno-national one that placed national identification (also) with the Zionist call, and therefore, with the State of Israel.

c) Institutional politics. Until the Six Day War, left-wing parties had considered the State of Israel, which had been established on strong socialist features, as the miraculous living proof of the victory against Nazi-Fascism; this also helped older and younger Jews find a new political home after 1945. After the simultaneous and smashing military victory of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) against three armies and the creation of another million Palestinian refugees nineteen years after 1948, the anti-Fascist paradigm that the left had applied to Jews—and therefore also to the State of Israel—shifted from the latter to Palestinians, who were now seen as the new resisters (Simoni and Marzano 2010; Mendes 2014: 117–126). When the generation of Italian Jews born after the war came of age at the end of the 1960s, they found it particularly difficult to identify with (and vote for) those left-wing political parties that they had so strongly believed in as teenagers. From here began the slow but sure estrangement of many Italian Jews with Italian left-wing politics, which led them to extend their support to center-right, and later to right-wing parties (Marzano 2010). In the 1970s and 1980s this slow political shift of the Jewish electorate was also favored by the events taking place in the international arena, which in the following two decades made Europe one of the armed fronts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

d) Terrorism. Beyond memory, identity, youth, and politics, another factor helped consolidate the core connection between the memory of the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the late 1960s, and more markedly in the 1970s and 1980s, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was fought in Europe (and in Italy too) also through terrorist attacks, transmitting to European Jewish communities a deep sense of insecurity *vis-à-vis* the country in which they lived, and the security arrangements that their states had put in place to protect them.

The terrorist season opened at the airport of Rome in July 1968, when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked to Algiers a plane of the national Israeli airline El Al; it continued in August 1969, again from Rome, when the PFLP hijacked TWA flight 840, believing Israeli PM Itzhak Rabin was on board; the airport of Rome was again the stage of two more hijackings in 1973 and one major attack in 1985.

Only considering airports, Zurich, Athens, Munich, London, Paris, and Vienna were also sites where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict spilled over. Beyond airports and airplanes, in the 1970s Palestinian terrorist attacks were conducted against Israeli targets like embassies and El Al offices. As it is well known, one of the peaks of this first wave of terrorist attacks took place at the beginning of September 1972, when the still unknown terrorist group Black September massacred eleven Israeli athletes at the 20th Olympic games in Munich (Klein 2005; Large 2012). Six days after the massacre, on 11 September 1972, it was confidentially reported to the British Foreign Office that Israeli "counter-terrorist actions" were to be expected especially in contexts "where the Israelis have fairly comprehensive knowledge of Arab activities, like West Germany and Italy" (…) "the aim being to terrorise the terrorists."[2] This report was an accurate piece of information on operation Wrath of God/Bayonet in which—over two decades—the Mossad assassinated the alleged instigators of the massacre of the Munich Olympics, starting from Wael Zwaiter and Mahmoud Al-Hamsheri in 1972, who acted as the PLO representatives, respectively, in Rome and Paris.[3]

In the 1980s the Israeli-Palestinian conflict saw a new intensification in loco with Operation Litani (1978), the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982), and the First intifada (1987). In this context, two Palestinian terrorist groups repositioned their political aims to include also Jewish objectives in Europe. The first was the group of Abu Nidal, who had been expelled from Fatah and the PLO already in 1974 and the other was the already mentioned PFLP. At the hands of these two groups, between 1980 and 1986 the synagogues, Jewish schools, and/or Jewish community centers of Paris, Antwerp, Brussels, Vienna, Copenhagen, and Istanbul all suffered deadly attacks. As for Italy, the group of Abu Nidal attacked the synagogue of Rome on 9 October 1982 (Marzano and Schwarz 2013).

All these attacks—spread over more than fifteen years—left hundreds of civilians dead, citizens of different nationalities, ages, gender, professions, persuasion, and belonging; they obviously also made Jews feel threatened

[2] The National Archives, London (henceforth TNA), FCO 17/1622, NE 1/5, *Acts of Violence by Arab Terrorist Organizations*, 1972, Letter from P.G.H. Harwood to Mr. [Sidney?] Giffard, 11 September 1972.

[3] On Zwaiter see the installation at the Venice Biennale of 2007 by Emily Jacir, https://electronicintifada.net/content/material-film-retracing-wael-zuaiter-part-1/7054 and https://electronicintifada.net/content/material-film-performance-part-2/7053, accessed 3 July 2021.

in Europe, while at the same time feeding a narrative of mutual exclusive victimhood, in which both the terrorists and the victims represented themselves as part of an exceptional and unique history of persecution. In the case of Jews—given that they had been targeted again *qua Jews* on European soil—these attacks also renovated a sense of insecurity and the fear that institutions were incapable, or unwilling(?), to protect them and their rights. For the generation of Jews that had been born after 1945, this feeling of insecurity had started a few years before, with the Six Day War. A brief examination of how the Italian press presented and discussed these events will show why.

The Turning Point of the Six Day War: The Press

Marianna Scherini (2009–2010) has analyzed how the general and left-wing press in Europe has helped shape a public discourse on Israel in various moments of the Arab-Israeli conflict, from 1967 to the early 2000s. Her research discusses the emergence of new forms of anti-Semitism after 1967, and to what extent racial stereotypes on Arabs and Jews were perpetuated (or not) by the main European press reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This process was triggered with the Six Day War and peaked in the 1980s with the Lebanon War and the First Intifada. Here, I will follow her investigation only for 1967.

When Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser expelled the UN Expeditionary Forces from Sinai on May 16, closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships on May 22, and signed a pact of mutual defense with Jordan on May 30, it became quite obvious that a new war was imminent in the Middle East. From here, throughout the war and after its conclusion, the Italian conservative and the left-wing press gave very different readings of the events, constructing, as we shall see, narratives that were based on different premises and, therefore, yielded diverging conclusions. From both perspectives, the stereotypes and the rhetoric used to describe the parties involved only favored the alienation of those who felt that their individual and collective identity was at stake in this war. Following Scherini (2009–2010), my sources for this section are two daily national newspapers: one from the conservative field, the center-right *Corriere della Sera*, and one from the left, *L'Unità*, the official daily of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). A more complete picture that includes other voices within the Italian left can be found in Tarquini (2019).

a) Corriere della Sera. As the main national newspaper, the *Corriere* could rely upon a variety of correspondents spread in various European capitals, in Washington and Moscow, and upon special envoys: Dino Frescobaldi was in Cairo, R.A. Segre in Israel, and Alberto Cavallari was in Jerusalem since June 2. The *Corriere* presented the diplomatic crisis that preceded the war in the framework of the Cold War, and squarely placed the blame for the crisis on what it defined "the Arab aggression", whose reasons were to be found in the choices of leaders that had a *natural* familiarity with violence. Since the beginning of the diplomatic crisis in the Middle East, this newspaper openly sided with the State of Israel (Scherini 2009–2010: 44); however, it did so filling its narrative with stereotypes that were altogether evenly distributed among Arabs and Jews/Israelis: the former (at times called Egyptians, but otherwise rarely defined in ways other than a general "Arabs") were described as "backward", "bloodthirsty", "barbaric", and as a "huge danger" (*immenso pericolo*) to a "little people" (*piccolo popolo*). The latter were alternatively described as gifted with plenty of intelligence, as Holocaust survivors, as potential victims of a likely and imminent new Holocaust, or by making reference to the biblical theme of David against Goliath, a comparison that obviously emerged after it had become obvious that the Israeli army had won the war. On a psychological plain, the newspaper underlined the irrationality of the Egyptian president, followed by the *natural* excitability of (non-otherwise specified) Arabs, who were depicted as having a natural propensity towards violence and to waging war. With an orientalist outlook, Egyptians were also represented as an anonymous crowd with no individuality, and were included in the descriptions as supporting voices for their leader. Jews and Israelis were also described as Europeans, as this identification was functional to build a juxtaposition between a civilized "us" and an uncivilized Arab "Other".

When on May 30 Egypt and Jordan signed an alliance of mutual defense (which implied the encirclement of the State of Israel, given that Egypt and Syria were already politically united in the United Arab Republic), the *Corriere* described it as a "complete siege" for Israel in which "tens of millions of Arabs, overexcited by frenetic racial hate propaganda, besiege two million Jews, locked up in a long and narrow strip of land" (*Corriere* 1967a).

This type of rhetoric sparked a series of toxic analogies, the most obvious being the one between Arabs and the Nazis, and the idea that the State of Israel was inhabited mainly/only by Holocaust survivors, which also brought to the direct comparison between Nasser and Hitler. In the

words of Augusto Guerriero, one of the most distinguished pens of the Corriere at the time,

> There is no peace in the Middle East. And how could there be, if Nasser is in Cairo? Could there have been peace in Europe as long as there was Hitler? And so, there can be no peace in the Middle East as long as there is Nasser. The western world has been slow to understand this character, his ambitions, his politics. He is a little Hitler. Not for nothing does he keep around him a phalanx of Nazi criminals, to whom he has entrusted delicate or criminal services: espionage, propaganda, organizations of attacks. (Guerriero 1967)

These misleading historical analogies were meant to raise sympathy for the State of Israel; they should also be understood within the anti-Communist political agenda of the newspaper: if left-wing parties and press supported Nasser as an allied of the Soviet Union, the argument went, then they should also take responsibility for indirectly supporting the likelihood of a new Holocaust. This logic was made explicit by Manlio Lapinacci on May 26: the support that the PCI had extended to Nasser was "even at risk of becoming, God forbid, moral accomplices in a resumption of the 'final solution' of the Jewish problem according to the models of Colonel Eichmann", as "the small State of Israel is threatened by war and destruction" (Lapinacci 1967).

As Scherini (2009–2010: 47) has duly noted, the sympathy towards the State of Israel derived from a series of false analogies and from a misleading series of identifications: on the one hand, Israelis were equaled (only) with Holocaust survivors, an identification that was extended also to the Jews of Rome. Reporting on May 30 on the demonstration that the Jewish Community of Rome had organized in support of the State of Israel, Giovanni Russo, another important contributor to the *Corriere*, reported:

> The Jewish people [*popolo ebreo* sic] of Rome found themselves spontaneously united. At the windows and in front of the doors there were old ladies, still dressed in mourning [for the Holocaust], whose faces expressed shock for the tragic memories. There were families of the old neighborhood—the ancient ghetto—the merchants, the second-hand dealers, the witty shopkeepers, people who are working hard to rebuild a life (…) and perhaps they thought of how many could not be there, or of their families who had left Rome and are now in Palestine [sic], hoping to finally have a homeland, where they can live free from hatred, and that could give them a future of

> peace; and today they feel encircled again and threatened with annihilation. (Russo 1967)

As it is well known, the war started on June 6 with a preemptive attack of the Israeli air force on Egypt and continued involving Jordan and Syria until June 11. After six days, the State of Israel had tripled its territorial extension, had conquered the territories known today as the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the Sinai peninsula from Egypt, and about one million Palestinians had been made refugees. When it became clear that the State of Israel had won, the reporting gave way to a triumphalism that incorporated most of the stereotypes mentioned above, with a Biblical tinge:

> The whole world is still incredulous because the biblical legend has been realized: little David has landed the gigantic Goliah (…). Nasser, overrun by hatred, by the demon of violence and war, does not want to resign himself to defeat, which covers him with ridicule and shame. He had sworn to destroy the state and the people of Israel; he had excited the unsuspecting Egyptian crowds to the extermination of the Jews; he had provoked and offended Israel with words and aggressive acts: invectives, challenges, blockade of Akaba [sic], concentration of the army at the borders. He promised Israel only destruction and death…now he has seen all its air force destroyed on the ground without having been able to fight, his tanks captured, his army in pieces, on the run. (*Corriere* 1967b)

Seen from the left, the picture was very different.

b) L'Unità. The official daily of the PCI had a foreign desk in Moscow and, from June 1, sent Arminio Savioli to Cairo as a special envoy. Its reading of the events stands in stark contrast to that of the *Corriere*, as should be expected, given the different ideological orientation, political affiliations, and readership of the two newspapers. *L'Unità* too framed the beginning of the crisis within the dynamics of the Cold War, but substantially reproduced the interpretation that the desk of the newspaper in Moscow transmitted to Rome. Broadly speaking, this remained its interpretative line in terms of contents, language, and tone throughout the whole period. From Moscow, the situation appeared as follows:

> The aim of Johnson is clear: he wants to drag the rebellious [Atlantic] partners towards a greater commitment in support of his aggressive policy. Behind the groups that in the Republic of Israel foment the aggression

> against Syria stand large oil companies (…), large American groups—starting from the CIA—that organized the coup in Greece, and are preparing a similar one in Cyprus and that, finally, are hoping to achieve NATO unity in the Mediterranean on offensive positions. (*L'Unità* 1967a)

In this newspaper the words "aggression" and "threat" were usually used in connection to the State of Israel or to the role of the United States in the area; the former was presented as "the spearhead of American imperialism", and the decision of Nasser to close the Straits of Tiran as "an essential right of Egypt" (*L'Unità* 1967b), given the global appetites of American foreign policy, that "years of aggression in Vietnam" had already shown (Ferrara 1967).

As in the case of the *Corriere*, on *L'Unità* too, most of the correspondences published during the war itself reproduced official war bulletins; given that *L'Unità* was relying on Egyptian sources, it was slower in realizing Israel's victory, which the *Corriere* had already understood on June 8, the day after the IDF had captured Jerusalem. Indeed, while the *Corriere* was speaking of David and Goliath, *L'Unità* continued to praise the "heroic resistance of Egyptian soldiers in Sinai" (Savioli 1967).

Rather than following the (rather lacking) coverage of this newspaper, it is interesting to look at a few themes that emerged from its pages in the final days of the war and in its immediate aftermath, as some of them continue to be relevant today.

One of the main questions was the "expansionism" of the State of Israel; this theme was not only connected to the military conquests of the IDF, but called into question the immediate and long-term intentions of its ruling class; it also took issue with the nature of Zionism as the nationl(ist) ideology that had led to the establishment of the State, and with the complicated relationship of all this with the Holocaust.

L'Unità started to pull these strings together starting from the iconic Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan. As the days went by, Dayan was first mistakenly credited with the success of the military campaign (Jacoviello 1967), whose planning and realization had been of Chief of Staff Itzhak Rabin instead. He was then constructed as the architect of Israel's foreign policy, variously defined as "expansionist", "aggressive", "imperialist", and "colonial". For Antonello Trombadori, for example, "the attack in force on all fronts by Moshe Dayan" had been the one factor that had crushed any hope to carry out a "diplomatic initiative" aimed at the pacific resolution of the crisis. His words were echoed by Alberto Jacoviello, who

spoke of “Moshe Dayan’s bloody blitzkreig [or. in Italian *guerra lampo*], planned in secret in every detail (…) and carried out with overwhelming superiority of means” whereby defensive pretexts were used to justify an “expansionism that had been theorized with candid arrogance” (E.P. 1967). From Dayan, the newspaper moved on to criticize the whole Israeli ruling class, which was no longer presented as a “mere pawn of the US or the UK” but as a “leadership that expresses an expansionist logic within Israeli society, that converges with the general actions of the world imperialist front” (Ledda 1967). The ultimate conclusions of this reasoning indicated in Zionism the root of all evils, as an expansionist nationalist ideology, that represented the real reason why the State of Israel could not be integrated in the Middle East and as the ultimate expression of European colonialism against (non-otherwise specified) Arabs. Already on June 11, as the war was closing, *L’Unità* defined the establishment of the State of Israel

> only as a colonialist initiative, undertaken under the English protectorate (sic) at a time when the world was in the hands of the happy “capitalist civilization” (…) and did not have the slightest consideration for the interests and rights of “colonial” peoples, or “colored”, or whatever else they used to call them at the time. (*L’Unità* 1967c)

And while the idea of the establishment of the State of Israel as a colonial/ist enterprise had been a matter of historiographical and political debate even before 1967, and continues to be discussed today, the really problematic term in the quote above is the opening term “only”, as if persecuted Jews all over Europe did not count among those oppressed peoples whose cause a communist newspaper would consider taking up. Despite these complicated premises, *L’Unità* claimed its right to criticize Zionism as a national(ist) ideology; indeed, in this understanding, relinquishing this right *because* of the persecutions that Jews had suffered in recent times and before the Second World War would have been worse. As Romano Ledda explained, it would be absurd “to equate the cause of Israel with that of the State of Israel because of the moral reparation that the Jewish people (*popolo ebreo* (sic)) still awaits from Europe” (Ledda 1967). The ideological dimension that permeated these debates once again revealed the geographical, cultural, and political distance of these intellectuals from the Middle East in general and from an understanding of the (indistinct) Arab, Palestinian, or Jewish Diasporic experience.

In the very last hours of the Six Day War, the local police of Parma transmitted to the Ministry of Interior a mimeographed leaflet found at a rally organized by the local branch of the PCI.[4] This appears to be the first document that revealed the existence in Italy of the first local branch of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) in Italy, even though this student association had been established informally already in 1965, becoming a registered association in 1971. In the same way as young Jews had been designing a future for themselves as both transmitters of their group's collective (traumatic) memory and as identity activists through their youth organizations and dedicated press, through meetings, conferences, and youth camps, also some Palestinians that had arrived as students in Italian universities in the early 1960s started to organize themselves from the grassroots. It is to them that I now turn.

The General Union of Palestinian Students in Italy

The 1960s proved a fateful decade for the Palestinian Diaspora too. As it is well known, the Six Day War, the ensuing War of Attrition and the battle of Karameh (1968), as well as Black September in Jordan (1970), came to constitute the new core of events that re-founded Palestinian political activism (Terrill 2001), starting from the reestablishment of the PLO (1969) as the main organization that would represent Palestinians and lead the (armed) struggle for the liberation of Palestine under the leadership of Yasser Arafat. These very same events pushed many young Palestinians out of the areas that Israel had occupied in 1967 and out of Kingdom of Jordan after 1970, and new migration waves strengthened the Palestinian presence in the Gulf (Rouleu and Paul 1985; Smith 1986) and in Europe (Shiblak 2005), including Italy. The historic Palestinian secular party Fatah became the dominant party within the PLO while other factions were the already mentioned Revolutionary Socialist PFLP, the Marxist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command (PFLPGC), and the group of Abu Nidal (El-Rayyes and Nahas 1976).[5] These well-known details are only a reminder that the internal political dynamics that regulated the PLO leadership in exile also found a

[4] Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome (Central State Archive, henceforth ACS), GAB, 0162/PS, Telegram from the Prefecture of Parma to the Ministry of Interior, 9 June 1967.

[5] https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/, accessed 3 July 2021.

correspondence in youth and student politics in the Diaspora. On a smaller scale, Palestinian students in Italy also followed some of these political divisions, mitigated by the small numbers and by a sense of mutual solidarity.

The history of GUPS in Italy has roots in the Middle East: GUPS emerged out of Palestinian student associations in Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus, and Beirut. Between 1952 and 1956 the chapter of Cairo had been chaired by Yasser Arafat; in 1955 it had been accepted to the International Student Congress as an observer and, in 1958, it had become a full member of the International Union of Students (Shemesh 2018: 146). The (re)foundation of GUPS in 1959 in Cairo by young graduate students who had also been among the founders of Fatah was a moment in which Palestinian students redefined their national and political aims, with special attention to the role that youth and education would play in "taking action to regain [their] stolen homeland, using all means permitted by the articles of this [GUPS] charter" (Shemesh 2018: 151n). In this context, GUPS took on several aims: to represent all Palestinian students in the Diaspora, to differentiate their political and national identification from the more general (pan-Arab) one that was gaining ground among Arab students, and to provide practical assistance to Palestinian students wherever they were.

For Italy, Laura Castellini (2013–2014) has recorded the voices of many former Palestinian students who came to Italy, established the Italian GUPS, remained in the country after graduating, and often played some official role for the PLO or other Palestinian organizations at some point in their lives. These interviews provide us with a picture of the early beginnings of GUPS in Italy, the structure of the organization, and their political activities between 1965 and 1995, the year in which many local chapters closed. We will follow them only until the early 1970s.

a) Establishment and organization. Generally speaking, Perugia was the town where the first Palestinian students landed when they arrived in Italy at the beginning of the 1960s, usually to study architecture or medicine. In Siena and Perugia were (and still are) located the two public universities where foreigners obtain/ed the language certification to enroll in other Italian public universities. The number of Palestinian students in Italy had remained altogether small until the end of the 1960s, when the Six Day War and Black September led to a peak in new arrivals. Wasim Dahmash—whose family originated in Lydda (Lod), who immigrated to Italy in 1965 to study literature, and who later became an instructor of Arabic at the

University of Rome and Cagliari—remembers that before 1967 there were only two or three groups of Palestinian students in Italy: "about a dozen studied arts in Rome and another small group in Florence also studied arts and architecture. Another very small group was based in Perugia where they studied medicine" (interview Dahmash). Amin Nabulsi—who was born in Nablus and later established himself in Padua where he worked as a high school teacher and where he became the consul for the PA for the North East (2000–2009)—confirmed that the numbers of Palestinian students arriving in Italy through Perugia began to peak after 1967 (interview Nabulsi). Such an increase had also been favored by a new orientation in the cultural policies of the Italian governments of the mid-1960s, which decided to actively promote the enrollment of foreign students in Italy and thus made use of its cultural institutes abroad and embassies in Arab countries for student recruitment (Caruso 2009: 55). Indeed, Yusef Salman—also from Nablus, who arrived in Italy in 1972 to study medicine (Bologna and Pavia), and who later became the representative of the Palestinian Red Crescent in Italy, and more recently the spokesperson of Fatah in Italy—confirmed:

> in the 1970s the number of Palestinian students was very high; the highest number of Palestinian students organized in GUPS was at the beginning of the 1970s, when we had between four and five thousand students, for example in 1972, 1973 and 1974. (interview Salman)

When Palestinian students first arrived in Perugia, they were helped by the Arab Students' League (Lega degli Studenti Arabi, LSA): they met in the rooms of this association, their members were offered an initial place to stay, some Middle Eastern food, and also received practical help, to find a home, for example, and/or with classes of Italian or other subjects (interviews Dahmash, Qaryouti, Tamimi). However, as Samir Qaryouti—from the area of Nablus, who arrived in Italy in 1968 from Jordan to study political science in Bologna, then headed the PLO press office in Italy (1975–1978) and has since worked as a journalist for many Arab printed media and television—explained, it did not take long for Palestinian students to realize that they needed an association of their own. This separation differentiated the Palestinian path from the religious and political activities of the LSA. According to Qaryouti, many Arab students in the LSA were sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood, which, in the Italian political scenario, were close to the right-wing university student

association Fronte Universitario d'Azione Nazionale (University Front of National Action FUAN). In the radicalized political context of the 1960s, moving away from right-wing student politics meant coming closer to left-wing ones and, at the same time, remarking the uniqueness of the Palestinian situation. The words of Samir Qaryouti found an echo in most of the interviews with other members of GUPS in Italy:

> There is an exceptionalism of our cause, of our problem, that cannot be compared to that of anyone else; we do not have a State, we do not have a Ministry, we do not have a passport; one has a document here, another has a *laissez passer* for refugees there, and we belong to different social groups. (Interview Qaryouti)

On May 25, 1971, the Questura (Police Headquarters) of Perugia sent an urgent telegram to the Ministry of Interior, informing them that on 14–15 May the first congress of GUPS in Italy had taken place in Perugia.[6] The Statute of the association explained that GUPS in Italy was going to be a students' union that would work to improve students' life and help them acquire the necessary tools to be successful in their studies. GUPS also aimed at strengthening relations with "Arab, Asian, African students, and with those of all national and international student organizations". Finally, the third aim of GUPS in Italy was to

> explain the Palestinian question, the situation of the Palestinian refugees and people and the national liberation struggle that Palestinians lead in order to create a free democratic state in Palestine where Jews, Christians and Muslims will coexist.[7]

Perugia thus became the springboard of the political activities of GUPS throughout the peninsula in the following two decades. After obtaining their language certification, from here students departed to enroll in other universities throughout the country, bringing with them their Diasporic identity, the traumatic loss of Palestine, the experience of being refugees in Syria or in Jordan and the imperative to transmit the individual and collective memory of these events (Volkan 2001). In line with the general political trends of the period, they also embraced the belief that collective

[6] ACS, MI, PS, Cat. G, b. 381.

[7] *Statute of GUPS in Italy*, in ACS, GAB, 443/205801/V, General Affairs Foreigners' Service [AA. GG. Serv. Stran.] to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3 June 1971.

political action could define successful political struggles and bring changes. In the context of the radical battles of the times—anti-imperialism and the Vietnam War, support for the Cuban revolution, the battles of Che Guevara in Africa and so on[8]—the struggle for the liberation of Palestine also found a space, though in the 1960s and 1970s it had not yet acquired the prominence it would gain the following decades (Marzano 2016; Falciola 2020). Wherever they moved on from Perugia to continue their studies, they established local chapters of GUPS, thus creating a national network made of local units.

Amin Nabulsi established the first GUPS unit in Padua in 1968; Samir Qaryouti pioneered the establishment of GUPS in Bologna (interviews Nabulsi, Qaryouti, Tamimi); in 1971 Khader Tamimi established a GUPS unit in Parma and Hani Geber—who immigrated to Italy in 1971, studied political sciences in Milan and later became the PLO representative in Italy, and more recently, the Palestinian diplomatic envoy for Northern Italy —established the GUPS unit in Pavia (interview Gerber). The GUPS branch of Perugia, which functioned as a sort of central unit, was transferred to Rome in 1974 (interview Tamimi); the unit of Naples was one of the last to be established in 1977, also thanks to the initiative of Omar Suleiman, who arrived in Perugia in 1977 and then moved to Naples with a scholarship by the Italian Ministry of Education (interview Suleiman). This local and national (Italian) structure was then represented in the National (Palestinian) Congress of GUPS, which comprised "directly elected representatives of all Union branches". This was the highest organizational, legislative, and policy-setting body of the GUPS.[9]

Indeed, the Second World Conference on Palestine that took place in Amman between 2 and 6 September 1970 discussed the aims and structure of GUPS, indicating the special role of Palestinian students in the national struggle throughout the Diaspora. In the founding document that emerged from that assembly, students were defined as "a revolutionary pillar", as the backbone of the Union; their role was to recover the dignity of the Palestinian people, and their education would have provided experts to the Palestinian cause; the Union would have enlisted as many

[8] Unione Generale degli Studenti Palestinesi in Italia, *Vietnam-Palestina* https://www.palestineposterproject.org/taxonomy/term/570/poster-imaged-full?page=1, accessed 31 July 2021.

[9] International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam (henceforth IISH), *General Union of Palestine Students—L'union Generale des Etudianst* (sic) *de la Palestine*, n.p.h., n.d., n.p. [p. 4].

students as possible for the armed struggle.[10] And while, broadly speaking, GUPS remained a student political association, at least one of its members, Osama Abdel Al-Zomar, a student in foreign languages at the University of Bari, was involved in the terrorist attack at the synagogue of Rome on 9 October 1982. Captured in Greece, he was never extradited despite Italy's requests, and the trial closed with a "life sentence in absentia for manslaughter" (Marzano and Schwarz, 2013: 188–89).

b) Politics and narratives. Palestinian students enrolled in Italian and other European universities put in place a system of mutual help which saw them go through their studies, and also maintain an active political agenda. Remembering their history and telling their narrative became an individual and collective political exercise, and one of the means to connect to local student activism. As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continued to make the headlines, it became a way to attract the interest of the general public too, and of institutional (mainly leftwing) parties, trade unions, and politicians. Leaflets, booklets, posters, and manifestoes were central in this strategy[11] and so were public meetings and discussions. Bassam Saleh remembered how leaflets were printed mainly on anniversaries, to construct a chronology of Palestinian history with which Italian students and the general public could become familiar (interview Saleh). Among the dates that were commemorated periodically were 2 November (1917, anniversary of the Balfour Declaration): in a leaflet produced and distributed by GUPS of Pavia, this was described as "one of the worst aggressions made by Zionists and imperialists against Palestine", as the source "of infinite evils, tragedies and a threat to world peace", and as the single factor that brought the "dispossession of the Palestinian Arab people of its homeland, of all of its legitimate rights and of its properties, turning them into refugees without the right to self-determination" (Castellini 2013–2014: 48). Other dates were 9 April (1948, massacre of the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin during the War of 1948) and 15 May (1948, proclamation of the State of Israel), described as the day in which

[10] Ivi, [p. 1].

[11] Ivi; Fayez A. Sayegh, *A Palestinian View*, General Union of Palestine Students, n.p.h., n. d. [1970]; Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milano, Affiche, Manifesti e caricature, Italia, *Al Karameh*, https://patrimonio.fondazionefeltrinelli.it/new-feltrinelli/storico/detail/manifestiaffiches/FF0000003681/al-karameh.html?jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:%22GUPS%22,%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}#!prettyPhoto, accessed 28 July 2021.

"British imperialism, by ending its mandate on Palestine, gave power to the terrorist Zionist bands" (Castellini 2013–2014: 50); 5 June (1967, outbreak of the Six Day War), 21 March (1968, battle of Karameh), 17 September, (1970, beginning of the Black September). And, as the conflict spilled over to Europe, 16 October (1972) and 9 January (1973) were included in this Palestinian chronology, as they commemorated the already mentioned assassinations of Wael Zweiter in Rome and of Mahmoud Al-Hamsheri in Paris.

As the following examples will show, the linguistic register that GUPS adopted in this material was that of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and anti-racism. In this framework, Jews, that were always understood and presented as a collective entity, were portrayed as colonial and racist towards Palestinians, who saw and represented themselves as the new victims of racism. A leaflet entitled *Another link in the terrorist chain of Israeli Zionism*, that was mimeographed by GUPS on 15 January 1973, after the assassination of Al-Hamsheri, stated:

> Once again, this act denounces in front of public opinion the racist and imperialist nature of the State of Israel, that recurs to all kinds of crimes to eliminate physically anyone that tries to unmask with their political activity the anti-Arab works of the regime of Golda Meir [Israel's PM 1969–1974] (Castellini, 2013–2014: 55)

The GUPS conference that took place in Perugia on 18–19 December 1971 produced a document in nineteen points that set the political agenda for GUPS in Italy for the following years. Here the PLO was considered the only representative of the Palestinian people, which made GUPS the only spokesman of Palestinian students; after Black September, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was presented as a reactionary regime that "aimed at liquidating the Palestinian revolution", and Palestinians saw themselves as the vanguard in the "fight against Zionism and world imperialism headed by the USA". In this context, GUPS appealed to revolutionary forces worldwide, including Italian, to support the Palestinian struggle.

c) Supporting Palestinians in Italy. Between 1967 and 1969, many associations, groups, and committees had already embraced this cause, and a plethora of initiatives, public debates, and encounters started to take place all over the country, in universities, on television, as informal meetings, and in political conventions. These activities grew exponentially in

the 1970s and 1980s, peaking during the Lebanon war in 1982 and the First Intifada in 1987. For obvious reasons of space, I only provide here a few examples of events that took place at the end of the 1960s, when protesting against the State of Israel in the aftermath of the Six Day War was adjoined to several other anti-imperialist and anti-American themes that were popular at the time and that converged in the youth and student protests of 1968.

Many left-wing Italian associations and parties—among them the PCI and its youth federation the FGCI (Federazione Giovanile Comunisti Italiani, Youth Federation of Italian Communists), as well as the PSI—and groups from civil society that shared a broadly conceived anti-imperialist agenda mobilized in this direction. As shown by institutional correspondences, only in June–July 1967 local demonstrations and rallies that dealt with the question of Palestine, the Middle East, and the Arab peoples had taken place in the Italian province as well as in large industrial cities, in Modena, Torre del Greco, Parma, Rome, Turin, Pisa, Bologna, and Perugia, and Italian authorities were evidently monitoring this new phenomenon.[12] The year 1969 saw the establishment of the very first pro-Palestinian committees that were not officially tied to any political party, whose aim was also to raise funds for Palestinians, involve Italians in grassroots projects, and mobilize public opinion in this direction. In March 1969 a joint initiative of the PCI and of the small socialist party PSIUP (Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity) led to the establishment of a Committee for the Solidarity with the Palestinian People (Comitato per la Solidarietà con il Popolo Palestinese) in Rome, whose aim was to "promote initiatives that would help Italians get to know the real conditions of Palestinians in the territories occupied by the Israeli troops".[13] Other

[12] ACS, GAB, 0230/PS, Registered mail from Prefecture of Modena to Ministry of Interior, 15 June 1967; ACS, GAB, 071236, Registered mail from Prefecture of Naples to Ministry of Interior, 13 June 1967; ACS, GAB, 0162/PS, Registered mail from Prefecture of Parma to Ministry of Interior, 9 June 1967; ACS, GAB, 3122/12, b. 16, Registered mail from Prefecture of Bologna to Ministry of Interior, 27 June 1967; ACS, GAB, 015222/67-Stranieri, Registered mail from Prefecture of Rome to Ministry of Interior, 10 June 1967; ACS, GAB, 2914/12B/5–6, Reserved registered mail from Prefecture of Turin to Ministry of Interior, 30 June 1967; ACS, GAB, 03402/PS, Telegram from Prefecture of Pisa to Ministry of Interior, 15 June 1967; ACS, GAB, 3114/12, b. 16, Registered mail from Prefecture of Bologna to Ministry of Interior, 27 June 1967; ACS, GAB, 10/3752 PS, Registered mail from Prefecture of Perugia to Ministry of Interior, 31 July 1967.

[13] ACS, GAB, 443/184368/IV, General Affairs Foreigners' Service [AA. GG. Serv. Stran.] to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 March 1969.

similar committees were established in Pisa in May 1969 "in solidarity with Arab peoples," in Milan and then in Padua in November of the same year.[14] By August 1969, the Committee that had been established in Rome had already published four issues of its new journal entitled *Rivoluzione Palestinese* (Palestinian Revolution) and had "established a center to collect medical material for the Arab populations engaged in the war against Israel."[15] It had also organized a solidarity day for Palestine on 30 November, which saw the participation of about three hundred people and which received coverage in *L'Unità* and in the weekly *Akhbar el-Yom* from Cairo and various Libyan newspapers, as reported by the Italian embassies in Egypt and Libya.[16]

Among the various initiatives, students in Palermo organized a conference entitled *The Palestinian question and its origins* which saw the participation of about fifty Italian and foreign students.[17] Some of these debates were attended also by Jewish students. In Turin, according to police records, the Jewish community encouraged Jewish students to participate to "prevent inaccurate information from being expressed" and to "oppose adequate truthful information." In front of 200 students, a student of Syrian provenance explaining to the public "the Arab point of view on the conflict in the Middle East" was followed by speeches of Jewish students. The police reported that the atmosphere had remained generally calm and that during this conference FGEI had distributed a leaflet entitled *Outline for a discussion on socialism in the Middle East*. Here young Jews brought into the conversation the "particular and dramatic historical contingencies" that "determined a maturation of the Jewish popular consciousness", of its transformation into the "will of self-determination of the people" and of its realization "through national independence, in the land linked to the historical past of the people themselves".[18] With similar if not

[14] ACS, GAB, Telegram from Prefecture of Pisa to Ministry of Interior, 17 May1969; ACS, GAB, 441/012909-G-5/12/36 Very urgent reserved registered mail from General Affairs Foreigners' Service [AA. GG. Serv. Stran.] to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 25 November 1969.

[15] ACS, GAB, 443/184368/IV, double reserved file from General Affairs Foreigners' Service [AA. GG. Serv. Stran.] to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 August 1969.

[16] ACS, GAB, 441/012909-G.5/12/36, very urgent registered mail—reserved from General Affairs Foreigners' Service [AA. GG. Serv. Stran.] to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 25 November 1969.

[17] ACS, GAB, 443/184397/V, from General Affairs Foreigners' Service [AA. GG. Serv. Stran.] to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 June 1969.

[18] ACS, GAB, 1110/12B/5.6, reserved registered mail from the Prefecture of Turin to Ministry of Interior, 10 May 1969.

identical words, students from GUPS were expressing the same attachment to the same land as their source of current and historical identity. Things took a different turn in Pisa where a representative of GUPS and the President of the Jewish community clashed in "a lively manner, though without incidents".[19]

The list could go on into the 1970s and 1980s and, often, these initiatives led to the foundations of new committees in support of Palestinians, as in Padua, Pavia, Florence, and Rome,[20] and to numerous other initiatives they in turn sponsored. With the already mentioned first conference of GUPS in Perugia on 14–15 May 1971, and with the official registration of GUPS in Italy, pro-Palestinian activism further increased in the number of initiatives, in the more direct agency of GUPS itself and in the support that this organization succeeded to mobilize beyond student activism, through left-wing parties and trade unions, thus reaching out to a much broader audience and base for support (Castellini 2013–2014; Tarquini 2019).

Needless to say, this had inevitable repercussions on how Italian Jews perceived that their narrative—and the individual and collective identity that was based on it—was being distorted, making them feel misunderstood and often rejected in a public discourse where the terms Jew, Zionist, and Israeli were often used interchangeably (Yehoshua 1996), for example, in the media and in public debates. Such a confused and politicized climate had a strong impact on the existential and political choices of many of them, and especially on those who had been born after 1945 who decided to leave for Israel as volunteers during the Six Day War. Among them, some eventually moved permanently to Israel, while others came back. Whatever their final choice, for all of them that experience was life-changing in various respects. In the next and final section of this essay, I will leave space to the stories, narrative, and voices of some of them that I collected in a series of interviews conducted in Israel and in Italy. Though not statistically representative of the 110 who left Italy as volunteers in

[19] ACS, GAB, telegram from the Prefecture of Pisa Ministry of Interior, 17 May 1969.

[20] ACS, GAB, 441/0932/G5/12/36, from General Affairs Foreigners' Service [AA. GG. Serv. Stran.] to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 9 April 1970; ACS, GAB, 1/216 registered mail from the Prefecture of Pavia to Ministry of Interior, 22 January, 1970; ACS, GAB, 638/12.b.1, reserved registered mail from the Prefecture of Florence to Ministry of Interior 6 March 1970; ACS, GAB,11200/94, from General Affairs Foreigners' Service [AA. GG. Serv. Stran.] to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 July 1970.

Israel during the Six Day War, or immediately after ("The Volunteer"), the stories that eleven of them generously shared with me are still telling of the collective response of a generation and of the construction of an identity structured between a *here* and a *there*.

Young Italian Jews and the Six Day War

The collective expression *young Italian Jews* hides more complexity than it seems. Within this broad category we find a generation of individuals born in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, whose parents originated from different geographical contexts (within Italy and in a broader sense), who grew up in families of different economic and social backgrounds, who attended both Jewish and non-Jewish public schools, and who had attained different levels of education. Those who were university students in 1967 were in the midst of their careers, and those who worked at the time were in the midst of their jobs. Almost all of them still were, or had been, active members of national youth movements like FGEI or of transnational ones, like the already mentioned BA and HH. Others had been engaged in national politics: Marina Ergas from Milan, for example, was very politically active; she used to "hang up dazibaos outside factories for the strikes at the age of fourteen" (Interview Ergas). Others were more moderate, though they still identified with the left, with the communist, socialist, or social-democratic parties. Fewer leaned towards smaller parties at the center of the political spectrum, like the Partito Repubblicano, or the Partito Liberale Italiano (PRI and PLI). The *kibbutz* attracted many, as the "only utopian experiment that did not fail" (Buber 1949) and as the ultimate realization of the socialist idea. Avner (Piero) Calò from Florence/Milan said, "immigration to Israel meant immigration to a kibbutz as the perfect realization of my own ideal of a shared and collective life; the socialist idea par excellence". Marina Ergas too said, "the kibbutz was one of the things that brought me to Israel. There was no need to make the revolution here [in Israel], because the kibbutz already existed". And even if Miriam Toaff Della Pergola from Rome did not share the same mythical regard for this secular institution, she went to a religious one when she left Italy on June 5, 1967 (interviews Calò, Ergas, Toaff Della Pergola). Regardless of all these differences, the dynamics of the Six Day War and the complex political climate that had developed in Italy before, during, and after the war prompted many of them to take direct action vis-à-vis their complex Italian and Jewish identity.

a) The Holocaust and Jewish education. Most of those who left for Israel as volunteers during the Six Day War responded to an inner call cultivated for years. Umberto Di Gioacchino from Florence summarized this feeling: "I don't know what it was precisely, something that pushed me. They were looking for civilian volunteers to substitute those who had left for the front and I said: I am going" (interview Di Gioacchino). For a few, the Holocaust and the silences that surrounded it represented a heavy weight that played a role in the decision to leave: the extended family of Marina Ergas had been deported to Auschwitz while her immediate family had managed to escape; she remembered the silences of her father on the subject, and her parents urging each other "not to show to the girl the magazines with pictures of the concentration camps", as well as her mother crying in her sleep "the Gestapo is coming, the Germans are coming, the stadium is full of Jews that will be deported, they are here to take us away!" One of the reasons for her boarding the first plane to Israel at the outbreak of the war rested in the belief that "should there happen something terrible and should they exterminate us now with this war, I would never forgive myself if I don't go" (interview Ergas). Umberto Di Gioacchino described the silence that surrounded this subject at home as a "curtain of iron"; his grandmother had been betrayed for money and had been deported from Milan, his mother could never watch films on the Holocaust, and his father had eventually joined the Resistance (something that he learnt by chance a few years after the end of the war) (Interview Di Gioacchino). Miriam Toaff Della Pergola considered more relevant in her decision to leave Italy the Zionist education that she received in youth movements, but spoke of the "tremendous impression that her family history made" on her as a young girl, how her father Elio, who, at the time was Chief Rabbi of Ancona, "saved all the Jews of Ancona, then went to Leghorn to bring to safety his own father, the Chief Rabbi of Livorno", was captured, managed to escape, and later joined the Resistance (interview Toaff Della Pergola). The family of Lia Pacifici Millul had been hiding in Florence and then in 1944 escaped to Switzerland; so did the family of Avner (Piero) Calò and the mother of Roberto Osimo, who managed to cross the border nine month pregnant. On the contrary, the parents of Marina Finzi Norsi from Milan did not succeed in crossing the border with Switzerland with two small children. Heading South from Trieste, the family of Piero Steindler was intercepted in Venice, where they "remained hiding for twenty-two terrible months, guests of a family of gondoliers." (interviews Di Gioacchino; Pacifici Millul, Osimo, Calò,

Finzi Norsi, Steindler). All of them could tell different, yet similar, stories of persecution and/or rescue, but all grew up with the weight of their families' silences; as mentioned above, when the Eichmann trial opened up some space for these memories to emerge, all them followed it with great interest. Marina Finzi Norsi explained why in very essential and logical terms: "I followed the trial because it was closely connected to the history of my family" (interview Finzi Norsi).

Despite the weight of the Holocaust on their families and on their individual biographies, more relevant to their choice of leaving for Israel as volunteers in June 1967 had been the Zionist education received in Jewish schools or, more significantly, in the BA or HH. In 1961, Miriam Toaff Della Pergola had been to Israel for a month on a trip from the Jewish school of Rome; for her Zionism came "more from the BA than from school. The summer and winter camps had a pioneering character, and the aim of the movement was that its members would make *alyia* [immigrate to Israel] at eighteen years old. And this was my idea too" (interview Toaff Della Pergola). Marina Finzi Norsi expressed a similar view in reference to the Jewish school of Milan, "that did not push its pupils towards Israel; I did not feel this drive; it was a Jewish, but not a Zionist education" (Interview Finzi-Norsi). Almost all of them had already visited the country in their teens with trips organized by the BA, the HH, FGEI, the Italian branch of WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization), or to visit family members. During these trips that took place throughout the 1960s, that usually lasted between twenty days and one month, they all developed a sentimental and nostalgic attachment to Israel as a state and as a society, which they nourished when they came back to Italy. Umberto Di Gioacchino, who at the time worked in education at the Jewish community of Florence, had accompanied a group of school-age children that was invited by the State of Israel after the flood of Florence of 1966 (Interviews Ergas, Steindler, Ventura, Calò, Pacifici Millul, Di Gioacchino).

The collective memory of the Holocaust, the weight of the silences that surrounded that dramatic period, the involvement in organized Jewish school or community life, participation in FGEI, and the Zionist education received mainly in BA and HH can be considered as different seeds that became active when, in May 1967, the buildup to the war started. Not for everyone the same factors carried the same weight, but their combination is what prompted many to suspend their studies/jobs and to leave as civilian volunteers for Israel for a period comprised between one

and three months. Some then went back to Israel a few years later in a more permanent fashion, while others remained in Italy.

b) The buildup to war (22 May to 5 June 1967). During this short and extenuating time, the most widespread fear among Jews—regardless of their age—was that the State of Israel would disappear. As we saw, center-right and left-wing press certainly did not help defusing the alarm, nor did institutional or grassroots politics. Lia Pacifici Millul remembered, "before the war, at the Jewish community of Florence we were all mobilized, to see what we could do to help" (Interview Pacifici Millul). As we saw above, Marina Ergas would not have forgiven herself not to be there should a new Holocaust take place. Piero Steindler was a medical student living in the Morgagni student residence of Padua where "the general orientation was not in favor of Israel, though some students had been more supportive when Egypt had closed the straits of Tiran." In general, he was "convinced that Israel would disappear" and turned to the Jewish community to ask how he could leave [for Israel]" (interview Steindler). Miriam Toaff Della Pergola too feared

> that the State of Israel would cease to exist. During the weeks of the diplomatic crisis, the atmosphere was that of the end of the world; looking at the press, the situation was very serious, every day there was something new. (…) Watching the television, it seemed that the State of Israel was seriously running the risk of disappearing. It was a very sad period. (Interview Toaff Della Pergola)

Piero Steindler too kept himself informed through the press and television. In his memory the television correspondences by the well-known Jewish journalist Arrigo Levi represented a main factor that ultimately shifted public opinion in favor of the State of Israel:

> In our student residence we had a little room for watching tv that was full only on two occasions: when Arrigo Levi was speaking and for football matches. Arrigo Levi was great, his wonderful correspondences were broadcast on the news of the first channel [RAI 1]. We were all surprised that RAI 1 [connected to the Christian Democratic Party, some currents of which had long-established relations with Arab countries, as in the case of Enrico Mattei and others *note of the A.*], had assigned such delicate correspondences to Arrigo Levi" [i.e. a Jew, *note of the A.*]. (interview Steindler)

Still, those who described the period that preceded the war—and therefore their departure—spoke with a sense of urgency that was not only connected to the fate of the country to which they felt an emotional attachment, but pointed to the fact that one of the poles on which their identity stood might disappear. As Miriam Toaff Della Pergola explained:

> I wrote to my brother Ariel that I did not want to stay in this situation, with one foot in Italy and one in Israel, I had to do something, you cannot just watch with one foot here and one there. I wanted to be here [in Israel] and not there [in Italy]. I did not want to be a spectator but a participant. I knew that, not being Israeli I could only work in a kibbutz. But I wanted to be in Israel and not in Rome, and we ended up on some newspaper under the headline "The son and daughter of the Chief Rabbi [of Rome] are leaving!" which really bugged us because we would not have ended up on the newspaper had we not been the son and daughter of our father, but this makes you understand that the general feeling was that one was a hero, that was leaving to go die. But indeed, when we left, the situation did not appear very rosy (interview Toaff Della Pergola).

c) Departure and returns. This is not the place to follow the path of each of these young Italian Jews once they arrived in Israel as the war was still going on, or immediately after for those who reached Israel by boat. The students of medicine—Steindler, Finzi Norsi, Lio Beniamino Gross (from Trieste, already an MD), and a few others—were assigned to various hospitals in the country. The others who did not have a specific training that could be put to use during the war were directed to different religious or secular *kibbutzim*, where they worked in various agricultural or other jobs. Many of them were quickly disillusioned about the real contribution they could give to the country that they had rushed to help. Some of them recalled the prejudice against Italians as spoiled and lazy workers; others felt some resistance towards them as non-Ashkenazi Jews and the surprise of the authorities in charge when they realized that none of them understood *Yiddish* (Interview Ergas). Their individual experience was ultimately heavily influenced by the location where they spent this period: some, like Miriam Toaff Della Pergola remembered the heavy work in the vineyards under the scorching sun for a month, especially for someone like her who "had been studying Greek literature until a few days before;" others had no hesitation in defining the whole experience as "a wonderful holiday." Marina Ergas felt completely misunderstood when, upon arrival to the first *kibbutz*, her group was directed to the swimming pool and not

put to work; Daniele Ventura was deluded "when we found out that we were useless" (Interviews Steindler; Finzi Norsi; Gross; Toaff Della Pergola; Calò; Ergas; Di Gioacchino; Ventura). Even Piero Steindler, one of the medical students, "came back with wonderful memories, but also a little bit frustrated". As he recalled: "I had left to do things seriously and then I realized that I was one among many that they did not know what to do with." He continued:

> I had left with the idea that I could have died, and it was something that I had accepted. Then all went well. I came back as if I had been on a tour. We even visited a battlefield. Two or three days after the war (interview Steindler).

For him "moving to Israel had never been an option", while the opposite was true of Marina Finzi Norsi who did not see any other option: despite the good social life that she was leading in Milan, "at some point I no longer saw the reason to remain attached to this [Jewish] tradition in a superficial way," Ultimately, she left the University of Milan in her fifth year and graduated at the Hadassah medical school in Jerusalem (interviews Steindler; Finzi Norsi).

Young Italian Jews were not alone. When the Six Day War started, a whole generation of young Jews literally from all over the world chose to be *there* regardless of the inevitable risks they would run. And although this essay has not kept into consideration the voices of those of the same age group who remained at home, the numbers of those who mobilized and left within a few days are quite remarkable. Listed by country of provenance as of 5 July 1967 (one month after the beginning of the war) the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs counted 1295 volunteers from England, followed by South Africa (861), France (607), USA (301), and so on, for a total of 5043 individuals ("The Volunteer") from five continents and more than twenty countries. Most of the Italian volunteers had touched this international dimension already on the planes (or ships) that took them to Israel, and certainly lived it through in loco, in the *kibbutzim* where they worked, in the fields, in the kitchens, in the laundry, and so on. Miriam Toaff remembered American, French, and South African volunteers; Roberto Osimo met Helen Leigh, a volunteer from England who later became his wife. The international dimension of this experience was also intergenerational: Piero Steindler worked under the "supervision of an old Polish director, Prof. Kaufmann, whose aides were a Scottish or an

Irish physician"; Marina Finzi Norsi started her practice with a Czechoslovakian surgeon, a genius of surgery, people of great valor" (interviews Steindler; Finzi Norsi; Toaff Della Pergola; Osimo; Leigh Osimo).

d) 1968–1969. Those who left as volunteers in 1967 came back as transformed individuals, regardless of whether they had spent their days in Israel working in orchards or travelling the country. For most, it was an eye-opening experience in various respects; most striking had been the encounter with peers of the same age group from all over the world. In a different sense, striking had also been the realization that there existed a discrepancy between a diasporic narrative built on foundational myths and a sense of nostalgia, and the reality of the hard politics on the ground, especially in reference to the new dramatic situation of Palestinians, that they had witnessed first-hand, for example, in tours of East and Old Jerusalem and of other occupied areas (interviews Di Gioacchino; Steindler).

When they returned to Italy, the university students among them found themselves involved in the students protests that were spreading across the country, in the debates, assemblies, and occupations that opened up a new season of collective action. In that context, the experience in the *kibbutz* could also be seen in continuity with other experiences of collectivism: Marina Ergas had come to Florence to work as a volunteer in 1966 when the Arno river had flooded, with other members of the Jewish community, among them the well-known sociologist Renato Mannheimer, and with hundreds of other volunteers from all over Italy and the world (Interview Ergas). However, in the politicized climate of 1968, their experience was not well received.

As we saw above, since 1965, GUPS had begun to be active in Italy and, in the following few years, various chapters of this student association spread in universities across the country. Their version of events was gradually adopted and incorporated in the political battles of the time, accompanied by a highly pitched political rhetoric. In this context, those Jews who shared the ideals that were at the foundations of the revolution of 1968 presented their collectivist experience in the *kibbutz* as a validation of their political identification; however, they were refused on grounds of their ethnic belonging. Those who were finishing their studies and had already made up their minds that they would settle in Israel were not

particularly touched by such a rebuttal. Miriam Toaff Della Pergola was one of them:

> When after 1967 the left shifted its support away from Israel, I was actually finishing my exams at university and was already heading out, towards Israel. Being a volunteer at kibbutz Sde Eliahu during the war certainly carried its weight in my decision to leave Italy in 1970. (interview Toaff Della Pergola)

Others used their collectivist experience to obtain some credibility in student assemblies and public debates where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was one among other themes; this was the case of Daniele Ventura, who intervened in a student assembly at the University of Florence:

> At the centre of Santa Apollonia there had been a demonstration organized by Arab students. (…) I went with my cousin Franco Ventura and some Israeli students. At some point, something was said that deeply offended the Israeli students who left the room. It was my turn to speak and I felt very uncomfortable; still, I took the floor after a young South American student that spoke extensively about colonialism and imperialism. I denounced his speech as anti-Semitic, because he had essentialized Jews, presenting these practices as values of the whole Jewish people. (Interview Ventura)

For those who shared deeply the values of social justice and progress and the ideals that the youth was trying to (re)claim in 1968, the awakening to the complexity of ethnic belonging and political belief was even harder. The words of Marina Ergas are exemplary in this respect:

> I tried to participate to 1968, working in the neighborhood. One felt involved in the age of collective mobilization: in the morning I used go at the gates of [the factories] of Breda and Pirelli and in the evenings I worked with the families of migrants from Sicily. And the experience of the kibbutz was seen in different ways. Workers had no idea what a kibbutz was so, having been there gave me a status in certain places and it did not in others. (…) After the war, when I presented myself again in one of the left wing groups of which I was part, they took away my right to speak, because I had been to Israel and I was trying to balance the [political] positions that were expressed in those debates. And this really disturbed me and made me decide to come back here [to Israel] because there [in Italy] I would not have functioned with this conflict. (Interview Ergas)

Conclusions

When the conflict in the Middle East peaked, both Jews and Arabs in Italy (Moslems and Christians, mainly Palestinians and of other nationalities) felt increasingly isolated from a political and existential point of view. This in turn fostered their sense of attachment to their respective communities, and their adherence to more exclusive versions of their own histories and narratives. In this respect, when considering how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict spilled over to Europe and how it helped shape Diasporic identities, we can observe its effects on three areas: self-perception, perceived identity, and social affiliation. To paraphrase Amartya Sen, the twin illusions of destiny and of uniqueness—that are so important in shaping exclusive identities—came to the fore at times of crisis, strengthening the predominance of the religious-national-ethnic component over others (professional, gender, political affiliation, etc.) in the definition of Self and of Other (Sen 2006), with long-term political and cultural consequences.

Italian Jewry had been altogether a latecomer to Zionism and, after the Second World War, it gradually rejoined the cultural and political trends that had been developing in the meantime in the rest of the Jewish world. Between 1945 and the early 1950s, a previous generation of Italian Jews had asked questions about their own identity and place in society; many of them had volunteered during the War of 1948, often in a military capacity. Arrigo Levi, the journalist of RAI 1 mentioned above was one of them, and so was Prof. Luciano Segre, whom I quoted in opening (Simoni 2010, 2018). Those born after 1945 asked similar questions and participated to some of the dynamics of the Six Day War as (civilian) volunteers.

There were differences between these two generations. Those born after 1945 were confronted with challenges that were less existential and more political: they had not been directly expelled from schools or universities, they did not have to run for their lives, nor did they have to hide for fear of being betrayed; their families sheltered them as they were growing up, unlike those of the previous generation (Simoni 2018); still, they felt cornered, this time both from the right and from the left, in a society that often misunderstood their complex identity and that misrepresented and condemned the sentimental and nostalgic attachment towards the State of Israel that many of them had developed in their teens. When the Six Day War started in June 1967, these young Jews, and especially those who identified with the left felt betrayed, indeed because left-wing parties, press, and civil society shifted their support for Palestinians in the name of

the same values of anti-Fascism and Resistance that Jews had embraced for their own survival twenty-five years before. This became particularly obvious when the conflict in the Middle East peaked, or when it spilled over in Europe through violence and terrorism. During and after the 1960s, this young Diaspora responded to these challenges by strengthening its relationship with the State of Israel, whether through nostalgia, professional relations, by settling in the new Homeland, or by adopting a more fluid model of coming and going that Italy's geographical proximity to the State of Israel allowed.

During the same decade the Palestinian young Diaspora too started to organize themselves and respond to the loss of that very same Homeland, and to react to the historical narrative that the victor in this conflict had established and that Jews in the Diaspora had often also adopted without too much critical questioning. This could not happen, for obvious political reasons, by going to historic Palestine, but it occurred by bringing Palestine to the diasporic countries where Palestinians were now studying, living, building their careers and families, and working. The establishment, network, work, and activities of GUPS in Italy (and in many other countries in Europe and elsewhere) was in important step in this direction. When this narrative was adopted by the local (and later national) parties, and incorporated into domestic political dynamics, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict took a life of its own away from the Middle East.

In the 1960s, Italian society and politics did not prove up to the task of acknowledging the complexity of these political and historical narratives, and their juxtaposition, nor did they express any interest or ability to defuse their destructive potential. On the contrary, the press and institutional and grassroots politics fueled this conflict, often recurring to stereotypes that either drew from an Orientalist imaginary or that were remnants of the so-called anti-Jewish Archive (Levis Sullam 2008). Whatever the case, the spillover of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Europe started then a new course of its own that continued to reverberate for decades to come.

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Between "Yellow" and "Red": Stereotypes and Racial Discourses in 1950s Italian Narratives of Communist China

Laura De Giorgi

In 1955, an Italian cultural delegation headed by the anti-fascist jurist Piero Calamandrei and composed of several intellectuals from different cultural and political backgrounds visited the People's Republic of China (PRC). It was an important event as, at that time, Italy and China did not have diplomatic relations. The polarization of the Cold War had placed the two countries in different camps, and Communist China was excluded from the Organization of United Nations. In this context, the visit of the delegation aimed to open a dialogue with and improve Italy's knowledge of revolutionary China (De Giorgi 2017; Calamandrei 2020). Among the members of the delegation were the writer Carlo Cassola, the literary critic Franco Fortini, scholars such as Cesare Musatti and Noberto Bobbio, the painter Ernesto Treccani, and journalists such as Carlo Bernari and Antonello Trombadori.

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One outcome of this initiative was the publication, in 1956, of a special issue of the journal directed by Calamandrei, *Il Ponte*, under the title *La Cina di oggi*. As a collection of essays written by the members of the delegation and original translations from Chinese sources, the special issue was a breakthrough with regard to Italy's knowledge of China, partially because of the high political and intellectual profiles of the contributors and partly because of the broad spectrum of topics presented to the readership. Most of the authors shared a positive view of the new revolutionary state and of Chinese people and aspired to overcome the ignorance and prejudices that surrounded the PRC. As one reviewer suggested, "the volume published by "Il Ponte" will give a contribution to make the wrong image of China disappear from the mind of many of us" (Pischel 1956, 462)[1].

Actually, in that period, the interpretation of the Chinese revolution was mostly polarized along ideological and political lines: favorable and often enthusiastic depictions of the PRC were counterbalanced by narratives that described it as an enemy of Western civilization (Polese Remaggi 2019; Basilone 2019a). Not surprisingly, the special issue of *Il Ponte* was criticized by other intellectuals, such as Nicola Chiaromonte and Ignazio Silone (Chiaromonte 1956), who thought that the image of China offered by the journal was much too compliant with Red China.

Nevertheless, the discourse on China did not involve only political and ideological judgments but touched upon a more general attitude toward Chinese people and society with regard to Italian public opinion. One member of Calamandrei's delegation, the Communist intellectual Antonello Trombadori, framed the negative Italian attitude toward revolutionary China in terms of "racism" (Trombadori 1956). He argued that the way Italians looked at the PRC still reflected the legacy of colonialism and Eurocentrism. In his view, this attitude was remarkable in those who were politically averse to Socialist China:

> I admit that the word to say now is harsh, but I cannot avoid using it: the word is "racism". The same racism which has been cancelled, after tears and blood, from the official vocabulary of Europeans in the wake of the Second World War, is just sleeping in different ways within our middlebrow culture, the same culture that nourishes us from our civilized humanistic school. It is the same "racism" that, for the few who can learn from history, looks like

[1] All quotations from Italian sources have been translated into English by the Author.

> the only, but nauseating, theoric justification of those reactionaries who are in favour of parliaments and national autonomy if in London, Paris or Rome, but who are not able to suggest a civil government for Nairobi, Manila or Tannarivo (Antananarivo) different from a firing squad. (183)

In his essay, Trombadori pushed his argument further, claiming that the risk of being racist was stronger and more widespread than commonly assumed. The taste for exoticism and Eurocentric attitudes was still influencing the way China was perceived, even by progressive intellectuals. Political sympathy or ideological adherence to the revolution did not save Westerners from showing Eurocentric bias and racial prejudices, reproducing colonial stereotypes.

This chapter aims at probing Trombadori's claims by looking at the discourse on China produced in Italy during the Cold War. The choice of period is not contingent. After the fall of Fascism, racism became a political and cultural taboo in Europe, and the notion of race, which had supported discriminatory and colonial policies before the Second World War, apparently disappeared in the Italian public sphere. However, the recent reemergence of racist discourses in Italy shows how this disappearance was probably an illusion. Racism just "evaporated" in Italian society and culture, continuing to fill the air as an invisible steam (Romeo 2012).

In the case of China, historically, racism has been expressed in terms of fear of the so-called yellow peril (Kwoner 2012; Frayling 2014; Tchen and Yeats 2014), whose legacy has recently been evoked with regard to the recent Sinophobic trends in the West (Billé and Urbansky 2018). In the late 1990s, Italy's Sinophobic attitudes were first triggered by migration from the PRC and by the impact of Chinese economic growth on Italy's position in the global economy (Zhao 2018; Zhang 2016, 2019). In Italy, the language of this apparently new discriminatory attitude toward China recalls the stereotypes of the "yellow peril," too. A suspicious and even hostile attitude toward China has been expressed, making use of old prejudices regarding the Chinese as unfathomable and cunning people—an ethnic group basically unassimilable to Western society and values.

This essentialization of the Chinese as a group defined by some unchanging psychological and cultural features suggests that the continuities with the past are stronger than expected. It is true that since 1949, the discourse on China in Italy has been essentially framed in political and ideological terms. However, ideas and notions shaped by cultural Eurocentrism and by the colonial mind may have still imbued Italy's

understanding of China. Through some case studies from the writings of Italian travelers who visited China in the 1950s, this chapter argues that, in spite of the differences in the political and ideological attitudes toward the revolution, the conceptual language of the old colonial time and of Orientalism was still affecting the way China was narrated to the Italian public.

The Orientalism of Progressive Intellectuals

The context of the production of knowledge about China in Italy during the early Cold War was affected by multiple factors. Besides the geographical and cultural distance between the two countries, the success of the Communist revolution and the establishment of the Socialist State added a political and ideological element to the already complicated puzzle of China's image. Moreover, from a material point of view, direct contact was made difficult by the lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Only a tiny minority of politicians, intellectuals, and business people had the opportunity to visit China. For several among them, going to China was a political act (Hollander 1997). Travel in China was mostly constrained by political factors in the context of the unofficial diplomacy, and visitors had little opportunity to experience China without the filter of the ideological and political propaganda imposed on them by their host (Brady 2003).

Though limited, these opportunities have existed since the early 1950s. Cultural and economic delegations, as well as members of left-wing parties, such as the Italian Communist Party and the Italian Socialist Party; social organizations, such as the Italian Women's Union (UDI) and the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL); and individual personalities, such as the scholar Francesco Flora, the writer Curzio Malaparte, the journalist Enrico Emanuelli, and the businessman Dino Gentili have visited China (Meneguzzi and Samarani 2014; Samarani et al. 2018).

Among these travelers, professional writers and journalists were the most active in terms of transforming their experiences in China into narratives. In the 1950s, travel literature was one of the most important channels for learning about China in Italy (Lombardi 2006, 2010). In fact, its importance was established during the first half of the twentieth century, when the popularity of travelogues began to reflect the Italian public's aspiration to identify the nation's place in the modern global order

(Burdett 2010), also contributing to the construction of the Italian colonial mind (Tomasello 1984).

Before the Second World War, most travel writings about China reflected all the ambivalence of Orientalism. The appreciation and admiration of Chinese philosophy and art, as well as the suspicion of and even repulsion for contemporary Chinese people, had composed a contradictory portrait, where the magic of the Orient was matched with the need for reassurance that Italy belonged to the Western civilization (De Giorgi 2010, 2014b; Basilone 2019b). On the one hand, travelogues were rich in descriptions of the strangeness of Chinese food, religion, medicine, and popular customs, of the frightening and anonymous Chinese crowd, of the abject poverty of common people, of the corruption of bureaucrats and old élites, of the abrupt violence of political conflicts, and of inscrutable and apathetic behavior. They reproduced a set of distinctive images of the Chinese *Other* that could not easily disappear from the popular imaginary. On the other hand, these reports used China in order to consolidate Italy's image as a Western and modern country keen to help the development of China, as shown by the narratives surrounding the only tangible Italian colonial enterprise in China, the Tianjin Concession (Marinelli 2007, 2014). As the studies of this "aristocratic concession" have argued, "the Italian 'imagined community' in Tianjin capitalized on the rhetoric trope of the 'civilizing mission' attributed to the newly created Italian nation: this was based on the 1890s claim that 'Italy's was a proletarian colonialism' and therefore less pernicious than the others, since it would have been 'aimed to secure better land and greater prosperity for its indigenous citizens'" (Marinelli 2015).

The fall of Fascism and the establishment of the PRC radically changed the political context. China could no longer be considered a colonial country, and its revolution required reframing the whole discourse on Chinese culture and society in a new analytical framework, that of Socialism.

However, as a reading of the ethnography of Communist China in 1955 produced by the progressive and left-wing travelers who were members of Calamandrei's delegation suggests, the cultural legacy of Orientalism was much more hard to relinquish, even for admirers of the Chinese revolution who were apparently ready to put an end to the old colonial views of China.

In fact, notwithstanding their different ideological backgrounds—there were Marxists, but also Christians—most of the delegation's members had

a genuine appreciation for the Chinese revolution as a successful example of an anti-colonial struggle. Moreover, they had all been persuaded that their task was to overcome the ideological and cultural prejudices that kept the PRC at the margins of the international order (Polese Remaggi 2019).

One shared goal of their narratives was to struggle against the old-time colonial idea that China could not deeply change. Conversely, their writings and descriptions aimed at suggesting that the PRC was not only rapidly proceeding along the path of progress, but was even more socially and morally advanced than the West. There was a strong focus on the "newness" of Chinese society and economic and political organization, as they were eager to demonstrate how the revolution had implied a farewell to the old feudal backward society of colonial times. From this perspective, they aimed at opposing the popular tendency to naturalize historical features (such as the authoritarianism of Chinese imperial tradition) as perennial distinctive elements of Chinese collective psychology and social organization.

However, this attitude did not exclude the idea that colonial stereotypes could creep into the portraits of the PRC. This was especially true when they had to come to terms with Chinese traditional culture, which was also a staple of the PRC's cultural diplomacy, even in the revolutionary period (De Giorgi 2014a).

Their encounters with Chinese art, literature, music, and cuisine raised ambivalent attitudes. Facing the exoticism embodied in Chinese material culture, even sympathetic travelers experienced a sense of wonder or even estrangement. As one of the most brilliant members of the delegation, the literary critic Franco Fortini pointed out that a common reaction to Chinese art and culture was its rejection. Most travelers considered Chinese culture with annoyance, discarding it as a relic of the past, an obstacle to progression, and incompatible with modernity and Socialism (Fortini 1956, 58).

In other cases, their taste for exoticism loomed large in their narratives, and the old tropes about Chinese civilization being mysterious and sensual found their way into the travelogues. Descriptions of Chinese writing and cuisine, as practices which encapsulated the exotic nature of China, suggest how some typical themes of the colonial discourse on the Orient were preserved, even when a progressive traveler faced the new revolutionary China.

The writer Carlo Cassola's reaction to the Chinese writing system is quite revealing. Cassola did not refrain from presenting it as the most paradigmatic sign of the unintelligibility of Chinese culture and of its unfitness for modern development. After a long description of the features of the Chinese written language, defined as "prehistoric" and as "a language of the infancy" of humanity—a period that Western people had overcome long ago—he claimed that it was very inadequate for science and technology:

> It is not an exaggeration to say that the greatest difficulty for this country's modernization is the language. This language is really a curse, a ball and chain for the Chinese people on their path to resurrection. [...] The radical solution that will be necessary at a certain moment will be the adoption of an alphabet that is a change of the language. It is said that linguistic unity will be lost [...] but I think that this argument is not really convincing in the face of the enormous benefits that could be gained eliminating such an anachronistic language. (Cassola 1956, 70)

The idea that the Chinese written language was not compatible with modernity has a long history in the colonial views of China (Mullaney 2017). Cassola just replicated an opinion that was historically linked to the judgement of Chinese backwardness. This writing was considered to embody all the peculiarities of Chinese culture, and in defining it as "prehistoric," Cassola again evoked the old familiar colonial stereotype of the Chinese as "childlike" (Keevak 2011, 115), a people which had for a long time been stuck in the infant stages of development and that only Westernization (under the guise of Communism) could project into adult modernity.

Worst of all, Cassola suspected that the writing system had to also be considered as the cause of the "mental deficiency" he noticed in the Chinese people:

> Maybe after the adoption of a new language apt to the modern needs, some curious mental deficiencies that we have found in the Chinese—who are certainly very smart—would disappear. We were surprised to notice that they are weak in calculation. (1956, 71)

He supported his view with a short anecdote on the use of the abacus by Chinese clerks in shops, but this portrait reinforced the image of China as a people and a civilization marginal to a rational traditional that the

writer implicitly suggested as being at the basis of Western modernity. Carlo Cassola certainly had no intention of resuming the old stereotypes that had contributed to the racist and colonial view of Chinese culture, but he was not able to escape the long shadow of Eurocentrism and the temptation to measure the Other according to Western standards. Actually, it is fair to say that probably some progressive Chinese intellectuals and politicians, and the Chinese Communist Party's leadership, would have partially agreed with this interpretation of Chinese writing. In the same period, a reform in this field was in progress, and consequently, the special issue of *Il Ponte* included an essay on the plan to substitute the characters with an alphabet. In this essay, the author, the linguist Carlo Tagliavini, expressed his perplexities regarding the reform and its impact (1956, 652).

If the discourse on the Chinese writing system preserved the myth of Chinese culture as incompatible with modernity, the most emblematic example of the Orientalistic stereotypes about China concerned the description of food. Descriptions of and reflections on Chinese food abounded in personal travel notes, but also in published travelogues. No travelers could escape the feeling that the cuisine represented the quintessence of the exoticism of Chinese culture. Dishes raised an exciting mixture of anxiety and curiosity, fascination and repulsion. And, considering the role of food in Italian culture as a marker of national identity and character, it is not surprising that much attention was addressed to this topic.

In the texts of the intellectuals of the 1955 delegation, the interpretation of the Chinese approach to food often hinted at notions of disguise and concealment, which had also been typical tropes of the construction of Chineseness in colonial discourse. Consistent with his persuasion that Chinese culture could not survive to modernity, Cassola did not hesitate to define Chinese specialties as "exquisite corpses," suggesting that in the end Chinese cuisine embodied the dead memory of the past. On the other hand, Fortini pointed out how it had to be considered equal to literature, art, and the writing system, as it was a "bewildering and unbelievably complicated thing."

> I believe that Chinese cuisine is the richest of recipes and the most refined in taste, but food is unidentifiable, everything is transformed in a smudge, disguised: nor the shape nor the color can help to foresee the taste. (Fortini 1956, 59)

Another traveler, the journalist Carlo Bernari, defined it as "incomprehensible" and something that "can be really appreciated insofar it can surprise" (1957, 5–6). Bernari's analysis of Chinese cuisine is particularly interesting as it is full of implicit and even unconscious suggestions about the Chinese character. According to Bernari, approaching Chinese cuisine required revolutionizing the Western hierarchy of senses, from smell through sight to taste. Only once eaten, it was possible to know the actual ingredients of the dishes, as its preparation required cutting food into the smallest of pieces and mixing them together, making it unrecognizable. What the food really was, concealed under poetic names, it was hard to say. A visitor could guess, but never be sure of, what they were eating. The inscrutable Chinese mind had in its cuisine its most sophisticated epitome.

This description of Chinese culinary tradition embodied the old racialized stereotype of the mask and the disguise as fundamental features of Chinese people, imaged as being keen to hide their feelings and thoughts, as enigmatic, and as consequently untrustworthy. From this perspective, eating Chinese food, for a foreigner, was a question of adventurousness and curiosity (a "Western" cultural attribute with regard to the Orient), but also of trust. As a specter, Orientalism was still haunting Western progressive writers in their narratives of China. Mostly inadvertently, they offered an afterlife to those old attitudes toward China shaped by colonial fantasies and fears. It was not racism, but it could support a view on Chinese people and culture that, in other contexts, could be dangerously appropriated by racist discourses.

The Legacy of Prewar Colonial Discourse: Race, Nature, and History in Virgilio Lilli's Travelogue

If during the Cold War racism was expunged by public discourse, the idea that the Chinese were a race with specific characteristics still lived on in some journalistic narratives. The legacy of racial classification developed in the late nineteenth century was often easily recognizable, though less tied to a biological reading of Chinese people than to the adoption of a positivist geographical and historical determinism. In this view, the Chinese belonged to the Asian race, a composite group made up of different peoples who shared biological and psychological features (Gabrielli 2014) but whose capacity to develop and modernize depended on different historical, geographical, and political factors.

During the late 1930s, this articulation offered a political rationale for a distinction between the Japanese and Chinese, supporting the discrimination toward the Chinese migrants in Italy as a consequence of Italy's alliance with Japan and Germany (Cologna 2020b) and the prohibition of interracial marriages. After the fall of Fascism, the idea that geographical and historical features determined Chinese social behavior and cultural norms did not disappear. Authors who were less ideologically supportive of the PRC were vocal in expressing the idea that Chinese people were radically different from Westerners and often argued that this was due to historical and geographical factors. History and geography had determined the collectivist attitude of the Chinese mind and a philosophy where the individual was less important than the community, leading to, consequently, the propensity to choose and accept an authoritarian and nationalistic political system.

The core argument of the conservative discourse on China was that the Communist revolution was the outcome of a tradition of despotism. In other words, it was not a liberation of the Chinese people from a destiny shaped by nature and history but, conversely, an event caused by their "natural" inclination toward communitarianism and authoritarianism. The emphasis on the "natural" preference of the Chinese for authoritarianism responded to contingent geopolitical interests in colonial times, but it also reflected deeply rooted cultural and racial prejudices. During the Cold War, this was a leitmotif of the discourse about Communist China in the West, explicitly evoked in the depictions of the PRC by writers not aligned with the left. They tended to conflate the old historical and geographical determinism with the political and ideological language of the Cold War. Their views of the PRC produced a racialized notion of the Chinese people, whose social values and psychological features were essentialized and considered immune to change.

In some cases, they did not refrain from using the old notion of a "yellow race" in order to describe the people's attitudes and behavior. One exemplary case is the long report published in 1961 by Virgilio Lilli, a journalist for *Corriere della Sera*, the newspaper of the conservative bourgeoisie and one of the main press outlets in Italy.

Virgilio Lilli was an important personality in Italian journalism, he was not a Communist, and he had extensive experience as a foreign correspondent. He had already visited China before the end of the civil war, in 1948. In these first reports, Lilli had sketched a portrait of the Chinese as people whose social customs and values were mostly determined by their struggle

for survival in a place where individuals had no special significance. In order to support this claim, Lilli had explained the custom of killing or abandoning newborn daughters as a consequence of the burden of nature on the Chinese soul.

> China is a permanent cataclysm, a fact of a grandly objective character, in which the laws of balance are decided with relentless clarity, with an irreparable frankness by phenomena that seem to be of unprecedented ferocity, sometimes. Actually, they are just the consequence of the laws of preservation and balance of which humanity sometimes is not aware. The Chinese throws away the female newborn as a peasant prunes a tree, and with his sickle mutilates the living vegetable flesh, indifferent to the green leaves that are so lost […]. In Europe the death of a baby girl is a bitter misfortune of life. In China, it is just nature, or even the restoration of harmony. (1953, 237)

This idea of a destiny inscribed in nature was not lost in Lilli's understanding of the Chinese revolution. Rather, it seemed to support his interpretation of the events, when in 1959 he visited Communist China. Lilli went to China during the Great Leap Forward, when Maoist economic policy was based on vast mass mobilization in order to overcome Chinese structural limits to rapid industrial development. Still not aware of the dramatic famine that this policy was causing, Lilli concluded that the huge struggle of the Chinese people in order to increase agricultural and industrial production proved the uniqueness of Chinese culture and society, which was due to the burden of history and nature. Rather than in the title, *Into the Red China*, the whole rationale of Lilli's book was in the subtitle "If I were Chinese, I would be a Communist."

> … the first enemy of the people, in China (communist or imperialist as well) is the climate: the first-class slavers, the ruthless colonialists, the capitalist exploiters, the imperialists who have encroached the richness and the peace of the country, more than the Westerners, the Whites, the missionaries, the corrupted bureaucrats, are Summer and Winter. I had the confirmation that the Chinese perennial crisis is determined more by geography than by history, the same centuries-old history: drought and floods, thirst and shipwreck. It is nature, and not in capital letters. The blind, insensible nature […] does not love the Chinese, as she does not love Indians, she does not love Arabians, she does not love Africans, she does not love Persians, she does not love all the peoples of the so-called underdeveloped countries, that

> are underdeveloped because they have been condemned by their great enemy, nature. My visit in China during Summer time has taught me that Chinese Communism (the anthill organization, the over-military discipline, the forced labour, the idolatry for technology et cetera) fights more against the ferocity and the injustice of nature than against those of the privileged classes. The struggle against the privileged classes has been, and still is just the pretext for the struggle against nature. (Lilli 1961, 11)

Communism was the only possible path for the Chinese people to escape from the cage that nature had imposed on their lives for centuries, compelling them to think exclusively about survival. As Lilli wrote, the "eternal Chinese problem is not to live, but not to die" (1961, 13).

Lilli's geographical determinism left some room for change: Communism could maybe help the "survival" of the Chinese people. The cost of this outcome, at any rate, was the erasure of historical consciousness. The revolution liberated the Chinese people from their glorious, long, but already dead, past. Indeed, this struggle against the past at the core of the revolutionary efforts was a struggle against nature, since the past was deeply entrenched in the psychology of Chinese people "because, in the end, even history is nature" (Lilli 1961, 15).

This naturalization of history supported Lilli's view of the Chinese as a "race." Not a Communist sympathizer, Lilli looked at the revolution as an attempt to free the Chinese people from the burden of their memories and history and as a way of escaping the destiny of poverty to which they were bound by their geography and history as the "natural given." In his depiction of China, the discourse was articulated in terms of a distinctive way to be human determined by specific geographical and historical circumstances that the Chinese social body could not escape.

Quite revealing, for example, is his use of metaphors from the natural world in his analysis of the failure of the Catholic missionary enterprise in China. In his view, foreign religion had violated China's "nature." He compared the Christian missionary efforts to "planting bananas in Lombardia, or wheat in the Sahara," that is, going against natural conditions (Lilli 1961, 151). "Every race has its Heaven, and trying to change it is a much harder enterprise than changing the earth under its feet" (Lilli 1961, 153). And if Communism (still a Western import) had succeeded, the reason had to be identified in it being anti-colonialist as well as in its consistency with the true nature of the Chinese race, focused on material aspects of life.

The explicit emphasis of the racial characteristics of the Chinese, such as in comments about their habit of drinking hot tea or their capacity to endure the discomforts of a harsh summer, punctuates Lilli's description of the PRC. However, it is in the last chapter that Lilli elaborates on the racial features of revolutionary China in a more articulated manner. Here, he produces a comparison between China and Japan, in order to confute the similarity of the PRC to the Soviet Union. In his opinion, this view does not make any sense, as he argues that the Chinese are first of all "yellow," that is Asian, rather than "red," and to be "yellow" is just a natural fact, a datum of nature.

Lilli's list of the characteristics of the "yellow race" and, in his view, embodied by Japan during the Second World War and now recognizable in Communist China, is a summary of cultural stereotypes of East Asians: the spirit of self-sacrifice, the absence of humor, weak individual aspirations, huge national aspirations, no faith in God or in any eternal transcendent being, the emulation of the West, and so on (1961, 185).

> The Chinese race and the Japanese race are both yellow races. A kind of yellow, by the way, that constitutes the closest relationship of blood and spirit in all Asia. [...] To say that the Chinese can resemble more the Russians than the Japanese is like saying that the Greeks resemble more the Eskimos than the Romans.
>
> China's geography is strictly similar to Japan. Not in a structural sense, but in the sense, much more relevant, of their position in the globe. China is Asia and Japan is Asia. [...] Chinese demography and Japanese demography belong both to a luxuriant nature, with an overproduction of human units that is peculiar to the yellow race [...]. A demography of quantity not of quality, of masses more than of individuals, which naturally tends to the anthill [...].
>
> China today is nationalist, as was Japan yesterday. Its nationalism is of a racial kind; a national racism that in Europe can be referred only to Germany [...], the Chinese nation feels itself more defined by the yellow race than by geographical borders and by history. (Lilli 1961, 183–4)

Placing his writing in a historical context—in the wake of the 1960 Sino-Soviet split—Lilli's concern with regard to distinguishing Chinese Communism from the Soviet one is not surprising. What is remarkable is his use of the notion of "race," which framed the People's Republic's political identity in the old colonial understanding of Asian culture. The specificity of Chinese Communism could be interpreted in terms of

"nature" and "race." From this perspective, Lilli thought that race was a political factor that could not be ignored. Describing the Chinese perception of the Russian presence in Siberian cities (for the Chinese, a piece of Asian territory) and the way the Russians dealt with the Chinese, he recalls the relationship between colonizers and colonial subjects in strictly bodily terms:

> And, in the end, there is an element of differentiation between the colonizers and the colonized which is similar to the one existing in the colonies: it is race. In Africa it is the color, in Asia the eyes. In Africa the "whites" command and the "blacks" are subjected; in Asia, the "straight eyes" are the masters, the "slant-eyes" are the subjects. (Lilli 1961, 190–1)

Race was still an important category that shaped the world and human behavior much more than ideologies and that he did not reject, but explicitly emphasized. Nationalism was racial, more so than anything else.

Paradoxically, thinking about the Communist Chinese in terms of a "yellow race" permitted Lilli to circumvent any truly ideological evaluation of the PRC. He could make his point in supporting a political stance that reflected, in the early 1960s, a slowly shifting attitude toward Socialist China in Italy. In his view, the "yellow" character of Chinese Communism was an advantage for the West, as the real menace for Western civilization was represented by the Soviet Union, not by China. Lilli was vocal in claiming the necessity of giving political recognition to the PRC (1961, 194–9). In doing so, he drew from the conceptual legacy of colonial racial classification. In his eyes, China was first "yellow" and, secondly, "red." China's Asian identity placed it at a safe distance from Italy and, essentially, in a different category from Western civilization.

Conclusions

In 2020, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Italy has witnessed an upsurge in anti-Chinese racism. The search for the origin of the infection has driven some parts of the public opinion to identify the main cause of the transmission of the infection as Chinese migrants' supposed habits, such as their barbarian eating customs, bad hygiene, promiscuous living, and secrecy (Cologna 2019, 2020a).

Moreover, in a political and cultural climate where populist protests have often been built on xenophobic fears, the assumption of a radical

difference between "our" social values and lifestyle and "theirs" has been nourished by an insistence regarding the culturally specific and politically determined responsibility of China for the global spread of the virus. At the same time, the Chinese approach to controlling the epidemic has raised an ambivalent attitude, as the PRC's capacity to impose a drastic quarantine has been taken as a standard to judge Western governments' actions against, but also as a reminder of Chinese indifference to individual freedom.

This racist or Sinophobic discourse draws from a past repertoire of ideas and stereotypes, of fixed ideas about Chinese culture and national character, and, for some, of a notion of a "yellow race," which still live on in the Italian mind. It makes use of images of a racialized China rooted in Italian culture.

The intersection between the legacy of Italian colonial ideology, the reception of notions of the "yellow peril" in the West, the influence of domestic political and ideological factors, and the public's experience of China through travel and migration throughout the twentieth century has shaped the discourse on China over time, but the persuasion that the Chinese people share some unchangeable cultural traits that place them at odds with the West or make them unintelligible seems to be resistant to change. It is not surprising that, even during the Cold War, the portraits of China offered by travel narratives from different political and ideological positions share significant commonalities. Even if racial ideology was rejected as being shameful after the fall of Fascism, colonial and Eurocentric stereotypes and tropes continued to imbue, though to different degrees, the Italian imaginary of China, helping to preserve racialized narratives.

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Racism in Italy and the Italian-Chinese Minority

Anna Marsden

Italy is the European country with the highest number of Chinese citizens, whose immigration is one of the oldest in the modern history of the country. It slowly started one century ago, well before the transformation of Italy from a country of emigration to one of immigration,[1] and it rapidly increased from the 1980s with the new flows of migrations from China. Nowadays there are in Italy more than 300,000 Chinese citizens. They are the third largest group of non-EU residents in Italy (after Albanians and Moroccans) and the second highest (after Moroccans) of migrant entrepreneurs running nearly 53,000 individual enterprises (plus several corporations) distributed throughout the country and mostly operating in trading (36.9 per cent) and manufacturing (33.7 per cent) (Ministero Lavoro e Politiche Sociali 2019, 11, 27). From 2009 to 2019 the number of Chinese residents in Italy increased from 188,352[2] to

[1] The net migration became positive in Italy in 1973.
[2] http://demo.istat.it/str2009/index.html.

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318,003 (Ministero Lavoro e Politiche Sociali 2019, 11). The many Chinese who were born in Italy (about 39,000 from 2010 to 2018) (Ministero Lavoro e Politiche Sociali 2019, 12) significantly contributed to this growth, while the number of new arrivals has progressively decreased (from 22,866 in 2010 to 10,025 in 2018)[3] and the Chinese population is increasingly made up of people who have lived in the country for many years. Nearly one third of Chinese residents were born in Italy (Osservatorio Politica Internazionale 2020) and this percentage will probably increase because it is a young population (average age of thirty-two) who generally marry before the age of thirty, with an average of two children per couple. Given these numbers, it is likely that the Chinese become the most important ethnic minority in Italy due to their demographic and economic contribution, coupled with the increasing economic power of China and the possible role of the Chinese community in facilitating economic exchanges between Italy and China, and the growing activism of second-generation Chinese.

Despite the growing multi-ethnicity of the population, Italian policies do not seem to have any cultural regard for ethnic diversity. National immigration policies have always been based on a model of "subaltern integration" (Ambrosini 2005) with limited rights for immigrants and their descendants, who are generally relegated to the lowest level of the class ladder and socially marginalized. The Italian citizenship law (n. 91 of 1992), based on a strict *jus sanguinis* (right to citizenship if descending from an Italian citizen), makes the acquisition of Italian citizenship difficult even for Italian-born Chinese.

This chapter traces the history of the Chinese population in Italy and the persistent prejudices against them, showing the impact of racism on three relevant phases of the interaction between Italian and Chinese residents: the first arrivals of Chinese immigrants and the slow development of a small community of mixed Italian-Chinese families (approx. 1920s–1970s); the development of mass Chinese immigration and the spreading of prejudices against Chinese migrants (1980s–2005); the emergence in the public debate of second-generation Chinese with the creation of their first association and the formation of an Italian-Chinese identity as a result of its interaction with Italian society and its exclusionary policies (2005–2010).

[3] https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do, accessed 02/02/2021.

Chinese Migrants and Their Enterprises in Italy: A Brief Overview

The first Chinese who moved to Italy were natives of southern Zhejiang province in southeast China, particularly of a small area close to Wenzhou city, including several villages in the districts of Qingtian, Wencheng and Rui'an. These pioneers were traders from Qingtian, selling small statuettes in pyrophyllite (typical mineral of Qingtian), Chinese curios that were popular in Europe at that time. Since the late nineteenth century, Chinese traders were present at many international fairs in Europe and in 1906 they participated in Milan's international expo. In the following decades the first Chinese migrants settled in Italy, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, when restrictions to Chinese immigration were introduced in France and Germany,[4] where they had previously started to settle, pushing them to look for an alternative destination. These migrants were young men coming from China or from other countries where they had migrated previously.[5] They generally married Italian women who were often internal migrants themselves, coming from the countryside surrounding bigger cities such as Milan, Turin and Bologna. Initially, the Chinese migrants worked as peddlers, selling fake pearls and later silk ties and leather articles that they had originally bought from Italian traders and then started to produce autonomously, creating their first enterprises. Their Italian wives helped them establish these firms that also employed Italian women as workers. The success of these businesses allowed these migrants to call their relatives and friends to work for them as street vendors, selling their goods around the country. Despite the fact that the arrival of hundreds of Chinese peddlers in the mid-1920s caused alarm and suspicion in Italy and that many of them were expelled from the country (Brigadoi Cologna 2019, 60), those who remained did not face great troubles until 1938.

[4] From 1925 France introduced increasing immigration restrictions. Initially Chinese peddlers could still go to France, but paying expensive fees that they could not afford; in 1929 Chinese citizens were denied entrance to France for any job. Germany reinforced repression of illegal immigration in 1925 and introduced measures against Chinese peddlers in 1926. In the second half of the 1920s Germany expelled many Chinese migrants. Further measures were introduced in the late 1930s with increasing controls against Chinese population and the creation of a special unit for surveillance against the Chinese. See Brigadoi Cologna (2019), 54–55 and 27–31.

[5] Mostly from Japan, where there was strong Chinese migration before the Kanto earthquake in 1923, and from France and Germany.

When the Racial Laws prohibited marriages between "Italian citizens of Arian race with another person belonging to another race" (Cap I, art. 1), relationships between individuals belonging to different ethnic groups also came to be prohibited:[6] those between Chinese men and Italian women were condemned and there were also a few cases of reports against those who had sentimental or sexual relations with Italian women, which led to the internment of Chinese men and to the public condemnation of the women (Brigadoi Cologna 2015, 151). The situation became even worse during the Second World War, when the Chinese became "citizens of an enemy country". In 1940, 431 Chinese were registered in Italy (mostly in Milan and Bologna). Nearly two thirds of them were arrested and sent to concentration camps and penal colonies (Ustica and Tremiti), subjected to confinement in small municipalities in central Italy or to a compulsory supervised residence in their municipalities of residence.

Brigadoi Cologna (2019), who has reconstructed their history, highlights how Italy was the European country with the highest number of Chinese people in concentration camps. According to his research at least 260 Chinese were persecuted in Italy during the war and they were, after Yugoslavs, the largest group of non-Jewish foreign civilians imprisoned in concentration camps. Most of them were sent to three concentration camps: Tossicia, where the Chinese were the most numerous group of prisoners in the first years of war; Isola del Gran Sasso (both in the province of Teramo, Abruzzo); and Ferramonti di Tarsia (in the province of Cosenza, Calabria). Notably, concentration camps were often overcrowded and in poor condition. As an anonymous interned Chinese described them in a letter:

> The space between our beds is too narrow, with serious consequences for air quality and hygiene. Thus, we immigrants are often afraid of falling ill, people who have recently been brought to hospital for treatment are already five or six (Brigadoi Cologna 2019, 146).

[6] Royal decree-law 17 november 1938-XVII n. 1728, *Measures for the defence of the Italian race*, Art. 1., available at https://www.assemblea.emr.it/cittadinanza/per-approfondire/formazione-pdc/viaggio-visivo/lideologia-nazista-e-il-razzismo-fascista/il-razzismo-fascista/le-leggi-razziali/approfondimenti/regio-decreto-legge-17-novembre-1938-xvii-n.1728-provvedimenti-per-la-difesa-della-razza-italiana, accessed 20 January 2021.

The majority of Chinese prisoners remained in concentration camps throughout the Second World War, despite the many requests for the revocation of their internment that they themselves—and their relatives and friends—submitted. Sometimes these requests came also from Italian people, as in the case of Shang Gane Shing who had a large leather workshop giving work to about fifty Italians.

There is still limited knowledge about the history and the stories of these first Chinese immigrants in Italy and their traumatic experience in concentration camps (Kwok 1984, 2018; Heams-Ogus 2011; Brigadoi Cologna 2019). However, a few personal histories can shed light on a broader phenomenon which still needs to be uncovered. The story of Shang Gane Shing is an interesting example: he was arrested in Bologna on 30 November 1941 and was sent to Ferramonti, one of the worst concentration camps located in a malarial area, where he contracted malaria. He had several other chronic diseases including hepatitis, gastritis and tuberculosis. His friends, relatives and Italian workers, and also the *curia*, repeatedly applied for the revocation of his internment, but this was never granted. In April 1943, because of his poor health, he was moved to confinement in Atri, a town in the province of Teramo, where he met the Italian Gina who became his wife only in September 1945. In February 1944 he had been captured by the German command and transferred to the Teramo concentration camp to work on the entrenchment of the Gustav line. Two months later he was admitted to the hospital of Teramo for tuberculosis and only after his recovery he could finally return to Bologna (Brigadoi Cologna 2019; Rocchi and Demonte 2017). Many other Chinese fell ill and sometimes died in concentration camps. Only twenty-eight obtained the revocation of their internment (Brigadoi Cologna 2019, 108).

At the end of the war, most Chinese returned to China (sometimes with their Italian wives) and only about one hundred remained in Italy. The latter included more than fifty Chinese men married with Italian women and nearly all the entrepreneurs that had established their businesses in the production and commercialization of leather goods (Brigadoi Cologna 2019). Most of them were based in Milan and in Bologna, and some were already successful enterprises, for example Scicen founded by Hu Suzan. This was one of the oldest and best-known Chinese firms employing dozens of Italian and Chinese workers (Rocchi and Demonte 2017).

The 1951 census counted 271 Chinese citizens in Italy. About eighty of them were married to Italian women and the rest of the group was mostly composed of their Italian wives and children who were considered Chinese because of the Italian citizenship law. Indeed, law 555/1912 stated that Italian women marrying foreign citizens would lose Italian citizenship and acquire that of their husband, and that children could only have their father's citizenship. This law was then abrogated in 1975 for the section on women (law n. 151 of 1975) and in 1983 for that on children (law n. 123 of 1983). Several Zhejanese men married women from the region of Abruzzo that they had met during their confinement and, after the war, they moved together to Milan, Bologna or other cities. A few remained in that area where there are still some mixed families of descendants of the Chinese who had been imprisoned in the concentration camps (Kwok 2018).

In 1975 there were only 402 Chinese in Italy (Carchedi and Ferri 1998, 264), all natives of the same villages in Zhejiang (or in Italy) and mostly concentrated in Milan, Turin, Bologna, Florence and Rome. Until the 1980s, the Chinese population in Italy increased very slowly and it was largely made up of mixed Italian-Chinese families. Most children of the first Chinese immigrants married Italians, new arrivals were limited and included only relatives and friends of the first immigrants. In the 1980s, when migrations from China increased, their number started to grow rapidly in Italy and in the rest of Europe. Italy's immigration amnesties[7] and the availability of employment for unskilled people attracted migrants from China and from several European countries.

In 1987, after the first amnesty, Chinese in Italy were 5,382 and, after the second amnesty in 1990, their number had grown exponentially to 18,665 (Brigadoi Cologna 2019, 165). Together with the Zhejianese, who are still in a large majority, the Fujianese started to arrive in the late 1980s and the Manchurians in the 1990s (Ceccagno 2003, 46–47). At the beginning of the new millennium Italy was estimated to be the European country with the highest number of Chinese citizens, with about 50,000 people (Laczko 2003).

[7] The first amnesty was in 1986 (L. 943/86), several others followed until 2012: L 39/90, DL 489/95, L 40/98, L 189/2002, L 102/2009, DL 109/2012. While rules were quite strict for regular immigration, these amnesties allowed many immigrants already living in Italy or moving from other countries to obtain a permit to stay.

The Chinese initially contributed locally to the Italian economy with their first enterprises in a few Italian cities (such as Milan, Bologna, Rome) and from the 1980s also on a national scale, with a rapidly growing number of enterprises spread all over the country. The Italian production system, characterized by the presence of numerous industrial districts, offered them the opportunity to rapidly start small family-run workshops requiring minimal investment and limited professional skills. They worked as subcontractors for Italian firms that dictated their work schedule and productive modalities, with the orders often due the following morning. During the 1980s and the 1990s, the number of Chinese workshops (mostly in the garment and leather sectors) rapidly multiplied and spread out in several Italian districts allowing Italian firms to delocalize their production. At the same time the initial expansion of the catering sector promoted the geographical dispersion of Chinese migrants within Italy. During this period, Chinese firms remained concentrated in manufacturing, where most immigrants worked in highly demanding working conditions that allowed limited interaction with the Italian population. Some hundreds of entrepreneurs established successful businesses, many others were just survival entrepreneurs.

In this period, the Chinese population in Italy started to become more heterogeneous and socially stratified. In the new century, the presence of descendants from this population group began to increase significantly and they helped develop business further, especially in commerce and services; these expanded rapidly, while manufacturing remained the main sector of activity only in the industrial districts where not all Chinese firms were subcontractors to Italian firms. Indeed, in the twenty-first century the contribution of Chinese to national entrepreneurship has partially lost its subordination to Italian firms, has become increasingly more dynamic and heterogeneous and has taken on an active role in promoting processes of social integration by hiring Italian employees and serving a multi-ethnic clientele with a large variety of products and services (Marsden 2015).

In this context, associations of second-generation Chinese that demanded their rights and their belonging to Italy started to appear in 2005 and have significantly contributed to the public debate and to a general demand for social inclusion. Several Chinese descendants from an emerging middle class have become successful professionals (lawyers, university professors, artists, etc.) and have started to play an active role in promoting processes of social integration between the Italian and Chinese populations, and in the development of economic relationships between

Italy and China. Nevertheless, the Chinese are still considered foreigners and, over time, they have been subjected to various forms of discrimination and attacks. Their ethnic identity has been emphasized by Italian society and sometimes their businesses have been criminalized, thus transforming Chinese residents into an internal enemy. It is to these questions that I now turn.

Italian Perception of Chinese Residents: Ethnicization and Stereotypes

Racism against the Chinese has a long history in western culture that started with the creation of the "yellow race" in the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that all travellers who were in China between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries described the Chinese as "white-skinned" and quite similar to Europeans, the Chinese were transformed into yellow with the European assumption of whiteness as a symbol of supremacy to legitimate European expansionism (Demel 2011). In the classification of races by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, they were unified with the Mongols creating the yellow-skinned Mongolian race. The yellowness of the Chinese remained in all the following race classifications that assigned to the "yellow race" an intermediate position in the racial hierarchy dominated by the whites with the blacks at the lowest level. The choice of this colour, whose symbolism in European culture is associated with ambivalence, reflected, as Demel (2011) observes, the western ambivalent image of China whose past greatness could not be denied, and strongly contrasted with the negative image of China elaborated during the eighteenth century. With the spread of racial theories, the negative characteristics attributed to the Chinese multiplied. Christian missionaries described them as savages, depraved and even devoted to human sacrifices (Giovannini 2011) and western medicine strengthened the racialization of the Mongolian race. The Down syndrome was originally named "mongolism" and Down people were considered similar (and somehow even linked) to Mongols, listing in the supposed similarities the Mongolian eye considered a hereditary *defect* and a sign of *arrested development* of the race in the progress of human evolution (Keevak 2011, 101–123). The negative stereotypes of China were first extended to its inhabitants and were later further extended to Chinese migrants in western countries in the second half of the nineteenth century. The stereotypes of Chinese

culture as mysterious and esoteric and Chinese immigrants as perpetual strangers, willing to self-isolate in dangerous Chinatowns, that had spread in the USA at that time, have since largely spread also in other countries including Italy.

Breveglieri and Farina (1997) analysed the articles published in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* from 1920 to 1995 on this question. During the early years, articles that dealt with China and Chinese men used the categories of the exotic and they were portrayed as having "the soul of a child even in adulthood" and unable to pronounce the letter "r". In 1938, the newspaper published the first articles about Chinese residents in Milan. Despite positive description of the Chinese as respectful of the laws and as willing to integrate into the city, the articles condemned mixed marriage as deplorable, stating that "children of mixed blood—and badly mixed—as in this case in Milan should no longer be born". In the early 1940s the articles focused on Chinese peddlers, often described with derision and labelled "yellow faces".

This racial language continued to be used also after the Second World War, as Brigadoi Cologna (2019) shows in two examples taken from two other articles: published in *L'Unità* on 4 July 1945, the first was entitled *Quartiere cinese* (Chinese Neighbourhood) and it depicted the residents of the neighbourhood as "small Chinese", as exploiters of Italian workers and war hoarders (as Italy paid war damages to the interned Chinese) (Brigadoi Cologna 2019, 88). The second article, a decade later, was entitled *La China-Town di Porta Tenaglia ha perso il colore e il fascino dell'Oriente* (The Chinatown of Porta Tenaglia has lost the colour and charm of the Orient) and was published in the *Corriere della Sera* on 30 August 1956. It described the Chinese in Milan as "yellow guests who are reduced to about eighty, have mostly married Italian women and smilingly say 'We are all Milanese'." (Brigadoi Cologna 2019, 160). The two articles present different images of Chinese residents, but both emphasize their Otherness through descriptions that use racial categories and the use of the term "Chinatown" (or Chinese neighbourhood). The latter suggests the idea of a majority of Chinese population on the territory, which definitely contrasts with the small number of Chinese living in Italy at that time and their mixed Italian-Chinese families.

Since the 1950s the stress on *racial* diversity has never disappeared from the Italian media. Terms like *yellow* and *almond eyes* are still common in the press and can be found also in articles proposing an inclusive approach towards Chinese immigrants. This racial description is even

extended to Chinese enterprises frequently mentioned as "almond eyes enterprises".[8] The term *Chinatown* is also largely used by the media generally to emphasize, and often contest, the presence of a high number of Chinese people and businesses in a certain territory (Marsden 1997; Mirante 2008). However, these two racist terms are used with different and contrasting implications: *almond eyes* is often used as it were a neutral term and can be found even in articles focused on the integration skills of Chinese descendants, while the expression *Chinatown* seems to be mostly used with a clear negative meaning and is often associated with crime, mafia, urban decay and a general portrayal of Chinese as threatening and invading aliens. As we shall see below, and, following the increasing number of migrants and the first protests of Italian citizens against them, numerous articles that described Chinese migrants in the Italian press in the late 1980s took on this racist repertoire of images and stereotypes. Florence and the Florentine area represented an important case study.

Anti-Chinese Protests and Exclusionary Policies

The arrival of numerous migrants in the Florentine area was perceived with great alarm and described in the media as a sudden *invasion* that did not have any previous history of immigration. Large anti-Chinese protests rapidly appeared in Florence and in the nearby San Donnino-Campi Bisenzio industrial district, where, since the mid-1980s, many leather workshops of Chinese workers subcontracted for Italian firms. It was on the occasion of these protests that the Northern League, invited by local Italian popular committees created to contrast the Chinese presence, launched its activity in Tuscany in 1990. Anti-Chinese protests multiplied and were largely publicized in the media with great alarm about what was sometimes called the "Chinese bomb".[9] In Florence, several Chinese workshops located on the ground floor of residential buildings were evicted in February 1991 in response to protests of Italian residents who complained about the noise of the workshops and the Chinese presence. The municipality of Florence had sent technicians in to conduct several

[8] *Italia, è boom di imprese "con gli occhi a mandorla"*, "Il Vostro Giornale", IVG 3 April 2010, https://www.ivg.it/2010/04/italia-e-boom-di-imprese-con-gli-occhi-a-mandorla/, accessed 20 January 2021.

[9] 1990. *Via della Saggina assedia il palazzo. Esplode la bomba cinese*, "La Repubblica", 20 November.

checks on the working conditions and while it emerged that the noise could be eliminated with simple technical measures, the overall fitness for habitation of the buildings themselves remained problematic, due to defective construction. Ultimately, in contrast to these results and the technicians' opinion, the municipality of Florence evicted the Chinese and, without doing any work in the buildings, declared them habitable. As a journalist noted at the time, Florence was thus the first Italian city to evict the Chinese.[10] After this event anti-Chinese protests increased in San Donnino: the Chinese population was often victim of beatings (which sometimes led to their hospitalization[11]), some of the windows of their workshops were stoned, Italian landlords who rented to Chinese were threatened[12] and their names posted on the town walls as a means to put pressure on them to evict the Chinese. The local municipality worked in strict cooperation with the Italian anti-Chinese committee and the parish church to reduce the number of Chinese living in the area and transform their presence in a national problem with a large anti-Chinese campaign. San Donnino, often renamed by Italian residents and the media as "San Peking", became nationally the Chinatown of Italy, and discriminatory and repressive measures were taken in agreement with the national government against the local Chinese (Marsden 1994).

Following these events, many Chinese moved to nearby cities or other Italian regions; San Donnino stopped being on the front page of newspapers as the "Chinatown of Italy", but anti-Chinese stereotypes were strengthened in public opinion. The concentration of Chinese businesses in manufacturing and the hard-working conditions of immigrants were largely the result of how industrial districts were organised; nevertheless, many Italians saw in it a consequence of Chinese features, evidence of unfair competition and willingness to self-isolate. The Italian model of "subaltern integration" that identified migrants as poor and unskilled workers employed by Italians contrasted with the entrepreneurial attitude of many Chinese migrants; the old stereotypes developed in the late nineteenth century, that posited Chinese as alien, dangerous and impossible to assimilate became dominant in the early 1990s. From 1990 to 1992 Italian

[10] 1991. Antonio Maida, *E Morales chiude i laboratori cinesi. Troppo rumore, scatta l'ordinanza*, "La Repubblica", 21 February.

[11] 1991.Bultrini, *Giallo sull'Arno*, "Il Venerdì di Repubblica", 20 September 1991.

[12] 1991. Zambelli, *Ruspe a Chinatown/I comitati: "C'è una mafia dietro quei poveretti"*, "La Repubblica", 20 September.

media continuously publicized the image of a dangerous Chinatown dominated by the "yellow mafia",[13] a representation which impacted strongly on public opinion, and this type of image has never disappeared.

Protests against the Chinese population (although less violent than those described above) and the adoption of discriminatory practices against their enterprises (extensive controls on their workshops, limits to their commercial activities in areas with a high concentration of Chinese enterprises) took place over time in several geographical areas. In Rome, the municipality introduced limits to the goods most marketed by the Chinese (Lucchini 2008), while in Milan access to the commercial area and the time for loading/unloading of goods in Milan was restricted (Cologna 2008). Particularly significant was what happened in the Prato textile industrial district because the local policies towards the Chinese population moved here from an inclusive to an exclusionary approach after that Chinese businesses passed from a subaltern to an independent role in the local entrepreneurship.

Chinese immigrants started to arrive in Prato in 1990 and for over a decade they worked as subcontractors to Italian firms in the garment industry. In this subordinate role they were considered an important resource for the local economy, and the municipality of Prato was an example of good practice for its integration policies. In the early 2000s some hundreds of Chinese entrepreneurs took over the entire cycle of production (while Chinese businesses also expanded to commerce and services). They enriched the local economy transforming Prato into a fast-fashion district serving a large European market, while the textile industry managed by Italians was facing an increasing crisis with a strong impact on the local economy. Chinese manufacturers started then to be seen by Italian industrialists and politicians as a threatening "parallel district" and, within a few years, the Chinese in Prato were transformed into the "perfect enemy" (Bracci 2015). The Chinese presence was described as a "siege" in a book sponsored by the Industrialists Association (Pieraccini 2008) where Chinese firms were accused of representing a huge pocket of illegality threatening Italian manufacturing. The municipality of Prato changed its approach towards migrants and its hard-handed attitude

[13] 1991. Montanari, *Paura e silenzio a Chinatown. Dalla Francia gli uomini della "mafia gialla"*, "La Repubblica", 13 November.

further increased under the first right-wing administration (2009–2014) which also led to frequent and often violent raids against Chinese firms (Krause and Bressan 2017; Ceccagno 2017; Marsden 2019). In part, these policies were changed with the return of a left-wing government, but the strong anti-Chinese campaign of those years strengthened the stereotype of Chinese supposed introversion and irreducible Otherness, spread also on a national level through the publication of some literature that presented the Chinese in Italy as criminals, or as victims of Chinese criminals (Saviano 2006; Pincio 2008). Paradoxically, the stereotype of the Chinese introversion was reinforced in Italian society just when the development of Chinese businesses in new sectors of activity was growing, leading to an increase in the interactions between Italians and Chinese and to demands for social inclusion from the Chinese population, particularly from second-generation Chinese.

Second-Generation Chinese and the Initial Determinants of an Italian-Chinese Identity

At the beginning of the new century, many children of Chinese migrants who had arrived in the 1980s and the 1990s had become adults and started to question their ethnic identity and to claim their belonging to Italy. The richest Chinese families had invested in their children's education and the presence of second-generation Chinese students in universities had started to increase together with their professional aspirations outside Chinese entrepreneurship. In 2005 a group of wealthy and well-educated second-generation Chinese living in Milan, Prato, Florence, Rome and Naples, together with some second-generation Chileans and Ecuadorians and some Italians, founded Associna, the first association and website in Italy for second-generation Chinese (and, originally, also others).[14]

These Chinese youths originally focused their identity search on their feeling of belonging to Italy and on their denied Italian identity in mainstream society, claiming to be recognized as national citizens. Nevertheless, in their interaction with Italian society, they were pushed toward their Chinese roots, and it was only by partially assuming their ancestral identity that they could find a (limited) space in Italian society. Processes of ethnic

[14] www.associna.com, accessed 2 February 2021.

identification are constrained by the system of racial stratification and societal stereotypes imposed upon migrants and their offspring. Refused as Italians and labelled as Chinese in mainstream society, the youths of Associna used Chineseness as a means to be (partially) accepted in Italian society and created a new hyphenated identity as Italian-Chinese. In 2005 they presented Associna at a public conference in Rome, stressing the multi-ethnic composition of the group and their communal national belonging; in that context, as one of the speakers said, being Chinese was described as a purely physical attribute: "We appear Chinese, but we speak Italian, we have an Italian life style, we are Italians".[15] They introduced themselves on the website as "a group of young people of Chinese and other origins"[16] and stressed their integration in Italian society, strongly distinguishing themselves from first-generation Chinese. Soon Associna took on an important role in public debate, asking that the rights of children of the second generation of migrants be recognized, and that they be allowed access to Italian citizenship. Associna acted on a national scale, and a large movement asking for a new citizenship law took shape, while they also established cooperation with numerous regional and municipal government bodies and Italian associations.[17]

Italian institutions did not consider the youths of Associna as Italians with a different ethnic background, as they claimed to be, but as a reference point for the whole Chinese population in Italy; thus they introduced a distinction between a larger Chinese majority that was still considered difficult to integrate and this small group of Chinese descendants who could be promoted to a partial inclusion in Italian society, almost as mediators between "Italian insiders" and "Chinese outsiders", but not yet ready to be identified as national citizens. After more than fifteen years, a change in the law that would allow the recognition of Italian citizenship to the children of migrants is yet to come, despite several proposals and a final bill pending in parliament since 2015.

Facilitating communication and relationships between Italian and Chinese was one of the initial aims of Associna; this was part of a general demand for social inclusion that has remained largely unsatisfied, as Junyi Bai (president of Associna from 2005 to 2015) commented in 2011:

[15] Data collected by the author attending the conference in Rome on 24 October 2005.

[16] As available on the original website of Associna upon its launch, accessed 27 October 2005 and no longer available after its restyling.

[17] https://www.associna.com/it/cosa-facciamo/, accessed 5 March 2021.

> We have not seen significant changes in these years of activity. From politics to society, from the way of communicating on the issues related to immigration to the simple and daily "good neighbourhood relations", the situation sometimes seems even worse.[18]

The increasing anti-Chinese campaigns in Italy and the progressive emergence of China as a new superpower contributed to moving the youths of Associna towards their Chinese roots, and they gradually moved from an Italian to an Italian-Chinese identity. Their search for professional success outside Chinese entrepreneurship was extended from Italy to China; if at the beginning they looked for examples of successful Italian-born Chinese to identify with, and searched for professional success in Italy, later they started to look also for new opportunities in China.

In 2006 they published on their website the story of a second-generation Chinese: Mario Tchou, a computer genius who had an important role in the Italian company Olivetti and who had died in 1961 (Giochidiparole 2006). Three years later they collected twelve successful stories of contemporary second-generation Chinese living in several Italian cities and towns (Genoa, Naples, Rome, Padua, Bologna, Ancona, Campi Bisenzio) who were doing a variety of jobs (including artists, doctors and physiotherapists, bank employees) and published them in the calendar of Associna. Shortly after, they started to promote active policies to look for a career in Italy or in China (where many of them moved to work in Italian or Chinese companies or to start-up a business). In 2011, together with the Italy-China Foundation, they organized in Milan the first Italy-China career day, a job fair that later became an annual event.

In about five years, Associna significantly changed and extended its role in the transnational space. This change was evident looking at its website in 2011: it had become bilingual with discussion forums in Italian and Chinese; it included Shanghai in the list of the association's points of contact, and it published many more articles about Chinese in China than before. The presentation of Associna was transformed into "the first and main association for second generation Italo-Chinese people." During this period the composition of the association also changed: children from different ethnic backgrounds moved to other associations (that Associna

[18] Bai Junyi, *Sognatori diurni, crescere in tempo di crisi (di crisi sociale)*, Associna 2011, https://www.associna.com/it/2011/11/15/sognatori-diurni-crescere-in-tempi-di-crisi-di-crisi-sociale/, accessed 5 March 2021.

helped create), some Italians remained, but their presence was no longer mentioned, and a few older Chinese with brilliant careers, like Marco Wong (a successful manager who was contacted by Associna in 2007 and became its honorary president), joined the group. In the following years, Associna further developed, and the role of mediating between Italian and Chinese society mostly focused on the new business opportunities offered by China's new economic centrality in the world. In this new context, the group narrowed down its social commitment and took on an increasing role as business promoter with China. From 2013, discussions on identity and social issues were drastically reduced on the website, all discussion forums were closed and more space was given to job advertisements. In 2014 Associna began to concentrate its activity on promoting business with China through several initiatives organized together with numerous Italian and Chinese universities. This new phase started with the creation of Associna Business School (ABS),[19] a consulting company that carries on professional and managerial training for other companies, organizing workshops on cultural and linguistic mediation, and doing consultancy for intercultural marketing. Its first initiative was the training course "Doing Business with the Chinese: Cultural Contexts, Tools and Business Cases" organized in 2015 in collaboration with the Rome International Studies University (where Junyi Bai is the first Chinese teaching Chinese Commercial Law in an Italian university).

In 2016, according to this new role, Associna significantly entitled its national conference "Italy-China Business: The Age of Second Generation". The conference was attended by important Chinese companies (such as the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China in Italy) and successful second-generation Chinese employees, who were working in large Italian or Chinese firms. Since then Associna has organized various initiatives to facilitate business relationships between Italy and China: these included workshops on the internationalization of business tools and e-commerce[20] and a cooperation with TOChina[21] for the yearly ChinaMed Business Program (a summer school on international management at Peking University).

Since the creation of Associna many other associations of second-generation Chinese have appeared in Italy and several of them play a similar role of business promoter with China and act in a transnational space.

[19] https://www.facebook.com/AssocinaBusinessSchool/, accessed 7 March 2021

[20] Organized in Rome by ABS, respectively, on 13 November 2017 and 14 May 2018.

[21] https://www.tochina.it/, accessed 7 March 2021.

These associations have gradually established closer relationships with the traditional Chinese associations of the older migrants and, in recent years, they have been formally recognized by the Chinese government that tries to strengthen the connection with overseas Chinese, particularly in a country like Italy where Chinese are numerous and where most of them still have Chinese citizenship.

The Increasing Activism of the Italian-Chinese Community and the Responses of Italian Society

The presence of an Italian-Chinese community in Italy has become more evident through the development of their innovative enterprises and the public role that some second-generation Chinese have taken up with their associations and as university professors, journalists, artists and other professions. Since the late 2000s, a body of Italian-Chinese literature has appeared with the publication of several books authored by Chinese migrants and their descendants (Hu 2012; Wong 2011). This body of literature has also spread into Italian-Chinese magazines (such as *Cina in Italia*) and social networks. Central in many of these works is the author's biographical experience (Pedone 2014) that sometimes also extends to that of their ancestors in Italy, as in two graphic novels by Cjai Rocchi and Matteo Demonte. The first, *Primavere e autunni* (Springs and Autumns), published in 2015, narrates the story of Wu Lishan, Matteo's grandfather, one of the first Chinese immigrants in Italy. He arrived in Milan in the 1930s, married Giulia Bazzini, an Italian seamstress immigrated from the countryside, and established one of the first Chinese enterprises in Italy. The second, *Chinamen* (2017), extends the story to that of the Chinese population in Italy. The two books show how the search for Chinese roots partially looks to Italy and to the long history of the Chinese population there, a history that is still little known and waits to be fully recognized as a legitimate part of Italian history.

A minority of this population are already Italian citizens and their number has slowly but significantly increased over time, mainly due to the acquisition of Italian citizenship by second-generation Chinese.[22] Some of

[22] Chinese residents who acquired Italian citizenship were 754 in 2012, 1896 in 2015, 1864 in 2016, 1583 in 2017. Ministero Lavoro e Politiche Sociali 2016, 2017, 2018. About 1,100 second-generation Chinese have acquired Italian citizenship every year between 2015 and 2017, in ibidem.

them have also started to be politically active and run for local elections. In 2013, the first Italian of Chinese origin, Angelo Hu, was elected in the municipal council of Campi Bisenzio. He was later re-elected and still holds this position at the time of writing, while in 2019 two other Italian-Chinese, Marco Wong and Teresa Lin, were elected in Prato. Their presence, although numerically very modest, is another sign of the increasing activism of the Italian-Chinese group, which also helps question the stereotype that portrays the Chinese community as closed. The latter idea is still largely widespread in Italy, although a distinction between first- and second-generation Chinese (with a limited acceptance of the latter) has emerged in public opinion; on the other hand a new stereotype has appeared in recent years, that of the Chinese as a model minority.

Since 2015, as noticed by Brigadoi Cologna (2018), articles published in two right-wing newspapers (*Libero* and *Il Giornale*) presented the Chinese population in Italy as an example of successful integration in opposition to other groups of migrants described as "people who steal, peddle drugs, live thorough gimmicks and pose a threat to the community". In this hierarchy (that reminds us of the old racial hierarchy with the *yellow race* in an intermediate position) the Chinese were promoted to model minority with the motivation that "they are silent, work hard without complaining, and do not commit crime". In this view the supposed "silence" of the Chinese population appears a positive behaviour as "they stay in their place and do not disturb". In this representation, emphasis is placed on the separation between Italian "insiders" and foreign "outsiders", and "integration" is conceived as acceptance of a subordinate position by the latter.

Furthermore, the emergence of China as a world power has reinforced Sinophobia in Italy and in many other countries. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the racialization of the illness as a *Chinese virus*, initially witnessed a new spread of Sinophobia in many countries. Chinese migrants and their descendants in Italy were first identified with the virus, and later on as a *model minority* due to their responsible behaviour in reaction to Covid-19. They self-isolated and closed their businesses several weeks before the lockdown imposed by the national authorities, reacted to Sinophobia with a large antiracism campaign that initially found relevant space in the Italian media, donated medical equipment to Italian hospitals and institutions and contributed to community building by distributing masks to their neighbours (Hu 2020). They have expressed themselves in a variety of forms including videos, articles, webinars and columns on

social networks and posters, performances and other forms of art in the Italian streets (Pedone 2020). Despite this activism, showing their willingness to overcome any division between "us" and "them", Chinese people have remained in Italian society as the Other, objects to be observed and not active subjects, therefore "silenced", as observed by Pedone (2020).

Conclusion

The history of Chinese ethnic community in Italy shows persistent racism against this group that has been an object of scholarly discussion only occasionally and in limited ways. Race studies, as Keevak (2011) denounces, have concentrated on the contraposition between blackness and whiteness paying little attention to the construction of the *yellow race*; even less attention has been paid to it by common people. Racism against the Chinese, whose otherness is constantly stressed by their racialised physical description, appears to be more widespread and tolerated by public opinion than against other ethnic groups. Racial thinking and historical prejudices against the Chinese have strongly characterized the history of Chinese community in Italy and a reflection about this is essential to build a more inclusive and democratic society.

The history of the Chinese population in Italy did not only begin one century ago, but it also started with mixed Italian-Chinese families. Despite the fact that these first Chinese immigrants were publicly rejected by Italian society, as citizens of an enemy country or as *yellow guests*, they were welcomed in Italian families; sometimes their Italian employees demanded their liberation from the concentration camps, and the Italian population of the villages where they were interned generally have a positive memory of them (Kwok 1984; Brigadoi Cologna 2019). Nevertheless their stories, so strongly contrasting with the stereotype of Chinese migrants as perpetual strangers, remained hidden for a long time and, after the first pioneering research of Kwok, only in the 2010s they started to be rediscovered also thanks to some Chinese descendants like Luna Cecilia Kwok, who republished and publicized her father's book, and Matteo Delmonte, a third-generation Chinese who studied Chinese in adult age and looked for his Italian-Chinese roots coming from his grandfather.

In the construction of their hyphenated identity, the Italian-Chinese have identified themselves as one hundred percent Italians and one hundred percent Chinese, but while their one hundred percent Chinese is strongly emphasized by China with its renewed nationalism that sees

overseas Chinese as part of its soft power in the world, their one hundred percent Italian is still denied in the society they live in. If, in the past, second-generation Chinese were pushed to making a transition from an Italian to an Italian-Chinese identity, a persistent refusal of their full inclusion in Italian society might prevent a process of national identification and lead to their alienation from Italian society.

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Islamophobia: Gender and Racialisation of Religion

Debora Spini

A ghost is haunting our public spaces, in Europe and beyond, and is that of a black-veiled woman. References to Muslim women are ubiquitous in the discourse of right-wing xenophobic, ethnocentric and populist political parties and movements; however, this obsession is by no means their sole province. On the contrary, the reference to the "Muslim woman" cuts across the political spectrum and becomes a term of reference also for the discourse of mainstream liberalism, not to mention the divisive role it plays within the feminist debates. The ghost image of the Muslim woman epitomises and reinforces the image of Islam as the "Other", the opposite of every foundational value of Western society. Such a mixture of hatred, fear and revulsion is now commonly indicated by the term Islamophobia.

Although Islamophobia belongs to the host of "neo" racism, the hostility toward Islam has deep-set roots in Western culture, stemming from the centuries-old perception of Muslims as the enemy. More recently, this

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attitude has been reshaped in new terms, as first highlighted by Fanon, by the converging forces of colonialism and racism, as well as by the distorting glance of Orientalism (Massari 2006). At any rate, the term has been introduced in the common use by the Runnymede Report of 1997 that defined it as "unfounded hostility towards Islam and therefore fear or dislike of all or most/ Muslims" (Runnymede Trust 1997: 4). The political climate that ensued September 11 brought Islamophobia at the forefront of attention at a global level as the discourse of the clash of civilisation became increasingly popular. In more recent years, ethno-centrist right-wing populist movements and parties thrived off the fear of the Islamic invasion.

Yet, the very term of Islamophobia is far from being undisputed, and it has sometimes been criticised as way too ambiguous. However, appropriateness of definition and terminological precision are not the only matters at stake, as lively debates have developed on more substantial aspects, such as enduring reluctance to consider Islamophobia as a form of racism (Meer and Modood 2009). Others expressed their concern that it may become a tool to stifle any critique to Islam, as though there was no alternative between Islamophobia and extreme relativism: This is the case, for example, of the Appeal of 2006 *Together Facing the New Totalitarianism* (Hirsi Ali et al. 2006).

This chapter will begin by situating Islamophobia as a kind of cultural racism and will provide a few elements on how religion becomes the target of processes of racialisation before addressing more in depth the significance of the reference to gender in Islamophobic discourse. The chapter will look at the Islamophobic glance on women as a showcase of the difficulty of Western democratic public spaces to live up to their claim of ensuring the inclusion of difference and the realisation of individual autonomy. Women undergo a specific process of racialisation, which shows how much the universalistic conception of citizenship is in fact rooted in ethnicity and gender, and leads to revisit some crucial dimensions of modernity's self-understanding, such as secularisation and secularism.

New Grounds of Racialisation: Conflations of Culture

The question whether Islamophobia may be considered the result of a process of racialisation of religion makes it necessary to clarify the meaning of this lemma. One of the most common definitions describes racialisation as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (Lauwers 2019; Modood 2020; Omi and Winant 2014: 111; Gonzales Sobrino 2019). "The concept of racialization suggests that the object of study should not be 'race' itself, but the process by which it becomes meaningful in a particular context. Racialisation has now become one of the key ways that academics use to make sense of the 'meanings of race'" (Garner 2013: 19).

Race has been defined according to a wide range of criteria; evidently, adopting the category of racialisation as a heuristic tool implies the conceptualisation of race as a social construct.[1] Racialisation thus emerges as the typical *modus operandi* of a new model of racism, whereby "culture" has replaced biology as the privileged justification for discrimination, hatred and eventually violence. Étienne Balibar and Pierre Taguyeff were among the first to detect the rise of this new trend in the context of the 1990s French debate concerning immigration, which they defined as differentialist or neo-racist. Balibar and Taguyeff highlighted how this New Model Racism appropriated the lesson of cultural anthropology, swiftly transforming the recognition of cultural differences from a tool to combat colonial epistemic hierarchies into a reason to segregate, in the name of "the right to be different" (Taguyeff 1990).[2]

Evidently, this form of racism needs to conceptualise culture as a monolith, ahistorical, unchangeable and fixed. Cultural difference, as Balibar showed, has to be naturalised:

> What we see here is that biological or genetic naturalism is not the only means of naturalizing human behaviour and social affinities. At the cost of abandoning the hierarchical model (though the abandonment is more apparent than real, as we shall see), *culture can also function like a nature*, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a

[1] This is the core contribution of Critical Race Theory. For an introduction to CRT, see Delgado and Stefancic 1995.

[2] Ironically, Taguyeff is now one of the strongest opponents of the decolonial perspective, which he has stygmatised as "imposture" (Taguyeff 2020).

priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin. (Balibar 1991, emphasis original)

This "faulty epistemology", based upon the uncritical assumption of a "reductionist sociology" (Benhabib 2002: 4), fosters a vision of culture characterised by the same potential to "freeze difference possessed by concepts as race" (Abu-Lughod 1996: 140).

Evidently, the French *droite* is not the only context where the recognition of cultural differences undergoes a similar process of heterogenesis of purposes. Islamophobic themes and vocabulary are in fact common to very diverse political positions, from right-wing populist to liberals, as it will be further discussed below. On the contrary, "culture" is more and more often invoked as the ground for political conflicts, thus hiding from view other lines of tension, as in the context of global capitalism, identity politics may set in motion the double mechanism identified by Frazer as reification and displacement. On the one hand, displacement occurs when "questions of recognition are serving less to supplement, complicate and enrich redistributive struggles than to marginalize, eclipse and displace them". On the other hand, identity politics end up by forsaking their roots in an inter-subjective conception of the self to promote a reification of identity which imposes "a single, drastically simplified group-identity which denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations" (Frazer 2000). In this perspective, the series of "conflations and slides", as per Wendy Brown's definition, taking place among practices otherwise distinct are not simply due to an epistemological weakness but are the result of political choices. In fact, they are "the symptoms of a culturalization of politics", that "analytically vanquishes political economy, states, history, and international and transnational relations. It eliminates colonialism, capital, caste or class stratification, and external political domination from accounts of political conflict or instability" (Brown 2006: 20).

Brown and Frazer, moving from distinctive itineraries, find a common ground in reminding how important an intersectional perspective is when discussing identity politics; a *memento* whose relevance is particularly evident in the case of Islamophobia and its connection with gender. Furthermore, they both highlight how mechanisms of reification of culture do not only pave the way for exclusionist ideologies, but are also the breeding ground for communitarian and "multiculturalist" approaches which, although prima facie antithetic, yet are equally reductionist. In fact,

both contribute to a kind of zero-sum vision of “group vs. individuals”, as they ignore the internal pluralism present within individual cultures, and deny the capacity for adaptation and self-transformation of “cultures”, thus ruling out the possibility of individual autonomous agency within them.

Religion and Culture in the Construction of Islamophobia

In light of the above, Islamophobia appears as a form of cultural racism, or, in other words, the result of processes of racialisation whereby a group is defined by a series of characteristics, conceived as immutable and universal. In this case, the key criterion used to identify the racialised group is religion.[3] In spite of that, Islamophobia does not always admittedly manifest itself as a form of religious hatred.[4] Whilst this can be the case in some contexts—to make but two examples, the outburst of violence in the name of Hindutva, or the Bosnian genocide—as far as the Western world is concerned, the role of religion in the racialisation of Muslims is far more complex.

Islamophobic discourse in fact oscillates between the straightforward references to religion as a source of identity and a more sophisticated version which identifies the Western world with the values of individual freedom and toleration. Islam, on the contrary, is represented as incompatible with these values, and more specifically incapable of respecting the borders that in Western societies separate religion and politics and public and private. Both versions rest, although in very different measure, on an oversimplified view of Islam (Hashemi 2011), and on a dualist representation of the Muslim World as the antithesis of the West; both ignore the theological richness of Islamic traditions, practices and scholarship, as well as the existence of Western Islam, in the American continent as well as in Europe.[5] In its first version, typical of right-wing political forces, the reference to the Christian roots of Western civilisation plays a paramount role: a paradigmatic example being the recent declarations jointly issued by Orbán, Morawiecki and Salvini on the future “European Renaissance”

[3] Islamophobia has been defined also as religious racism: see at least Iqbal 2020.

[4] For a concise but exhaustive discussion of religious hatred, see Corrigan 2007.

[5] Whether European Islam possesses a theological distinctiveness is the subject of a growing debate. See Hashas 2018.

(Euractive 2021). Salvini's shows of devotion to the rosary or the Virgin's heart, or Giorgia Meloni's proud for being white and Christian are quite evident examples of the first kind of Islamophobic discourse. In this perspective, the exclusion of Muslims from Western societies is grounded on their religious identity as such.

The second stream of Islamophobic discourse instead is more complex, as it justifies the exclusion of Muslims in the name of the vary values of freedom and tolerance, indicated as cornerstones of Western civilization, by stating the incompatibility between Islam and secularisation and secularism. In some cases, this specific form of Islamophobia deploys a sort of mild paternalism. Muslims in Western contexts (and especially in Europe) are requested to "reform" their system of beliefs, so as to prove their being compatible with the principles of liberal democracy, the most recent example being President Macron's appeal for a reform of French Islam. The praise and support towards "moderate" Islam expressed by the most enlightened, progressive and open-minded milieus in Western countries, although accompanied by the best of intentions, still reveals a deep-set suspicion of Islam. "Muslimness" appears as a sort of bad habit, tolerable insofar as it remains contained: the "good" Muslim is the one that is, at the end of the day, more similar to "us", whose difference is attenuated (Shryock 2010: 11). In most occasions this second kind of Islamophobic discourse appears in the most distinctive and belligerent version, that of the apocalyptic expectations of the Islamisation of the Western world and the advent of Eurabia (Fallaci 2001).

In either form, this Islamophobic glance tackles a wider range of sources, going beyond the obvious reference to the Myth of the clash of civilisation (Bottici and Challand 2010) to include the much deeper, and relevant, conversation concerning the origins of secularisation and secularism. Although it would be impossible to properly do justice to this debate, which occupies such a prominent place in social theory and social sciences, it is necessary to mention a few lines of development to illustrate how it has been used to reinforce mechanisms reification and naturalisation of religion.[6] First of all, secularisation and secularism are not

[6] These comments should not be read as establishing any sort of direct connection between secularism and cultural racism. The point is to appreciate how the oversimplification of secularisation and secularism fit with the mechanisms of reification and naturalisation of culture at work in the racialisation process, and how secularisation and secularism may be used to affirm the superiority of an enlightened, modern and progressive West as opposed to an

equivalent: whilst the scope of the first term is essentially diagnostic, the latter indicates instead a full-fledged political project. Furthermore, each of them covers quite distinct semantic fields. The view of secularisation invoked in anti-Muslim discourses focuses exclusively on one among the many possible accounts: a sort of *vulgata* of the Weberian heritage which describes secularisation as a univocal and inevitable process of rationalisation and disenchantment moving from a centre (Europe/the West) and gradually extending to embrace a periphery (the rest of the globe). In this perspective, religious belief appears as a "left over" from the processes of modernisation, and as such incompatible with modernity, and in fact postcolonial and decolonial critique highlighted how this model of secularisation rests upon a chronological order separating social contexts "already" secularised from those "not yet" or "not enough" secularised, and therefore modernised (Nigham 2020). Another important aspect of the debate on secularisation concerns the profound debt of the notion of secularity with its Jewish-Christian theological categories (Gauchet 1997; Taylor 2008), which has become the ground for affirming Western uniqueness.[7] The Jewish Christian heritage is the focus of a somehow specular critique, concerning the viability of the "religion" itself. Talal Asad has opened the way to this debate affirming the need to conceptualise religion as the result of discursive practices rooted in specific political processes as well as in power relationships, instead of imposing a distorting universalism that "invites us to define religion (like any essence) as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon" (Asad 1993: 26). More specifically, Asad emphasised how the direct and unfiltered application of categories originated itself in the post-Reformation Western experience makes it particularly hard to understand the specificity of Islam (Asad 1993).[8] The critical perspective opened up by Assad has been adopted and radicalised by post- and decolonial scholars,[9] who have pushed it to the point of questioning the relevance of the notion of religion as part

obscurantist, superstitious and backward "other" in view of justifying discrimination and hatred.

[7] See at least Lilla 2007.

[8] Masuwaza points out how mainstream scholarship has preserved, rather than undermined, Western universalism, disguised under plurality of "World religions", by ignoring all practices, subjectivities and discourses that would not fit into the definition of "religion" (Masuwaza 2005).

[9] On the rapport between post- and decolonial scholarship v. Bhambra 2014.

and parcel of modern coloniality,[10] as well as exposing its role in the construction of race.

As mentioned before, these debates would deserve an otherwise accurate exam: however, two observations cannot be omitted. As far as diagnoses are concerned, the immediate identification of secularisation and Western society is not so unquestionable, as empirical observation reveals quite a diverse morphology. As it is well known, Europe seems to be more secularised than the United States: Europe itself features quite stark differences between countries which are in fact mostly secular and context where religious practice still plays a prominent role (Pew Research Centre 2005). The instrumental reference to Christian roots appears under a different light if confronted with this factual evidence. Even more importantly, "secularisation" has been associated to a wide range of definitions (Casanova 2013): this richness provides resources against the second kind of Islamophobic discourse, such as Charles Taylor's account of secularisation not as the simple fading away of religious belief as much as a transformation of its conditions resulting by the affirmation of an "immanence frame". In this perspective, individuals and groups would "become" religious, as a reflexive and autonomous choice (Taylor 2008). In this perspective, religious belief does not only adapt to but is intrinsic to modernity; religious practice is not incompatible with a democratic public space, on the contrary, it requires to be part of pluralist context.

Just as the diagnostic term of secularisation covers quite a wide range of possible interpretation, so does secularism. The secularist political project originates within the framework of the European historical experience. In its most ideal-typical version, that of French *laicité*, it originally aimed at securing a neutral political space, by firmly confining religious beliefs and practices to the private sphere: a choice dictated not only by the need of preventing religious identity from becoming a source of political conflict but also by the concern of avoiding discriminations among citizens. In spite of this original "inclusive" nature, the secularist project has revealed the potential to turn into a mechanism of exclusion of all those individuals or groups whose religious belief would not fit into the public/private dichotomy as articulated in a Western, or even more European, historical context (Young 1990). Secularism has also taken the form of a sort of ideology, which, declaring the superiority of rationalism over and above religious beliefs, branded as "superstition", reaffirmed a Eurocentric

[10] See, for example, N. Maldonado-Torres 2008and 2010.

colonial philosophy of history (Nandy 1988). However, just as in the case of secularisation, the uncritical identification with Western civilisation does not do justice to the plurality of the concrete historical incarnations of secularism. The European/Western version is only one among the possible secularist projects, as demonstrated, to make but one example by the Indian case (Bhargava 2014; Chandoke 1999). Even the Western world presents a diversity of solutions and adaptations, from French model of *laicité* to the Italian "laicità battezzata"[11] (Ferrari 2008).

The debate on secularisation and secularism appears to be particularly relevant when assessed in light with the actual morphology of the current global condition. Instead of disappearing or withdrawing in the invisibility of privacy, in a variety of contexts "religion" has come back to the forefront of domestic and international politics. Religious convictions motivate political agency in a variety of contexts: and in some cases, religious vocabulary and symbols are mobilised in view of political violence. These profound transformations prompted a reflection on the crisis of both secularisation and secularism as well as on the emergence of a post-secular paradigm (Casanova 2013). Evidently, the semantic diversity of both terms has a reflection on that of their "post". Whereas secularisation indicates exclusively the withering away of religion, post-secular may hardly mean anything else than the "return of religion"; Islam, in this case, appears as a harbinger of the *reconquista* of the public space by religion, as in the worse Eurabian scenarios. The lemma "post-secular" may instead describe the present condition as being already *irrevocably* transformed by secularisation, in turn understood as the transformation of the condition of belief. The lens of interpretation provided by Taylor permits to move beyond the verdict of incompatibility between Islam and political pluralism, thus refocusing many of the issues related to Muslim presence in the public space, to begin by the hasty association between dogmatic intensity and political radicalism.

[11] With this term, Alessandro Ferrari indicates a condition where the separation between State and Church continues to assign a primary role to one religious denomination, in the specific case of Italy the Roman Catholic Church.

Racialising Feminism

Alongside with secularisation, Islamophobic discourses have enlisted gender equality as well. Right-wing political actors have appropriate "feminist" issues for their sovranist, ethnocentric and populist agendas, including in some cases even LGBTQ+ rights. This appropriation strategy works so swiftly as many authoritative voices have identified gender and sexual liberty as exclusively Western values: Norris and Inglehart, to make but one example, pointed to a new clash of civilisation, which is "not about democracy [but] about sex", or at least "more about eros than demos" (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 64–65). Even sectors of mainstream egalitarian feminism have also been recruited among the uncritical defenders of Western civilisation,[12] a skilful move perfectly captured by Sarah Farris with the term femonationalism (Farris 2017). The result is a stark opposition between the West, home of individual judgement, autonomy, critique, and the non-West, completely enshrined and ossified within culture ("They" have cultural traditions; "I" have moral values" (Phillips 2007: 32), which in turn leads to a very expedient opposition between multiculturalism and feminism.[13] This identification of women's freedom with the Western world accurately hides from view a series of contradiction and conflicts. In spite of all femonationalist oversimplifications, women's membership in the exclusive club of democratic citizenship was not liberally granted, nor can it be considered as a *fait accompli*. This long story of course cannot be fully accounted for in these pages: however, even a cursory glance to some of its crucial phases may help to deconstruct the mechanisms of appropriation as well as to understand why the ghost of the Muslim woman can mobilise so many emotions, from fear to fascination to revulsion.

For a long time, women have been excluded from the magic circle of political autonomy because of their being "different" (Cavarero 1992; Pulcini 2003). Western modernity constructs women as the "Other" vis à vis the mainstream model of modern subject, characterised by the exercise of rationality and consequently of moral independence, the two capabilities considered the necessary safe-conduct to political autonomy. On the contrary, women are identified with emotions and sentiments, with vulnerability and dependence. The origin of that difference largely resides in

[12] For an account of debates on burka ban among French feminists, see Spohn 2013.

[13] An example being Susan Moller Okin's *Is Multiculturalism bad for women*? (Moller Okin 1999).

their body,[14] source of unruly passions and desires which make women substantially unfit to inhabit the public space. Admittance into the public sphere came as the result of a long series of struggles for inclusion and recognition, and at a price: the repudiation of all aspects that could differentiate the female subject from the male-centred model, to begin, not surprisingly, by all that is related to the dimension of corporeity. Throughout this journey, early Western feminists faced the challenge of demonstrating that women could be man's equal, which implied the refusal of all that had to do with corporeity, passions and emotions: the Orientalist representation of the "Mahometan" woman provided a useful tool to employ in this exhausting effort. The Other woman (Muslim and Oriental rolled into one), complacent prisoner of the Harem, appears as the epitome of sensuality, and constitutes a term of reference against whom white, bourgeois women construct their claims to be of capable of rational self-command. At the same time, she remains an unsettling and constant reminder of the condition of subjection and of male domination. "Feminist orientalism" as present in the writing of authors such as Brontë, Wollstonecraft or Stuart Mill, becomes "a rhetorical strategy [...] by which a speaker or writer neutralizes the threat inherent in feminist demands and makes them palatable to an audience that wishes to affirm its occidental superior" (Zonana 1993: 594, Spivak 1985).

However hard to conquer, women's presence in the public space is marked by profound contradictions, not completely solved by the affirmation of modern democracy. The foundational act of the modern democratic political community is in fact a pact among men, confirming and reinforcing their control over women's bodies. In spite of their admission (*sub condicione)* in the sphere of citizenship, women did not regain the ownership of their body, which continued to be confined within the private sphere, and as such untouched by political and emancipatory processes (Cavarero 2002; Pateman 1989). Second-wave feminism sought to break down the barrier dividing the sphere of private from that of public, turning the re-appropriation by women of their own body into the main battle cry of a huge wave of political mobilisation. This exciting time brought to profound transformations, such as a generalised "democratisation" of sexuality (Fassin 2006); yet, phenomena such as the permanence

[14] Cavarero's powerful analysis of Antigone's myth shows the association between "human corporeality and the female body" (Cavarero 2002: 16).

of gender-based violence even in the most "advanced" societies testifies that women's freedom is far from being solid and well established as to the point of representing a marking feature of the Western world. These persisting contradictions cannot be explained simply in terms of "not yet", symptoms of an incomplete emancipation to be cured in due time. This persisting expropriation reflects the fundamental ambiguity of the notion of people lying at the root of Western democracies, constantly swinging between two poles: on the one hand, a nation of citizens bound by political principles and, on the other hand, a "natural" community held together by pre-political and ahistorical ties of blood or culture. In this case, the control of women's bodies is evidently central for the reproduction of political community (McKinnon 2007).

Less evident, yet even more equally important, is the impact on gender relations of another crucial "slide" of modernity. The advancement of capitalism, part and parcel of modernity's journey, detached the notion of autonomy from the original meaning of self-government to reshape it in terms of self-ownership. The capacity of disposing of oneself, which results in the possibility of selling, buying and renting time and labour force becomes, in capitalist societies, the alpha and omega of individual freedom. Whilst the story of modern capitalism is well known, the transition towards a post-Fordist model displays more elusive forms of domination than those typical of its industrial predecessor. Post-industrial capitalism does not limit itself to exploiting labour force, but turns every aspect of life into a marketable, commodified resource. Its emphasis on individual development succeeds in turning critiques into endorsements (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999); and feminism is no exception (Frazer 2009). The logic of market and commodification, crystallised in the notion of "choice", extends to all aspects of individual and social life: it also has a specific impact on gender relationship and gender justice, creating a fatal attraction between white mainstream feminism and neoliberal rationality. Women's bodies, in this perspective, are a most privileged point of observation. Freedom coincides with availability and accessibility; reclaiming women's body, the great conquest of second-wave feminist battles, is now in danger of being turned into a channel towards commodification.

Muslim Women at the Crossroad of Conflations

The many threads of processes of reifications and displacements briefly recalled above converge in the perception of the "Muslim woman". The reification of culture evoked above conflates with an equally reified conception of religion and with a culturalised notion of secularism, generating a sort of vicious circle whereby identity depends exclusively by culture, which is, in turn, only defined by religion (Abu-Lughod 2013: 69). A series of *reductiones ad unum* are thus taking place. First of all, the Islamophobic glance ignores the internal diversity of the Muslim world, identified with integralism and violence, simply refuses to consider the possibility of internal evolutions within distinctive cultural contexts. Consequently, ignored are also the internal differences among Muslim women, who all come from Islamland, as in the poignant definition by Lila Abu-Lughod. The Muslim Woman is only one, invariably identified with her veil or, more precisely with only *one* veil.[15] The veiled body of Muslim women, perceived as the embodiment of oppression and subjugation, raises a storm of reactions going from revulsion to fear, from irritation to compassion, and sometimes stretching to include declared hostility. Whether the actual meanings of the Islamic veil justify this perception is a topic that has been so thoroughly discussed as not to require any further exploration here: the point is to reconstruct what lies at the core of the emotional whirlpool originated by their presence in the public sphere. Decades of "sartorial wars", as Judith Butler has brilliantly defined the host of controversies over the Islamic veil, show racialisation of gender and religion at work: and in fact, the case of the Muslim woman fits very well with Bordo's considerations on women's bodies as a racial battleground (Bordo 1993). Their (constructed, perceived) otherness provides a sort of mirror reflecting many deep-set contradictions of modernity, concerning in particular the place of women in the democratic political space as well as the real scope and depth of secularity.

Muslim women are at the same time visible and invisible: the veil hides them, however partially, from sight, whilst at the same time makes them conspicuous in the public sphere. Insofar as it is interpreted as a sign of submission (again, focusing on perceptions rather than on the actual meaning), their veil is an unsettling *memento* of the sheer fact that male power and male domination exist, and that they are far from being

[15] See at least Ahmed 2011, Scott 2007 and in Italian Pepicelli 2020.

definitely eradicated from our societies. Yet, this sight is profoundly comforting and reassuring, as it permits to conceive of gender injustice as part of a "pre-or-not-yet-modern" past, or to push it in a faraway space, being associated to "other cultures" in a most effective mechanism of projection (Mancini 2012).

Muslim women appear either as victims or accomplices of their "traditions". This excerpt from the Italian paper *Il Foglio* perfectly summarises this view:

> For all those women who are about to rebel, or who are gradually waking up, the veil is only a port whence they can sail offshore and change the route to their destiny. They live across two different world, one secular and the other regulated only by rigid prescriptions and integralism; they decide to slide on an incline who will take them to become European citizens instead of prisoners of the Ummah. In fact many psychologist and social workers affirm that they mostly rebel against tradition [...]; but in the Muslim community tradition and religion coincide, so their awakening causes them to abandon a rigid interpretation of the Quran.[16]

Insofar as they are "victims" of their traditions, they need help, according to the well-known postcolonial trope of "white men saving brown women from brown men".[17] The compassion and indignation raised by the sad condition of Muslim women, and the desire to "help" them, however, do not become an argument to grant them citizenship rights. Right-wing political forces, populist and not, find it easy to appropriate feminist

[16] The author, Cristina Giudici, is an Italian writer, who published successful réportages on immigration in Italy. Original text: "Per chi si sta ribellando o gradualmente svegliando, il velo è solo il porto di partenza per arrivare in mare aperto e cambiare la rotta al proprio destino. E, a cavallo fra due mondi, uno laico e uno composto solo da rigide prescrizioni e dall'integralismo, decidono di scivolare su un piano inclinato che le porti ad essere cittadine europee e non prigioniere della Ummah. Certo, molte psicologhe e assistenti sociali dicono che è soprattutto alla tradizione che si ribellano [...] Ma nella comunità musulmana tradizione e religione coincidono e quindi il loro risveglio le porta anche lontane dalla rigida interpretazione del Corano." (Giudici 2017, translation mine).

[17] The specular image of the "oppressed" Muslim woman is that of the Muslim man. Well-established colonial tropes provide a breeding ground for othering processes that culminate in the depiction of the immigrant man—invariably "Islamic"—as hypersexualised and sexually aggressive: the message is "they come here to rape our women". His even scarier ghost resonating with fears of aggression and rape is a constant feature of Islamophobic discourses across continents, from Europe to India's fight against "love jihad". I have discussed further this point in Spini 2017.

issues in view of their own political agendas. Authoritarian populist forces in particular manipulate feminist issues in an anti-Islamic perspective in order to strengthen their nativist conception of political community, whilst at the same time upholding traditional views of family and gender roles. Marine Le Pen is a paradigmatic example of the capacity of appropriating *mots d'ordre* such as secularism and feminism (Alduy and Wahnich 2015), well matched by the declarations of Meloni and Salvini.[18]

The manipulation of feminist issues in an Islamophobic perspective presents the additional advantage of neutralising, or at the very least undermining, the potential of feminism as critique, by cornering feminists accusing them of failing to defend Muslim women.[19] In an interview to the daily paper *La Stampa*, the leader of Lega Matteo Salvini denounced "the do-gooders of the left and the feminists who do not defend women from the Islamic subculture".[20] The "token" Muslim women who are given voice in Western public spheres are the exception that confirms the rule: in most cases, "the women chosen by the West as 'symbolic Muslims', rather than functioning as bridges and as cultural mediators between 'Us' and 'Them', have turned into the representation of the incompatibility between the West and Muslim world" (Vanzan 2016: 3).

Muslim women (again, the identification between Muslim and veiled woman is here accepted for the sake of argument) are visible insofar as they escape from visibility. This escape is profoundly irritating, as it brings up to light the results of the reformulation of individual autonomy in terms compatible with the logic of late modern capitalism, among which the instrumental appropriation of women's freedom has a special relevance. The emphasis on choice hides from the view the permanence of deep-set mechanism of power and of processes of normalisation and discipline, which define what is normal and what is unacceptable. The

[18] Farris has dissected the communication strategies of Salvini's League in the time range 2005–2013.

[19] It should be noted that this appropriation operates also outside of Western contexts; the most well-known example is how the claim of defending Muslim women becomes a weapon in the hands of the Bharatiya Janata Party and of other Hindu nationalist right-wing political actors.

[20] "Io critico i benpensanti della sinistra e le femministe che non difendono le donne dalla subcultura islamica" https://www.lastampa.it/topnews/primo-piano/2020/01/02/news/salvini-rispetto-francesco-ma-un-certo-islam-e-incompatibile-con-i-diritti-delle-donne-1.38278046

enthusiastic cooperation to the commodification of one's body is an autonomous choice: veiling one's head is not. Muslim women wearing a veil are acting because of interiorised mechanisms of domination—our *veline*[21] do not. These contradictions of "culturalized" liberalism—shared by an equally culturalised feminism—are grotesquely summarised in the photo featuring Salvini hugging a feminist "activist".[22] Furthermore, in its squalor, the image suggests that and availability: women are sexually free insofar as they make themselves completely available to the most stereotypical masculine glance. The veiled body raises compassion and solidarity, thus providing a most comfortable feeling of belonging to best of possible worlds; those feelings, however, may swiftly turn into hostility in case Muslim women would not comply with the request of embracing in toto "our culture". The well-known image of the French policeman forcing a middle-aged veiled lady to undress on the beach of Sète, or the disputes on the use of burkini on Italian beaches and swimming pools show how the strong is the heteronormativity cage framing women's bodies.[23]

At the same time, the veil makes Islam conspicuous, wherever it was formerly invisible (Göle 2013). The presence of veiled women in the public space is a constant, although unwelcome, reminder of the challenge of difference within Western democracies, as well as a disturbing evidence of how unprepared they are to live up to their own standards. The irritation, to say the least, caused by the presence of conspicuous difference, is the symptom of the ambiguities and weaknesses of the European secularist project. For all the reasons briefly outlined above, secularist neutrality works only among those who are similar, and is scarcely equipped to make room for identities who require to be recognised because of what they are, rather than in spite of it. Insofar as Islamic religious practices and believes are conceived as incompatible with secularity and therefore resistant to modernisation, Muslim women are twice the "not yet" of modernity: not yet free like us, not yet secular and enlightened like us.

[21] A colloquial term indicating Berlusconi's tv show girls; the *veline* are a typical example of commodification of women's bodies.

[22] https://www.agi.it/politica/seflie_salvini_discoteca_miss_musulmana_marocchina_ahlam_el_brinis-1848081/news/2017-06-05/, accessed on March 20, 2021.

[23] https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2016/08/17/news/piscine_donne_musulmane_in_italia-146139409/, accessed on March 20, 2021 for a brilliant analysis of the contradictions surrounding women's bodies see D'Elia and Serughetti 2017.

This series of conflations, reifications and reductions disregards in general all theological debates happening throughout the Muslim world, and most specifically the expanding galaxy of Quranic feminism[24]—which certainly did not need Macron's appeal to begin its own theological journey inside Islam. The mechanisms of appropriation and othering surely do not provide any support to the myriad of creative identity renegotiations and innovative practices by Muslim women in a variety of contexts, aiming at introducing empowering transformations within the Muslim world itself. Insofar as religious practices and beliefs are conceived as what is "not yet" secularised, women are twice the "not yet" of modernity: not yet free like us, not yet secular and enlightened like us. Mainstream Western feminism is not always a straightforward ally against these conflations, as its relation to religious agency is in fact quite difficult. In spite of a rich history of connections between Christianity and feminist claims, many feminists in the twentieth century—to make but one example, Simone de Beauvoir—have linked women's emancipation to modern secularism and highlighted the role they played in perpetuating women's subordination. This position is by no means exclusive to the Western world, and has been widely adopted in many post-colonial contexts. In the Italian context, Giuliana Sgrena or Cinzia Sciuto have recently perpetuated a view of Abrahamic religions as strongholds of patriarchy, and reaffirmed the link between secularism and women's liberation (Sgrena 2016; Sciuto 2020). The reasons why the relationship between feminism and religion is so complicated are as numerous as they are evident. The patriarchal character of religion, or, to be more specific, of Abrahamic religion is an undeniable stepping stone—a "dilemma" as noticed by Mahamood (Mahamood 2005: 4)—engaging feminist theologians across the various religious families. However, rather than engaging in this task, sectors of Western mainstream feminism do not investigate the potential of women's autonomous and empowering religious agency within religious traditions in general: more specifically they simply fail to see that for Muslim women throughout the world, Italy included, religious identity is a way towards empowering practices rather than a yoke to shake.

[24] For an exhaustive overview of contemporary Islamic Feminism see Sirri 2020; in Italian Pepicelli 2010.

A to Do List, *in Lieu* of Conclusions

The analysis of the many dimension at play in the Islamophobic discourse shows many deep-set contradictions within Western democratic societies, settling important tasks for critical work. As a form of racism resulting from processes of reification of culture, the presence of Islamophobia in Western public spaces shows the permanent influence of a naturalised view of political community among the criteria of entitlement to democratic citizenship. As religion is the crucial element at play in the process of racialisation, Islamophobia shows the limits of a culturalised version of secularism, thus opening the field for conversations on models of genuinely pluralist post-secular public spaces.

The ghost of the "Muslim woman" is a sort of prism that makes these contradictions all the more visible, thus making the quest for innovative approaches all the more urgent. First of all, it calls for Western democratic public spaces to be true to themselves, ensuring the means to achieve that personal autonomy which they claim as their foundational value. Within this framework, a wide range of lines of research opens up for feminist theory: primarily, the quest for an enriched theoretical equipment, which may account for and embrace unexplored paths towards autonomy and empowerment. New categories are needed to complement and counterbalance the heavy debt with notions of individual independence, sovereignty, self-government. This reconsideration of conceptual and theoretical tools can make use of consolidated strategies of intersectionality, and needs to advance further, so as to explore definitions of freedom and conception of subjectivity, along the lines indicated by Mahamood. Even more urgent is the renewed attention from the *liaison dangereuse* between feminism and capitalism, so as to disentangle women's freedom from a shallow notion of choice shaped around the logic of the market.

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"Africa's Delivery Room": The Racialization of Italian Political Discourse on the 80th Anniversary of the Racial Laws

Angelica Pesarini

The Language of Race: An Intersectional Approach

Summer 2018 marked the 80th anniversary of the enactment of the fascist Racial Laws against the Jews and, in a tragic twist of history, this year was marked by a series of severe anti-Black racist incidents, vitriolic anti-immigrant propaganda and polarised political debates on race, identity and citizenship. This was a year in which words such as "defence of the white race", "extinction of our race" and "ethnic substitution" were explicitly mentioned in the Italian political discourse.

The use of a certain grammar of race inherited by the late fascist period, pronounced anti-immigrant sentiments and the spread of populist propaganda were certainly important factors in securing the victory of the

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anti-establishment party Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Stars Movement) led by Luigi Di Maio, and Matteo Salvini's far-right party Lega[1] in the Italian general elections, held on March 4, 2018. The two respective leaders formed their Cabinet on June 1, 2018, after several weeks of negotiations, giving rise to the first European government led by two populist parties.[2]

The analysis of the journey leading to the electoral events provided in this chapter will map out and reveal a multi-layered racialisation of the Italian political discourse on immigration, and will demonstrate the historical legacy and the implications of a certain language of race. Yet, "race" alone would not suffice to reveal the complexities of this matter. As I demonstrate, opposing political forces made, in different ways, a strategic use of women's bodies and their reproductive capacities in conjunction with ideas of race and identity, for opportunistic purposes. In order to investigate the consequences of these dynamics, I feel it is essential to adopt an intersectional approach able to respond to the limits of "single-issue" frameworks (Crenshaw 1989). In this regard, intersectionality is useful to investigate and reveal forms of oppression and discrimination simultaneously caused by racism, male heteropatriarchal power, nationalism and xenophobia. The intersectional approach works as a paradigm able to detect how different social categories mutually shape and affect social interactions and identities, by considering that these categories cannot be separated; rather, they are mutually constitutive and influence each other. Therefore, my analysis will make use of a series of categories that, I argue, are inextricably connected and simultaneously shape the Italian political discourse on immigration, namely, race, gender and sexuality, blood and identity, and citizenship.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first part will highlight the relation between race and politics by providing an overview of three shootings that occurred in the first six months of 2018 in which the injured parties were all Black individuals. The analysis of these incidents will show the strategic use of the racist rhetoric adopted by the far-right and populist party Lega in order to gain political consensus in light of general election.

[1] https://www.repubblica.it/speciali/politica/elezioni2018/2018/03/04/news/risultati_elezioni_politiche_pd_centrodestra_m5s_fi_lega-190424815/, accessed May 30, 2021.

[2] The Salvini–Di Maio alliance was short lived. On August 8, 2019, Salvini called for snap elections due to 'diverging vision' to Luigi Di Maio and the government fell after only 14 months.

The second section will provide an overview on the historical use of the so-called *proof of blood* used as a fundamental legal tool to define national identity and citizenship, both in Italy and its former colonies in East Africa, from the late nineteenth century. Drawing upon this, the third section explores the heritage of the debates on identity and citizenship in the current Italian political discourse, by examining the bill to reform the citizenship law. Based on the principle of *Jus sanguinis* (right of blood), the debate to modify the law has been going on for more than 15 years. In the summer of 2017, the discussion of the bill in the Senate proposed by the then centre-left government, triggered heated debates with protests inside and outside Parliament. Citizenship rights, immigration and security, and the so-called refugee crisis were strategically lumped together by the right-wing coalition creating a symbolic terrifying Hydra, whose colour was undoubtedly black. The fourth part of this chapter will discuss the exploitation of women's bodies to spread a racist and xenophobic political discourse facilitated by the "amnesia" of the colonial past. In particular, it will first analyse a slogan used by far-right senator Ignazio La Russa in relation to Italian citizenship and African women's reproductive capacities; it will then turn the attention to the male heteropatriarchal power and the perception of the Black body during Italian colonialism in East Africa. The last section will demonstrate the persistence of an explicit language of race in the Italian political discourse, and the importance of women's bodies' exploitation to sustain a notion of Italian identity embedded in racist rhetoric.

The Language of Race: Italy 2018

As aforementioned, 2018 marked the 80th anniversary of the racist fascist laws in Italy and was characterised by a long campaign of pronounced anti-Black and anti-immigrant rhetoric. The first six months of the year saw numerous acts of racist violence culminating in a series of shootings. According to UNAR (the Italian National Office against Racial Discrimination), reports of ethnic-racial discrimination in 2018 increased by 300 more cases in comparison to the previous year[3] (UNAR 2019); on September 10, after a summer marked by a high number of racist incidents, Michelle Bachelet, United Nations' Human Rights Chief,

[3] https://www.open.online/2019/03/18/lallarme-aumentano-razzismo-e-xenofobia--lunar-trecento-casi-in-piu-in-un-anno-9-al-giorno/ accessed 30 May 2021.

announced her intention to send UN personnel to Italy in order to evaluate reports of an "alarming increase" of violence and racism against migrants, people of African descent and Roma people.[4] Anti-racist organisations monitoring racism recorded 14 shootings in the three months after Salvini entered the government (the majority of which involved air rifles)[5] and 628 cases of verbal and physical violence, discrimination and property damage of a xenophobic and racist nature.[6] Among the 126 recorded cases of racist physical violence (compared to 46 incidents in 2017), there were five deaths including that of Idy Diene and Soumaila Sacko whose violent ends will be further expounded in this section.[7]

The first shooting of the year, that also had the highest number of injured, occurred on the morning of February 3 when 28-year-old Luca Traini, took his black Alfa Romeo car from Tolentino, a village located in the central region of Marche where he lived with his mother, and drove 20 kilometres to Macerata. On his way, Traini, a former Lega candidate for city council and known associate in the local neo-fascist milieu, stopped at a café and at a gas station where he announced that he was about to go "shooting niggers" (Naletto 2020: 148). Once in Macerata, he started "hunting" Black bodies as targets. He shot 30 bullets in ten different areas of the town injuring six people, all Africans. Jennifer Otiotio, a 25-year-old Nigerian woman, who was waiting at a bus stop; Wilson Kofi Omagbon, aged 20 from Ghana, and Festus Omagbon, a Nigerian citizen aged 32, who were both together when they were shot. Traini also injured Gideon Azeke a 25-year-old man from Nigeria, who was hit by a bullet in his right thigh, and Omar Fadera from The Gambia, who was 23 years old. Mahamadou Toure, aged 28 and originally from Mali, suffered the most severe injuries as he needed to be rushed to intensive care with a liver haematoma.[8] At the time of his arrest, Traini had parked, not incidentally,

[4] https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2018/09/10/un-to-send-team-to-italy-over-racism_c7cc61fb-ab44-4650-8903-0dd66bcc0150.html, accessed May 30, 2021.

[5] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/10/un-human-rights-chief-sends--team-to-italy-after-alarming-anti-migrant-violence, accessed May 30, 2021.

[6] See *Lunaria*'s report on racism in Italy in 2018 http://www.cronachediordinari-orazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/FOCUS1_2019_RacisminItalyin2018.pdf, accessed May 30, 2021.

[7] Ibid.

[8] https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/02/04/sparatoria-macerata-chi-sono-i-sei-feriti-jennifer-salvata-dal-fidanzato-e-gideon-ho-rischiato-di-morire-solo-per-il-colore-della-mia-pelle/4136058/, accessed May 30, 2021.

near the *Monumento ai Caduti*, a monument erected in the fascist era commemorating victims of all wars. He was found draped in the Italian flag while doing the fascist salute. Traini explained he committed the shooting to avenge the murder of Pamela Mastropietro, an 18-year-old young woman whose body was found dismembered and placed in two suitcases, on January 30. Pamela, who was recovering from heroin addiction, had run away from the rehabilitation community in which she was hosted. In Macerata she met Innocent Oseghale, a 29-nine-year-old Nigerian who was known to deal drugs and who was arrested soon after and sentenced to life in prison in 2019.[9] It is important to highlight that Traini's act of terror did not focus on foreigners, as the majority of Italian media framed the event in the following days. Traini whilst deeply angered admitted that: "I don't deny what I have done. I wanted to hit drug dealers like those who sold drugs to Pamela. It's not my fault if in Macerata all the drug dealers are Black …. I didn't know I injured a woman, I just wanted to hit black men".[10]

While recovering from this traumatic incident, a month later in Florence, the city in which I reside, Roberto Pirrone shot and killed Idy Diene, a 54-year-old Senegalese man. Diene had migrated to Italy 20 years earlier and on that tragic day he happened to randomly cross the Amerigo Vespucci bridge to sell his merchandise to passers-by. After the shooting, Pirrone turned himself in to the police declaring that he had originally planned to commit suicide, however, once he realised he could not shoot himself; he decided to fire on a "random" target as, he said, in order to spend the rest of his life in prison.[11] Yet, CCTV footage showed how this alleged randomness seemed, in fact, quite selective as several people walked on the Vespucci bridge, and the only life seen as expendable was that of a Black man.

Three months later, on June 2, another Black man was shot dead, Soumaila Sacko.[12] The 29-year-old Malian trade unionist and human

[9] https://www.ansa.it/english/news/general_news/2018/09/18/oseghale-admits-killing-pamela-informant_d2270dda-611c-4d85-aebd-c6ab24c288fe.html, accessed May 30, 2021.

[10] https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/02/06/news/macerata_centri_sociali_casa_pound_annullata-188192927/, accessed May 30, 2021.

[11] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/3/8/protests-and-questions-over-killing-of-senegal-migrant-idy-diene, accessed May 30, 2021.

[12] https://www.thelocal.it/20180604/migrant-workers-in-southern-italy-strike-mali-man-soumaila-sacko-shot-dead, accessed May 30, 2021.

rights defender was a *bracciante* (migrant agricultural labourer) picking fruit and vegetables in the southern region of Calabria. Arriving in Italy in 2010 and working in the fields, he joined efforts to secure more rights for migrant workers given the extremely precarious and unsafe working and living conditions many are forced into. On that day in June, Sacko was collecting scrap metal from an abandoned factory in order to help a couple of co-workers to build a shack in the tent-city where he lived. The factory had been closed years earlier and seized by police following an accusation that hazardous waste had been illegally dumped at the site.[13] Antonio Pontoriero, whose uncle was among the people implicated by the police, had unofficially assumed control of the abandoned site. When on June 2 he saw Sacko and his two friends, he shot at them from his car with an illegally possessed firearm. Two of the three men managed to escape but Sacko died of head trauma resulting from a bullet. Initially, in the hours following the murder, national news agency media spread the news that the murder of Sacko would have been a reaction to an alleged theft.[14]

It is interesting to note the use of a racist and opportunistic rhetoric used by the right wing, and Lega in particular, to gain votes, especially after racist incidents of this kind. On these occasions, the condemnation of violence, and *not* of racism, would be followed by extenuating circumstances mitigating the responsibilities of the perpetrators. This was especially noticeable after the shooting in Macerata. On that occasion, Salvini promptly condemned Traini's gesture affirming that anyone committing such an act is a criminal "regardless of their skin colour", yet, adding straight away, that "it is clear and evident that out-of-control immigration, an invasion like the one organized, wanted and financed in these years by the left, leads to social conflict".[15] By saying this, Salvini intimated that the

[13] Racist attacks in Italy: 'The problem did not start today' |Racist attacks in Italy: 'The problem did not start today' |Racist attacks in Italy: 'The problem did not start today' | Racism | Al Jazeera| Al Jazeera| Al Jazeera|Racist attacks in Italy: 'The problem did not start today' |Racist attacks in Italy: 'The problem did not start today' | Racist attacks in Italy: 'The problem did not start today' | Racism | Al Jazeera| Al Jazeera| Al Jazeera|Racist attacks in Italy: 'The problem did not start today' |Racist attacks in Italy: 'The problem did not start today' |Racist attacks in Italy: 'The problem did not start today' | Racism | Al Jazeera | Al Jazeera| Al Jazeera, accessed May 30, 2021.

[14] See for instance: https://www.ansa.it/english/news/general_news/2018/06/04/police-probe-migrant-shooting-murder_619c744f-36fd-45e7-8325-cf291a15a4f6.html, accessed May 30, 2021.

[15] https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2018/02/03/news/raid:razziale_a_macerata_salvini_chiunque_spari_e_un_delinquente_-187953469/, accessed May 30, 2021.

alleged "invasion" of immigrants, orchestrated by the "Left", had led Italians to an unbearable level of exasperation and Traini's gesture was the inevitable consequence—contradictorily diminishing Traini of the responsibility of his actions. Another example of such a strategy occurred on the same day Soumaila Sacko died. On June 2, the newly elected Vice Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, Salvini, declared from Padua that "the party is over for illegal immigrants, get ready to pack, in a polite and calm manner but they have to go",[16] associating Black migrants victim of crimes to undocumented migrants.

Despite the brutality of this picture, it is essential to read this data within a broader and intersectional framework, in order to avoid falling into alarmist and single-issue perspectives. As I mentioned elsewhere (Pesarini 2021), attributing the so-called emergency of racism in Italy to a sole individual would not only assign that individual with extraordinary capabilities; it would also overlook the role played by categories such blood, identity, and citizenship, in conjunction with race and gender. In the case of Italy, the intersection of these factors has been historically relevant for the construction a specific idea of national identity forged also on biological criteria. Starting from the Liberal period and Italian colonialism in Eritrea, blood and later on race, the white race, laid the foundation of newly formed Italian state, as illustrated in the next chapter.

The Empire of *Africa Orientale Italiana* and the *Proof of Blood*

Historically, the idea of the *proof of blood* has played a fundamental role in the Italian political discourse, not only to define national identity and citizenship; but also, to grant rights and privileges to certain individuals on the basis of race. A good starting point to understand the implications of this debate is 1869, eight years after the unification of Italy as a nation state, when an Italian shipping company bought the Bay of Assab, on the coast of modern Eritrea. Later, the bay was sold to the Italian state and declared an Italian colony in 1882. Formal Italian domination over East Africa started in 1890, when all the Italian possessions gained up to that time were legally consolidated into a single political entity named "Eritrea" (Andall and Duncan 2005; Ben-Ghiat and Fuller 2008).

[16] https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2018/06/02/news/governo_salvini_lega_migranti-198005208/, accessed May 30, 2021.

In terms of *Italianness*, it is interesting to note that since the Liberal period (1861–1922) blood was used as an essential criterion to grant "mixed race" children born in the colonies to a Black mother and an unknown white father, Italian citizenship (Pesarini 2017). In 1909, for instance, the *Codice Civile per la Colonia Eritrea* [Civil Code for the Eritrean Colony] framed Italian citizenship through anthropological criteria, by asserting that a child born in the colonies to unknown parents could gain Italian citizenship if their "physical features" excluded the possibility that one, or both parents, were not "colonial subjects" (Gabrielli 1997). Later on, in 1933, during the fascist period, the article 18 of Law 999 of the *Ordinamento Organico per l'Eritrea e la Somalia* [Integrated Regulations for Eritrea and Somalia], stated that unrecognised "mixed race" children could gain Italian citizenship if they were able to show on their body the signs of phenotypic features indicating clear racial intermixing with a member of the "White race" (Ibid.). The "proof of race", as Barbara Sòrgoni (2002: 51) puts it, was successfully completed after craniometrical tests which included the morphological analysis of the skull and the measurement of cranial capacity (Poidimani 2009: 85).

The connections between race, blood, and Italian identity were formalised and institutionalised on July 14th 1938, with the publication on the national newspaper Il Giornale d'Italia of a pivotal document entitled *Il Manifesto degli Scienziati Razzisti*, also known as *Il Manifesto della Razza*. This document served as ideological and pseudoscientific grounds for Italian racism and preceded the promulgation of the Racial Laws against Jews (Gillette 2001). The text discussed the importance of race and blood by affirming not only the existence of biological races, but also Italians' "racial compositions" and their Aryan origins. In relation to blood, the document emphasised the purity of Italians' blood that had allegedly remained unchanged through the centuries, owing to a lack of "external contamination". Blood was for the regime "the greatest title of nobility of the Italian nation"; therefore, it was essential for Italians to be racist, in order to reckon with their responsibilities as members of a "pure race".[17] Another important publication launched in 1938 was the bimonthly propaganda magazine titled "La Difesa Della Razza". The magazine was edited by the Italian journalist and ardent fascist supporter, Telesio Interlandi, and it was published until 1943. It represented an

[17] See here for the whole text in Italian http://www.osservatoriosulfascismoaroma.org/il-manifesto-della-razza-1938/, accessed 30 May 2021.

important tool for the regime's propaganda that made use of cutting-edge graphics and images aimed to perpetuate ideas of race purity, anti-semitism and pseudoscience (Cassata 2008). One of the main contributors of the magazine was the journalist and politician Giorgio Almirante, a prominent figure of the historical Italian far-right.

Supporter of the creation of the Salo' Republic in 1943,[18] Almirante founded and led the post-fascist party Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement, MSI). In May 1942, on the pages of "La Difesa della Razza", Almirante wrote a pivotal article explaining the relevance of blood as the real and only proof to reclaim Italianness, and to distinguish Italians from *meticci* and Jews:

> Racism has to be food for all and everyone, if we really want race consciousness to be alive in Italy. Our racism has to be that of blood, blood that runs in my veins, blood that I feel flowing in me, and that I can see, analyse and compare with the blood of others. Our racism must be that of flesh and muscles; and of the spirit, yes, but a spirit that dwells in these particular bodies, which live in this particular country .... Otherwise we will play into the hands of *meticci* and Jews. The Jews, who, in too many cases have been able to change their name and confuse themselves with us ... There is only one proof to prevent and stop mixing and Judaism: the proof of blood. (Almirante 1942)

In light of these considerations, it is interesting to analyse the heritage of the language of race in the Italian political discourse, when thinking about the debate that occurred in summer 2017 in relation to the bill regulating the transmission of Italian citizenship, still based along blood principles.

[18] The Italian Social Republic, known also as Salò Republic, was a so called puppet regime led by Mussolini and sponsored by the Third Reich. It started with the beginning of German occupation of Italy in September 1943 and the fall of Fascism. Led by Mussolini, the Republic declared Rome as its capital but was headquartered in Salò, a small town on Lake Garda. The Italian Social Republic exercised nominal sovereignty in Northern and Central Italy but was largely dependent on German troops to maintain control. It surrendered in May 1945 (Burgwyn 2018).

Race, Blood, and Citizenship: *Jus Sanguinis*

In the pre-electoral campaign of 2017, one of the most disputed issues of contention, and strategically used by Lega as a sort of ideological battle, concerned the bill to reform the citizenship law. At the end of 2017, a united right-wing coalition managed to secure the rejection of the bill along with a big defeat for the weak and fragmented centre-left government, unable to effectively respond to the populist anti-immigrant propaganda and too cautious to fight for the bill (Tintori 2018: 445). This seemed to confirm the repetition of a pattern described by Giovanna Zincone and characterising centre-left Italian parties in relation to immigration:

> in theory keen to reform citizenship … [but] … when in government, had majorities that were both too narrow and too unstable, and were too concerned at the risk of losing future elections to be consistent in their intentions. (Zincone 2010: 1)

Debates to discuss the reform of the citizenship law have been going on for almost 15 years but no final compromise has ever been reached (Tintori 2018). The current Italian citizenship, Law 91 of 1992, is based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, literally meaning right of blood, a juridical procedure present in the majority of the globe's eastern hemisphere. This contrasts with most western and southern nations of the Americas, where the principle of birthright citizenship, or *Jus Soli*, right of soil, governs the conferring of citizenship (Vink et al. 2010; Tintori 2016). In very simple terms, Italian citizenship from birth is inherited by blood and not by birthplace. Thus, a child born in Italy to non-Italian parents (namely people who are unable to trace a blood connection to an Italian national) is classified as a *straniero*, a foreigner until the age of 18 when it is possible to apply for citizenship. Even then, citizenship is not guaranteed, and the application involves a great deal of bureaucratic processes, long waiting periods and is costly (Pesarini and Tintori 2019). Despite many attempts from organisations of the second generation—that is, individuals born in Italy but unable to get Italian citizenship from birth as born to non-Italian nationals—to modify the bill,[19] it was only in 2011 that 20 associations

[19] See, for instance, the work of the "G2 Networks" https://www.secondegenerazioni.it/ and "Italiani Senza Cittadinanza" Italiani senza cittadinanza | Facebook|Italiani senza cittadinanza | Facebook, accessed May 31, 2021.

launched a campaign called *L'Italia sono anch'io* (I am Italy too) in order to push for a change of the law, supported by the national newspaper *La Repubblica*.[20] The campaign turned out to be very successful and managed to collect 200,000 signatures. As a result, the text of a draft law of popular initiative was submitted to the Chamber of Deputies in order to modify the citizenship law on February 5, 2012.[21] The draft law foresaw a moderated form of *Jus Soli* for children born in Italy to foreign parents of which one at least had a long-term resident visa. It also introduced the possibility of *Jus Culturae*, right by culture, according to which a child born in Italy to foreign parents, or who had arrived within the age of 12, could acquire citizenship by attending school in Italy for at least five years, or by completing studies or professional training within a school or place of education.

The legislative process started on October 13, 2015,[22] when the Chamber approved the text and sent it to the Senate for further approval in order to become law. The vote in the Senate was intentionally delayed by almost two years due to the 50,000 amendments mainly proposed by far- right parties Lega and Fratelli d'Italia, in order to obstruct the vote.[23] It took until June 15, 2017, under the Gentiloni government, for the discussion of the bill to be brought to the Senate, although it was not previously scheduled in the calendar. The debates on the matter were so heated that the then Minister of Education, Valeria Fedeli, was left injured following a brawl after Lega senators physically pushed to reach the government benches while branding signs reading "No Ius Soli" and "Stop the Invasion".[24] A further element turned out to be crucial in the political debate related to blood and Italian citizenship: the symbolic use of women's bodies.

[20] See http://www.litaliasonoanchio.it/, accessed May 30, 2021.

[21] Draft law presented to the Chamber http://www.litaliasonoanchio.it/fileadmin/materiali_italiaanchio/pdf/PROGETTO_DI_LEGGE_-_Norme_sulla_cittadinanza_-_testo.pdf, accessed May 31, 2021.

[22] Text approved by the Chamber on October 13, 2015

http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/wp-content/uploads/testo-cittadinanza_senato.pdf, accessed May 31, 2021.

[23] https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/ius-soli-italys-opportunity-to-harness-much-needed-talent/, accessed May 30, 2021.

[24] https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2017/06/15/news/ius_soli_discussione_senato-168161564/, accessed May 30, 2021.

Africa's Delivery Room

In order to gain electoral consent, women and their reproductive capacities were strategically exploited by the political discourse in conjunction with ideas of race and identity. This became particularly noticeable in June 2017, eight months before the election, when the Senate discussed the reform of the citizenship law I mentioned earlier.

In the days following the brawl in the Senate triggered by the discussion on the reform of the citizenship law, *Jus Soli* became the topic of conversation by many television programmes to which the far-right senator, Ignazio La Russa, Vice President of the Senate since 2018 and one of the main representatives of the mainstream post-fascist scene, was often invited. Here senator La Russa, who comes from a family of fascist tradition and joined aged 24 the Fronte della Gioventù (Youth Front), the youth section of the post-fascist party MSI party founded by Almirante (Telese 2006), would vehemently express his opposition to the bill reiterating, insistently, almost obsessively, a specific slogan: "Italy cannot become Africa's delivery room".[25] La Russa insinuated that the bill would adopt a purely *Jus Soli* form of citizenship, which was never contemplated in the bill. He envisaged that flocks of African women would come to Italy to deliver their babies who, by law, would now have the right to be considered Italian from birth. This was quite far from the reality and in *reading* the bill, the granting of the proposed *Jus Soli* and *Jus Culturae* were not so easily obtainable. On June 23, just a week after the brawl in the Senate, La Russa was invited to the talk show *Tagadà*. Here, in an agitated and ineloquent manner, the Senator said (or to be more precise, shouted) the following:

> If I went working abroad and I happened to have a son there, I wouldn't consider it my right to have an American son or an English one or a Nigerian one. I would wait for a few years so he could decide if he wants my citizenship or the acquired one. Children do not necessarily need to get mad; they go to school, and they can be proud of their own citizenship … It is wrong to say that they can pass a random course [to acquire Italian citizenship]. A child born here to [foreign] parents in which the mother too is a long-term resident, otherwise [he shouts animatedly] we become Africa's delivery room! AFRICA'S DELIVERY ROOM! They come here, they give birth,

[25] See https://www.fratelli-italia.it/2017/06/20/ius-soli-la-russa-italia-non-sia-sala-parto-dellafrica/ (last accessed May 30, 2021).

> they find a guy who says he's the father and so on [some of the other guest speakers in the tv studio raise their voices to respond to his statements and try to interrupt him by speaking over him]. Let me say this! … Let's not make an opportunistic use of children to give citizenship to anyone! (*Tagadà*, June 23rd, 2017)

The almost identical speech was delivered on November 22 when the Senator was invited to the television show *L'aria che tira*. Here, asked about the bill, La Russa declared again:

> I know the law very well and I feel disappointed that … they speak about this draft law not knowing it …. They say it is enough for just one parent to be resident in Italy for five years. I would say it is the mother that should be resident, not a random parent because the father, we know that, it is always uncertain, and Italy shouldn't become Africa's delivery room.[26]

Italy as Africa's delivery room: "they" come here, "they" give birth to their Black babies, and "they" find someone who *pretends* to be the father in order to scrounge off the "generosity" of Italian citizenship promoted by the left. This, essentially, is the message La Russa was feeding the Italian electorate with.

In relation to the pregnant body, it is important to highlight that this specific body is shaped by a number of social practices and regulatory processes allowing specific forms of surveillance and scrutinisation by the state (Lee and Jackson 2002: 115). Yet, scrutinisation and surveillance seem particularly pronounced when the pregnant body is also a racialised body, considered "alien", not belonging to the nation and, therefore, potentially able to contaminate the purity of the Nation.

La Russa's vitriol came to my mind a few months later, on February 9, when I heard the story of a young Nigerian woman called Beauty[27]; one of those who, according to La Russa, comes here, gives birth and then finds someone to pass off as the father. Beauty S. was a 31-year-old Nigerian woman, coming from Africa indeed, and pregnant. The perfect candidate to confirm the effectiveness of La Russa's model. However,

[26] https://www.la7.it/laria-che-tira/video/ignazio-la-russa-usano-i-bambini-come-scudo-umano-il-pd-metta-la-legge-sullo-ius-soli-nel-programma-22-11-2019-294738, accessed May 30, 2021.

[27] Unlike Pamela Mastropietro, the surname of Beauty was not mentioned in any of the articles I read related to the facts.

Beauty did not need to find a fictitious partner to justify her presence in Italy, as she arrived with her husband, Destiny. What La Russa did not contemplate in his frothing tirades in the various television programmes he appeared, was that Beauty's pregnant body, allegedly using Italy as her "delivery room" was also a sick body, ravaged by a terminal illness. Beauty and Destiny had left Nigeria four years earlier and they reached the coast of Italy by boat, crossing the Mediterranean from Libya. The couple used to live in Naples, however, with the deterioration of her illness they decided to go to France to see Beauty's sister, in order to have a more stable situation ahead of her due date a few months later. Although Beauty was documented, Destiny was still an asylum seeker and therefore could not leave Italy. They tried to cross the border with France by coach on February 9, but they were stopped by French gendarmes. Beauty, who could have carried on the trip alone, decided to stay with Destiny and they were both brought back to Italy, at the train station in Bardonecchia at around two in the morning, despite her advanced state of pregnancy and serious respiratory problems caused by her illness. Here a local NGO took them closer to the hospital to be later transferred to the gynaecological department at Saint Anna Hospital, in Turin. Given Beauty's determination to save the foetus, doctors began an experimental phase of chemotherapy. Nevertheless, a month later during her 29th week of pregnancy, she gave birth to a 700-gram foetus by emergency Caesarean. Beauty died shortly after. Thus, it may seem Italy offered Beauty a delivery room but from that room she never came out.

Listening to La Russa's declarations, it becomes clear the Senator has conveniently forgotten Italy's historical presence in East Africa and how many Italian men made use of Africa seen as "pornotropics", namely "a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desire and fears (…) the quintessential zone of sexual aberration and abnormality", following the definition by Anne McClintock (1995). In 1905, more than 2000 Italians lived in Eritrea, defined as the 'first born colony' (Negash 1987). Among the 482 women who initially settled in the colony, only 73 were not married, while 80 per cent of the European men living in the colony were aged over 16 and were either unmarried or went to Africa without their wives (Barrera 2002: 23). Given such an unequal sex ratio, many Italian men had sexual relationships with Eritrean women, giving birth to the first generation of Black "mixed race" Italian children, commonly known as *meticci* (Pesarini 2017) Although some men recognised their offspring, many eventually abandoned both

women and children, especially those men whose time in Africa was temporary, such as military officials. In 1931, the number of Italians in Eritrea had risen to 4188. A third of the children born and recognised as Italians (515 individuals) were "mixed race", while the number of unrecognised children ranged approximately between 800 and 1000 according to missionary sources (Barrera 2002: 99). Only seven years later, in 1938, the Italian population skyrocketed to 68,000 members, mostly young single men (Sòrgoni 2003: 419). Such a massive increase in the male Italian population was owing to the fact that, between 1935 and 1936, 300,000 soldiers went to Eritrea in order to prepare for and fight the war against Ethiopia. The census conducted in 1938 showed the presence of 2518 "mixed race" children, 1291 of whom were recognised by their fathers and were therefore legally Italian (Gabrielli 1997: 101). All the others were living in the streets or left in Italian orphanages funded by the colonial government. It is also calculated that from 1940 to 1946 between 5000 and 7000 "mixed race" children were born in Eritrea, marking the 1940s as the highest period of inter-racial relationships (Barrera et al. 2008: 26). Considering this, one can ponder who treated which country as a "delivery room".

Racialisation and Exploitation of Women's Body

In both Beauty and Pamela's cases, one may notice the use of women's bodies, which are gendered and racialised, to build a complex discourse on the Nation and nationalism. In the case of Pamela, in fact, her dismembered white body seems to incarnate the body of the Nation. The havoc perpetrated on Pamela's body seems to be for Luca Traini the havoc that Black men, seen as an indistinct mass of criminals and drug dealers, commit on Italy. Therefore, the random killing of Black men symbolises the avenge of the violence performed on Pamela's body by Innocent Oseghale. The innocence and purity of Pamela were heavily emphasised by certain media targeting social media users. The online newspaper Fanpage.it, for instance, published an article on June 2019 portraying Pamela as a young and thin woman, victim of her borderline personality disorder which caused her addiction to heroin and irrational sexual promiscuity:

> A young and petite 18-year-old, big eyes, and a fringe of straight brown hair covering her forehead … Pamela Mastropietro is a restless girl, suffering with a borderline personality disorder that makes her a slave of drugs".[28]

By contrast, the fact that the killer of Pamela was not only a Black man, but also an asylum seeker with an expired permit who dealt drugs, triggered ferocious anti-Black and anti-refugee responses, diligently exploited on the social media by Salvini who, in the aftermath of the shooting spree on February 1, tweeted from his account:

> What was this worm doing in Italy? He was not fleeing war; he brought the war here in Italy. The Left have blood on their hands. This is another death caused by the State … Deportation, deportation, controls and more deportation!".[29]

And then there is Beauty's black, pregnant body. A dangerous body able to potentially contaminate the purity of the Nation due to its reproductive functions, if not accurately monitored and restricted by the State. Women's bodies are not just organic material, rather they can be considered political fields on which the State inscribes social messages. Thus, the rigid control of immigration reflects the fear of the invasion of other ethnic groups, potentially capable of obliterating the uniqueness of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997: 26). In this context, laws regulating the access to citizenship are of particular importance given that these allow foreigners to join the nation. Yuval-Davis illustrates how women, as "biological and cultural reproducers" of national ethnic collectivity (Yuval-Davis 1997: 26–27) have been historically stimulated or discouraged to procreate with certain ethnic groups. Not only do women have to be attentive of their own, potentially contaminating sexuality, but also of their own reproductive capacity since their children will be the new members of the nation. Consequently, the use of restrictive laws concerning the transmission of citizenship.

In the Italian debate on citizenship and blood occurred in 2017, it is interesting to note how not only male politicians from the far-right used

[28] "Fanpage.it" is an online newspaper belonging to the publishing group *Ciaopeople Media Group* https://www.fanpage.it/attualita/pamela-mastropietro-storia-dellomicidio-che-ha-ferito-il-paese/, accessed May 31, 2021.

[29] https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/959019984616869889,, accessed May 31, 2021.

women's reproductive rights to spread nationalistic and racist ideologies; also, female members of parliament from the left made use of the same strategies for opportunistic purposes. This was the case of Patrizia Prestipino, a candidate for the single-member constituency elections in Rome, and director of the department for animal protection under Matteo Renzi's leadership of the Democratic Party. On July 25, when Senator La Russa would talk about Black women and Africa's delivery room, Prestipino intervened to support Renzi's heavily criticised idea to create a "Department for Mums".[30] Interestingly, Prestipino's declarations released in a radio interview, resonated with La Russa's. In her speech, she explicitly mentioned the word "race" in relation to citizenship, confirming Yuval-Davis' theorisations on the use the State makes of the reproductive functions of women to perpetuate ideas of racialized identity. During the radio interview, Prestipino declared:

> Italy is a country at risks of not having Italian children anymore … if one wants to perpetuate our race, to call it that, it is obvious that we need to launch a concrete support plan for mothers and families … of course I am pro *Jus soli*, and I hope that the bill will pass as soon as possible, but it's clear that in Italy, Italians don't have children any longer. Thanks God the new Italians are having children, but Italians don't have children anymore. So, we need to start supporting mothers otherwise we risk extinction in Italy.[31]

Here Prestipino openly mentioned the word "race" in connection to Italian identity, suggesting that to protect and perpetuate "our race" (white), Italian mothers and families need to be helped. Failure to do this may cause, according to Prestipino, the "extinction" of the race itself. Even though, she expressed her support for the bill to reform the citizenship law, Prestispino made an implicit racial distinction between those she calls "Italians", who do not have children any longer; and "new" Italians who keep on having children. Despite the latter populating Italy, she implicitly suggested that the Nation may be reproduced only by certain bodies, that show specific biological features attributable to a certain race, "our race". Although Prestipino did not put the words race and white

[30] https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2017/07/24/news/pd_40_dipartimenti_esecutivi-171501631/, accessed May 31, 2021.

[31] https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2017/07/25/news/prestipino_pd_sostegno_a_mamme_per_continuare_razza_italiana-171600418/, accessed May 31, 2021.

together, white Italian women were used as the symbol of the nation to support the ideological construction of Italy as a white country.

A final cornerstone in this long journey exploring the racialisation of the Italian political discourse between 2017 and 2018 can be traced in January 2018. Before the shooting in Macerata, the killing of Idy Diene and Soumaila Sacko, before Beauty and Pamela; January 2018 was marked by some striking declarations made by Attilio Fontana, at the time Lega candidate campaigning to become governor of the Lombardy region, one of the historic cradles of the far-right party. Interviewed by "Radio Padania" in relation to immigrants, on January 15, Fontana said:

> It is a demagogical and unacceptable speech to say that 'we must accept them all'. It clearly is a matter in front of which we must react, we must rebel. We cannot accept them all. If we had to accept them all, this would mean that we would no longer exist as a social reality, as an ethnic reality, because they outnumber us, because they are much more determined than us to occupy this land. In the face of these claims, we must react, we can't accept them all. It is not a matter of being a xenophobe or racist, it is just a matter of being logical and rational. We cannot because we cannot all fit then we need to make some choices. We need to decide if our ethnicity, if our white race, if our society must continue or if our society needs to be wiped out. It's a choice. If the majority of Italians would say 'we want to self-eliminate ourselves', all right. It means that those we don't to self-eliminate themselves, will go somewhere else.[32]

These declarations, made 50 days before elections, sparked huge controversy and disapproval across the political spectrum. Many made reference to the fascist past and the Racial laws, with the president of the Jewish Community in Rome, Ruth Meneghello, expressing bewilderment and indignation having to hear about the defence of the white race on the 80th anniversary of the Racial Laws.[33] In order to divert the attention from his candidate's unwise and damaging declarations on race, Salvini intervened in the debate by affirming that "Italians are the least racist people in the world" due to Italian mass migration in the world, and pointing out how

[32] https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/01/15/attilio-fontana-lega-razza-bianca-e-rischio-dobbiamo-ribellarci-dopo-berlusconi-destra-e-gara-di-xenofobia/4093643/, accessed May 31, 2021.

[33] https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/01/15/news/elezioni_lombardia_attilio_fontana_centrodestra_razza_bianca_polemiche-186540209/, accessed May 31, 2021.

Italians abroad never asked for paid meals, hotels and cigarettes, unlike the 183,000 asylum seeks "camping out" in Italians squares.[34] Furthermore, Salvini also shifted the attention from race to religion, clarifying that the issue was not skin colour. According to the leader of Lega, in fact, Fontana warned Italians about some problems that the writer Oriana Fallaci had already predicted 15 years earlier, namely the risk of seeing centuries of history disappearing due to an underestimated "Islamification" takeover.[35]

Conclusion

This chapter showed the effects of the racialisation of the Italian political discourse between 2017 and 2018, on the 80th anniversary of the Racial Laws, enacted by the Fascist regime in 1938. The analysis was conducted using an intersectional approach in order to show how some specific categories relevant in this debate, were mutually constitutive and influenced each other. The categories chosen were race, gender and sexuality, blood and identity, and citizenship.

The chapter started by highlighting the relation between race and politics considering three shootings racially connotated that occurred in the first six months of 2018. The analysis of these incidents pointed out a strategic use of racist rhetoric adopted by the populist far-right party Lega, in order to gain votes in light of the general election. Race, however, was not the only factor characterising the racialisation of the Italian political discourse in 2017–2018. The intersectional perspective helped to reveal the historical intertwining of blood, identity and citizenship, which in conjunction with gender, played a crucial role for the formation of Italian identity since the second half of the nineteenth century.

The legacy of these dynamics was noticeable in summer 2017 when the Italian Senate, following a long period of contestations and demonstrations, inside and outside the Parliament, had to discuss the bill to reform the citizenship law, based on the principle of *Jus Sanguinis*. The reform contemplated the introduction of a moderated form of *Jus Soli* and *Jus Culturae* for children born in Italy to non-Italian nationals. The right and far-right heavily ostracised the bill by lumping citizenship rights, the

[34] https://www.secoloditalia.it/2018/01/salvini-gli-italiani-sono-il-popolo-meno-razzista-del-mondo-e-sui-vaccini-vi-dico/, accessed May 31, 2021.

[35] Lombardia, Fontana: troppi immigrati, razza bianca a rischio. Poi rettifica: lapsus - Il Sole 24 ORE, accessed May 31, 2021.

so-called refugee crisis and issues of immigration and security. This led to a polarisation of the debate on issues that were not related to the law (Tintori 2018: 446). A clear example showing some of the false claims spread by the far-right to steer the public opinion on *Jus Soli*, was provided by the analysis of Beauty's story, in conjunction with Senator Ignazio La Russa's claims. The Senator would insistently use the slogan "Africa's delivery room" to suggest a sudden presence of African women delivering their babies in Italy, had the bill been approved.

One of the major claims made by this article, concerns the exploitation and racialization of women's bodies and their reproductive capacities, to sustain a notion of Italian identity embedded in racist and white supremacist rhetoric. Drawing from Nira Yuval-Davis' conceptualisations, Beauty's story and Pamela's murder highlight how women are affected by nationalistic projects, and the use the State makes of their bodies given their role as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation. Finally, this intervention traced the historical importance of the idea of blood in relation to identity and citizenship to contextualise the use of certain words in the current Italian political discourse on immigration, and how this strategy generously rewarded far-right and populist parties that managed to go to power.

Between 2017 and 2018, Italian voters were exposed to months of vitriolic anti-Black and anti-immigrant rhetoric, and the effects of the political debates on issues of race, citizenship and identity produced sharp polarisations. Eventually, the final word was left in the hands of those who went to the ballot box in March 2018. The results were quite clear-cut. Despite making explicit references to the defence of the "white race", Lega's candidate Attilio Fontana became the Governor of the Lombardy region winning with 49.75 per cent of the votes[36]; Patrizia Prestipino was the most voted candidate of the centre-left in the single-member constituency elections in Rome, with more than 50,000 votes.[37] And Lega tripled its votes, gaining four extra million votes from the previous elections in 2013. In Macerata, in particular, Salvini's party skyrocketed from 0.6 per cent to 21 per cent only a month after the racist shooting spree committed by a former *Lega* candidate in Macerata. The people decided.

[36] https://www.regione.lombardia.it/wps/portal/istituzionale/HP/DettaglioRedazionale/istituzione/presidente/attilio-fontana-proclamato-nuovo-presidente-regione, accessed 31 May 2021

[37] https://www.romatoday.it/politica/elezioni/camera-senato-2018/patrizia-prestipino-piu-votata-a-roma.html, accessed 31 May 2021.

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South of What? In Search of Italy's Others

Stefania Bernini

Between 7 and 8 January 2010, hundreds of migrants took to the streets of the town of Rosarno, in Calabria. The protest followed a long series of attacks perpetrated by locals and culminated in the drive-by shooting of two migrants. Unlike on previous occasions, the protest turned violent, with widespread material damage inflicted on the town by the demonstrators. "This time they reacted, devastating everything they could reach", commented Giuseppe Baldassarro, reporting for the daily *La Repubblica* (G.B. 2010). As night fell, far more ferocious violence was exercised by locals against migrants, accused of having brought havoc to the town that had supposedly given them "shelter" (Bolzoni 2010; Ciavoni 2010).

Headlines across Italian media emphasized the shock produced by a "revolt" that made it impossible to ignore any longer the situation of migrants in the South. The looming regional elections and the fact that the Ministry of the Interior was held by the Lega's representative Roberto Maroni increased the political relevance of the crisis.

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Maroni's first interpretation of the events pointed to so-called illegal migration as the main source of the problem. However, it soon became clear that most of those involved had papers and had long worked in the Calabrian fields. The attention swiftly shifted to the South as an especially problematic context for migration. In the words of the Lega senator Federico Bricolo, no such things could happen "in the North, in Padania", where "trade unions" and "local public officials" would "never tolerate situations like this!" (Devitt 2011, 223).

Despite the Lega's characteristically boorish language, explanations pointing to the specificity of the Southern context thrived across the political spectrum, with particular insistence on the connivance between criminal organizations and Calabrian farmers. Comparatively little discussion took place over the root causes of the Rosarno's conflict, namely the crisis of southern agriculture, particularly in those areas most dependent on citrus fruits (Devitt 2010, 230). Instead, Rosarno became the symbol of the illegality and abuse that were supposedly bound to emerge when foreign migrants met the Italian south. Which is to say, when two marginalities met. In the widespread reading that pointed to the South as a peculiarly troublesome context for migration, two narratives converged: one concerning the South as Italy's historical other and one concerning the new challenges brought by migration to Italy's self-understanding.

This article explores the North–South duality that accompanied Italian history since unification and asks whether the *meridione* still represents Italy's internal Other.

The argument put forward is that while the anti-southern rhetoric remains strong in contemporary Italy, three factors have transformed and complicated the narrative of the North–South duality. These are: the transformation of Italy in a destination country for international migration; the repositioning of the Lega Nord (the Party that had most capitalized on the North–South duality) as a neo-nationalist party; and the emergence of European politics emphasizing the role of the Mediterranean as the southern border of the continent.

I argue that the growing presence of non-Italian migrants (and of African migrants in particular), together with the hardening of the Mediterranean border, produced a new and even stronger southern "Other", the significance of which was emphasized by the transformation of the Lega from a once separatist party into a nationalist/nativist force (Mudde 2019). As the southern rim of the Mediterranean became Italy's

new South, the *Meridione* acquired more and more the characteristics of a liminal space, a zone of complex encounters and transition, between Europe and a Mediterranean increasingly seen as a threatening wild space.

The Genesis of a Duality

The Italian North–South divide has been associated to a number of related (and unrelated) phenomena. Jane Schneider saw in it a version of Orientalism, with the North–South perspective acting as a way of administering power and resources (Schneider 1998, 1–23). For Lynda Dematteo, it could be considered a specifically Italian variant of anti-Semitism, emerging once one crossed the Alps (Dematteo 2007, 61). Italy's Southern question could also be seen as a manifestation of what Herzfeld described as a binary system working as a "key ordering principle of political inequality", or as an instance of James Fernandez's "popular cosmology", in which both Northerners and Southerners look at the *other* as different and morally inferior (Herzfeld 1997, 15; Fernandez 1997, 725–728).

Italy's North–South duality could also be seen as a product of nationalism and of the effort to create a centralized state (Kondratowitz 2013, 81; Fargion 1997, 134–154). In many ways, nationalism brought within the boundaries of a single country the system of classification that the colonial project had already established across the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. As in the case of several other "Orients", Italy's South was also built through travel accounts, scientific analyses, political speeches, and a variety of cultural representations (Moe 1999, 145–175).

On the map, Italy gives the illusion of obvious geographical boundaries. The apparent straightforwardness of those physical lines, however, contrasts sharply with the symbolic and cultural borders that criss-cross the country. Already during the Risorgimento, the impression of geographical distinctiveness given by the Alps to the north and by the sea to the east, west and south of the country, clashed dramatically with the fragmented cultural and political makeup of a territory lacking "unifying political institutions" able to act as the foundation of national identity (Lyttelton 2001, 31). The significance of the North–South axis increased in the aftermath of unification, as Italy's achievements and shortcomings started to be measured largely against the model of the great (northern) European powers. Located at the southern periphery of Europe, Italian politicians saw the transformation of Italy's South as an essential condition

for the achievement of a fully European power status (Petrusewicz 1998; Pescosolido 2019).

In the first years of unification, few doubted that this transformation would be achieved. According to a probably apocryphal account of Cavour's death, the Count allegedly spent his last words to predict that freed from the *mal governo* of the past, the Southern regions would soon become "the richest provinces of the Kingdom". Irrespectively of its veracity, the story testified the faith in the modernizing potential of unification that characterized both the Risorgimento and the first stage of post-unitarian history.

Against this early optimism, however, a fundamental ambiguity soon emerged between the commitment to the southern cause and the representation of the South as inexorably other (Moe 1999, 52; Dickie 1992, 2–24). Such ambiguity informed the writings that came to constitute the initial canon of the *southern question*, from Pasquale Villari's *Lettere meridionali*, written in 1875, to the inquiries conducted by Leopoldo Franchetti and Sydney Sonnino in the same period. None of these writers and politicians doubted that the success of unification depended on the ability of the new Italian state to bring health and prosperity to the ailing regions of the South. In their effort to make the South a national question, however, they ended up reinforcing not only images of misery and affliction, but also the "otherness" of lands awaiting to be made "Italian". The irreproachable goal of stimulating investments contributed to create a binary moral geography in which the South was inexorably represented as a place of backwardness and alterity.

The Biological Turn

The North–South duality found an even harsher declination at the turn of the century. Following the biological turn, championed in Italy by Cesare Lombroso, the Sicilian Alfredo Niceforo, reformulated in racial terms differences and inequalities that had so far been understood mostly politically.

Relying on the "truly marvelous precision instrument" of statistics to compile a catalog of the essential characters of northern and southern Italians, Niceforo argued that two races existed in Italy (Patriarca 1996; Teti 1993; Nani 2006; Montaldo 2014). While the typical Venetian was "brachycephalic, tall and of chestnut coloring", the typical Sicilian was a "Mediterranean dolichocephalic, short and of dark colors". This, pointed out Niceforo, did not need to be a problem, since "belonging to the same

people or to the same nation" did not equal belonging "to the same race or anthropological type" (Niceforo 1906 26; Caglioti 2017; Quine 2013).

Biological, social, and economic factors conjured up in generating and maintaining differences in appearance and behavior. A certain "nature of the soil" promoted wealth, "better physical development", "greater civilization", and "modernity". In other cases, the soil itself fostered poverty, the "physiological misery of men, the rarefaction of population and the root of barbarism" (Niceforo 1901, 51, 1906, 97). While the fertile planes of Lombardy had produced a flourishing economy and civilization, the latifundia of the South had delivered poverty and decay (Niceforo 1906, 135). Niceforo's conclusion was that the South was a "great colony in need of civilization"; it was the duty of the state to find the way to reverse the biological and social deterioration underway (Niceforo 1898, 4).

Niceforo's "two-races" theory, was officially discarded in 1938, when the Manifesto of Racial Scientists proclaimed that "the population of Italy" was uniformly "Aryan".

Although Niceforo had continued to work under the auspices of Fascism, his "two races" model conflicted with the politics of the regime. The colonial enterprise and the anti-Semitic turn pursued by Mussolini dictated that the any idea of racial differentiation within Italy should be abandoned. In 1939, Mussolini used his first visit to Calabria to explain that the "Southern Question" had been an invention of the liberal governments that had no place in Fascist Italy. In fascist Italy only "a National Question" could exist, since "the nation [was] a family where there [were no privileged or derelict sons!" (Caglioti 2017, 476–477; Gillette 2001). As new and more radical forms of racist exclusion were put in place by the regime, the fault lines of the past had to be rethought.

Ruth Ben-Ghiat has argued that Mussolini's racial policy had far deeper roots than the alliance with Nazi Germany and that some of them could be traced to "long-standing anxieties about 'primitive' elements within the national population" (Ben-Ghiat 2001, 3–4). In a similar vein, Angelo Caglioti insisted that both the emergence of "nineteenth century scientific racism" and Mussolini's racial politics found their roots in the "insecurity over the racial status of the Italian South in the European hierarchy of a colonial world" (Caglioti 2017, 462).

At the turn of the century, scientific racism had transformed the Southern question into a racial and anthropological issue and strengthened the image of the South as Italy's internal colony. The racial understanding of the socialist Niceforo, however, had not excluded the

recognition of being part of a common nation; on the contrary, he had insisted on the duty of the state to do all it could to reduce social and economic inequalities. The nationalist and anti-Semitic turn pursued by fascism substituted this narrative with a new racist classification, in which the "aryan" nation was now upheld against the dangerous and foreign Jews and the inferior and dispensable African colonial subjects.

Two distinct but interlocked narratives were therefore created. The narrative of the feeble internal Other in need of rescue and reform and the narrative of the menacing foreigner to be kept away. Both would find space in postwar Italy, each prevailing at different times.

The Southern Question in the Republic

As Italy emerged from the material and moral ashes of war, the "Southern question" seemed once again, to many, the most critical issue to be confronted in the path toward recovery. Postwar politicians and observers, as nineteenth-century *meridionalisti* before them, called for urgent economic interventions while continuing to emphasize "the exceptional nature of the South, its peculiarity and radical difference with respect to the rest of Italy" (Moe 1999, 54). The new institutions created by postwar governments with the explicit aim of "bridging the gap", first among them the 'Associazione per lo sviluppo dell'industria nel Mezzogiorno' (SVIMEZ), brought money to the South while contributing to crystallize the idea of a more or less uniform "Southern" region, whose main characteristic was its supposed difference from the North (Patriarca 1998, 92; Donzelli 1990).[1] A similar impact had the *Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia* conducted between 1951 and 1952 (Braghin 1978).

Even the most perceptive accounts could not avoid an ambiguous impact on the cultural understanding of the South. In 1945, the publication of Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, offered an important contribution to the possibility of a reappraisal of the Southern Question. His poetic view of an isolated reality, however, also strengthened the image of a South almost inaccessible to the comprehension of others. The anthropological studies conducted by Ernesto De Martino throughout the fifties and the sixties, sharpened the understanding of the diversity and

[1] The journal *Meridiana*, published by the 'Istituto per lo studio della società meridionale', represented the important outcome of historians and social scientists' mounting reaction against the tendency to use generalizing categories to talk about the South.

complexity that characterized the South, but his narrative of modernization risked contributing to the image of the *meridione* as a place of fascinating otherness and unmitigated backwardness (De Martino 1958).

In postwar Italy as in earlier periods, the domestic gaze was significantly reinforced by that of foreign visitors, starting from Anglo-American scholars imbued of reformist intentions. Researchers such as E.P. Banfield, Joseph La Palombara and later Robert Putnam were captivated by what seemed to them an extraordinary contrast between Italy's remarkable virtues and some equally remarkable shortcomings. Banfield saw in a particular form of familism the dominant explanation for Southern Italy's lack of social progress. If only Southerners could learn to cooperate, putting aside the imperative to maximize the short-term interest of their immediate circle, their "backward" society could be transformed (Banfield 1958). In the early 1970s, Percy Allum brought back from a very critical perspective the image of the South as a "colony within the metropolis", with politics and economics largely dictated from the outside, in which corruption and dubious political interests festered (Allum 1975, 7). Years later, Robert Putnam attempted a quantitative analysis of the presumed unequal distribution of *civicness* across the country (Putnam 1993). The result was once again to reinforce an image of Italy based on a dramatic duality in terms of civic and political culture.

Traumatic Encounters

The pervasiveness of stereotypes within Italian society found its first and most dramatic representation in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when mass migration produced an encounter of unprecedented proportions between Northern and Southern Italians.

Testimonies and analyses leave little doubt on how traumatic and full of suspicion and prejudice those encounters often were. In the main industrial cities of the North, where the intensity of migration from the South had the power to transform the social makeup of the city, the clash was often unmitigated.

An inquiry conducted by the 'Centro di ricerche industriali e sociali' di Torino in 1962 with the aim of estimating similarities and differences in terms of sociocultural values between locals and immigrants found widespread sentiments of hostility toward the newcomers. More than 53% of the families interviewed declared that they did not wish to have someone from Calabria as a friend or relative, similar sentiments were expressed by

47.7% of those interviewed toward people from Puglia, by 44.3% against Sicilians and 42.6% against Neapolitans. Moreover, a significant majority of those interviewed subscribed to a long list of negative stereotypes: Southerners were lazy, backward in their understanding of sexual and family relations, prone to criminality, uninterested in the public good. The most commonly shared opinion concerned the peculiarly enduring idea that Southerners "produced a lot of children in the expectation that others would take care of them" (Anfossi 1962, 258; Lanaro 1992, 236–239; Fofi 1964; Paci 1964; Galeotti 1971; Ascolani et al. 1974). Research conducted in Milan and Genoa in the same period, revealed similar stereotypical representations (Foot 2001, 43–46).

As Anna Badino's research on the experience of children of Southern migrants in Turin showed, the trauma resulting from finding themselves in openly hostile social environments traveled through generations. Migrants' children felt themselves as outsiders, both within and outside the school: "When you arrived, you were a different person, from the teachers, from the mothers… for them we were different people" (Badino 2012, 50; Cavalli 1978, 275–277).

Reactions against migrants could be marked by suspicion and hostility even in those cities where the impact of migration had been far more modest than in the industrial triangle of the North. A social enquiry conducted in 1958 in Florence's newly built housing estate *Isolotto*, revealed widespread prejudice against families coming from the South. The result was a determinate effort by Florentine families to avoid contacts, keeping themselves to themselves in the street and forbidding children from familiarizing with their peers from migrant families (Bernini 2010, 409–410). Similar social fractures were mapped by sociologists and urban planners working in new and old neighborhoods across central and northern Italy (Foot 2001, 53–55).

The ideological potential of the simmering resentments harbored against southern migrants became fully visible long after population movement from the South to the North had reached their peak. It was in fact the rise and consolidation of Northern Italian separatist movements in the 1980s that gave origin to the most systematic political exploitation of migration in the pursuit of a new form of ethnic politics at both regional and national level.

Migration as Ideological Tool: The Arrival of the Lega Nord

Born in the late 1980s from the federation of several autonomist movements, the Lega started its apparently unstoppable march while Italy's political system was crumbling under the weight of international events and domestic scandals (Costantini 1994; Bertolini and Soncini 1992; Huysseune 2006).[2] Having emerged as the second political force in Lombardy at the administrative elections of May 1990, the Lega managed to obtain 85 MPs at the political elections held in April 1992. The alliance stipulated between the Lega's leader Umberto Bossi and Silvio Berlusconi in the following year sanctioned the role of the Lega as a national political player.

The identity discourse put forward by the Lega rested on a combination of racism, self-victimization and subversiveness. Northern Italy was presented as an exploited and occupied land, plagued by successive waves of migrations and protracted institutional and political oppression. In the Lega's reading of Italian history, southern migrants had completed the institutional and political hegemony already exercised by Rome, as part of a strategy aimed to subjugate the North. At the core of the Lega's message was the call to resist the greedy hegemony of Rome and to reject the Italian state's illusory aim of "creating a utopian Italian homogenization" through the (cultural and economic) "annihilation" of the peoples of the North. When in power in local administrations, the Lega adopted a variety of symbolic gestures meant to signify its rejection of Roman control. Among the party's newly invented traditions were the Lega mayors' refusal to swear allegiance to the Prefects, the substitution of the national anthem with Verdi's *Va pensiero*, and the replacement of the national flag with local symbols or with the newly introduced *sole delle alpi* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Huysseune 2006).

More importantly for this article, the Lega built upon long-held stereotypes to present Southerners as the carriers of an inescapable alterity, rooted in their Mediterranean origins. As a Lega militant's letter to Autonomia Lombarda explained in the late 1980s, southern migration

[2] The new federation included larger movements from Veneto and Lombardy and smaller organizations from Piedmont, Liguria, Toscana and Emilia Romagna. Although the movements run under the banner of the Liga Veneta in 1984, by 1987 the Lega Lombarda had emerged as the leading force among the northern autonomist movements.

had "completely transformed the preexisting social reality" of the North, corrupting the local ways with the "bad practices", the "way of living" and the Arabic mentality of the South". Southerners prowess to criminality ("the only profession in which they excel") made the situation all the more serious. All in all, migrants had produced "enormous ethnic damages" (Costantini 1994, 155).

"Arabic" stood here for inferior, lazy, uncivilized. It was the mark of a corrupting and parasitic culture, determined to exploit the productive and laborious people of the North.

> It is us Lombards who are left to suffer, we have been crashed. The masters of Milan have become *terroni*. You go to the police: Southerners; you go to the municipal police: Southerners; the Prefect: a Southerner; the council clerks: Southerners; the court: Southerners… so, who can help us? (Costantini 1994, 160)

The theme of the double occupation informed the symbolism of the Lega since its origins.

Umberto Bossi's first political movement, the Lega Autonomista Lombarda, had paid tribute to the league of the communes that in the XII century had joined forces against Frederick Barbarossa, himself taken as a symbol of a centralizing and foreign power. In the nineteenth century, the Lega lombarda had been celebrated by patriotic writers as a symbol of resistance against tyranny and of struggle for a free and unified Italy. Bossi subverted the narrative of the Risorgimento, by shrinking the notion of *patria* to the silhouette of a region. Accordingly, Lega's representatives were asked to swear allegiance not to national institutions but to the "cause of independence" and to the Party that presented itself as the sole advocate of the will of the people of the North (Vimercati 1990; Brunello 1996).

Assigning political value to the supposed cultural identity of the North, the Lega defined new symbolic lines of inclusion and exclusion. The idea of federalism put forward by Bossi looked at multicultural/multiethnic societies as bound to mortify any sense of "social generosity" and as conducive to social anomie and related pathological behaviors (Bossi and Vimercati 1991; Petrosino 1988). Immigration was rejected as a source of "imbalances in regional development". What Bossi called "integral federalism" pursued a society based on "integration and love", but only among those who shared culture and identity (Costantini 1994, 73).

As Paul Ginsborg observed, Bossi had abandoned narrow definitions of ethnic specificity already in the late 1980s, in favor of a broader agenda in which economic interests and attitudes were as important as ancestors (Ginsborg 1998, 330). This, however, did nothing to reduce the emphasis on the North–South duality. On the contrary, in a reinvention of Niceforo's approach, the Lega insisted that insurmountable social and cultural differences separated Northerners (assimilated to North-Western Europeans), and Southerners, considered akin to "Arab-Greek-Mediterranean" civilizations.

When accused of racism, *Leghisti* affirmed their right to defend their own ethnocultural identity against attempts to reduce them "to an irrelevant minority in their own land" (Dematteo 2007, 82). Interviewed by Dematteo, the Lega activist Daniele Belotti remarked that non-Italian observers failed to understand the essential difference that existed between Northern and Southern Italians. While they thought "that between Trent [...] and Palermo [...] there are simply Italians", he felt "no affinity with a Sicilian". When he tried to name which specific cultural traits were shared by the peoples of the North, Belotti could only do so in opposition to the stereotypes usually associated to the South. Northerners refused "economic assistance" and mobilized for the common good (Dematteo 2007, 82; De Luna 1994).

As Dematteo observed, "racism" found its first expression in Italy not in nationalist terms, as for instance in France, but in terms of locality. The Lega's hostility toward multiculturalism was motivated by the fear that it would endanger the basic communities of individual belonging: the family, the neighborhood and the village (Dematteo 2007, 12; Ginsborg 1998, 331–334). It was a vision embedded in social nostalgia and built upon a myth of cultural homogeneity, which created a specific form of intolerance encompassing both Southerners and, later, non-Italian migrants (Ricolfi 1993; Diamanti 1993; Biorcio 1997). Although different in degree of unwelcomeness, both the *terrun* and the *vu' cumprà* remained inexorably "other".

Invented Traditions, Demographic Struggles and Changing Geographical Minds

The Lega's invention of an ethnic specificity of the peoples of the North reinforced the binary imagine of Italy as divided between a virtuous and advanced North and an individualistic and backward South. In the new

mythology forged by the Lega, the *Padani* became the descendants of the Celts once forced by the Romans into the valleys of the Alps. Rather than as the natural frontier between Italy and its northern neighbors, the Alps were reinvented as the place of ethnic/cultural resistance to the menacing power of Rome.

New symbolic frontiers also emerged, in the planes of Emilia Romagna and along the river Po. Italy's main river had long represented a symbolic line of demarcation between political cultures (the Christian democratic culture of the north-east and the communist culture of Emilia Romagna) and between systems of land tenure (sharecropping and *bracciantato*). It now became also a line of supposedly ethno-cultural distinction.

The ritual of the ampoule, in which water collected from the Po's spring in Piedmont was poured into the Venice's basin, was introduced by the Lega in September 1996 and immediately seemed to many one of the most bizarre performances invented by Bossi's party. Repeated annually, the rite was supposed to evoke a sense of belonging among the peoples of Padania. According to Dematteo, the celebration contained also a promise of growth and renewal, including in demographic terms. The Po, suggested Dematteo, acted not only as a border, but also as symbol of fertility and sexual energy, "containing the world that will come" (Dematteo 2007, 67).

The interpretation is suggestive. The Lega's rhetoric not only established a clear duality between a dynamic and vital North, and a passive and decaying South, but it also never tired of emphasizing the economic costs generated by the South's greater fertility rates. Resisting the economic weight of the South and the colonizing power of Rome, required the demographic revitalization of the North (Huysseune 2000).

Despite the Lega's auspices, however, no demographic recovery took place in the 1990s, neither in northern Italy nor in the rest of the country. On the contrary, in 1993 Italy's natural growth rate became structurally negative. Contrary to the wishes of the Lega, migration from abroad became the sole cause of the tentative demographic recovery that appeared since the mid-90s.

As in the case of internal migration, the economically stronger areas of the country were the first to see a significant growth in population as a result of immigrants' influx. In a paradox destined to last a long time, the industrial North in which the Lega thrived was also the area of the country in which the presence of foreign immigrants quickly became a stable and integrated component of the economy. Far from encouraging a rethinking

of its position on migration, the Lega quickly inserted migrants from abroad in its consolidated rhetoric designed to fuel anxiety over newcomers.

In the mid-1990s, the first instance of mass migration to Italy from Albania was promptly presented by the Lega as an attempt at colonization. As the responsible for the Lega nord Emilia, Maurizio Parma explained, militants wondered whether the Albanians whom the government intended to relocate should be considered refugees or colonizers. He had little doubt that they represented "people imposed by the central and centralizing government, with the complicity of local administrations" (Ansaldo 1997; Passalacqua 1997). It was a position that would reemerge every time the central government asked the regions of the North to take in a quota of newly arrived migrants and refugees.

The rise of the Lega in the 1980s and early 1990s had been part of a broader phenomenon that had seen the birth and expansion of autonomist movements across Europe. Accordingly, the Lega of the origins had taken up an autonomist stance and emphasized the ethnic and cultural specificities of the North, representing Southerners as inherently different and inferior.

The transformation of the Lega into a party of government and changing social circumstances, first of all in relation to migration, determined a progressive transformation of the party's ideological and strategic stance. In the 2000s, the increase in foreign immigration and the emergence on the international scene of new right-wing movements that opposed migration from a nationalist perspective produced a radical redefinition of the Lega's position, which became fully manifest under the leadership of Matteo Salvini.

Having succeeded Umberto Bossi as party's secretary in 2013, Salvini sought to transform the party (maimed by internal scandals and dwindling electoral support) in a national populist force. Following the example of other right-wing nationalist forces across Europe, Salvini found new enemies outside Italy's borders. As the League moved further to the right (even dialoguing with neo-fascist movements such as Casa Pound), an anti-European neo-nationalist agenda replaced earlier narratives of internal separation (McDonnell and Vampa 2016; Pajnik et al. 2016). A new threatening other, and a new South, swiftly emerged in the Lega's propaganda. As "uncontrolled migration" from Africa became the new enemy, the Mediterranean, once the signifier of the alterity of Italy's South, was reconfigured as a border of exclusion to be guarded at all costs. Migrants were no longer a threat solely to the cultural and ethnic integrity of the North, but also to the newly discovered nation (Diamanti 2016).

The Mediterranean as a Border and the Transformation of Italy's South

The transformation of Italy in a country of immigration was deeply entangled with the growing understanding of the Mediterranean as a fault line. The emergence of the Mediterranean as Europe's most critical border was only partly the result of the intensification of migration. An equally important role was played by European politics increasingly geared toward the abolition of the EU's internal borders and the parallel creation of common external frontiers. In the mid-1990s, the implementation of the Schengen Agreement granted unprecedented freedom of movements to most European citizens. The EU's external border, however, grew in significance and complexity (Schain 2019, 53–54).

While member states agreed to transfers of sovereignty to the EU as far as internal migration was concerned, their steps were far more timid and inconclusive with regard to the treatment of non-EU immigrants (Schain 2019, 7).[3]

The redefinition of the Mediterranean as a crucial political frontier and the initiatives taken by individual countries and the EU toward migration carried with them the unshakable image of *fortress Europe*. As the movement of peoples across the water intensified, so did the number of agencies engaged in the effort of controlling the sea. In Jaquemet's words, "the EU's radio and satellite curtains, backed up by border patrols" acted as "the dematerialized equivalent of the fortified walls of Medieval Europe", "the late-modern solution for detecting undesirable subjects well before they enter protected territory" (Jaquemet 2020, 131; Pace 2006). The oft-repeated claim according to which border controls were aimed at avoiding deaths at sea, were systematically disproved by reality. In the early 2000s, intensified movements from the southern rim produced both an escalation in the patrolling of Europe's southern border and a steady rise in migrants' deaths, quickly rendering the Mediterranean "the deadliest border in the world" (Schain 2019, 15; Bicchi 2018).

In Italy, the acceleration of movement and conflict across the sea increased the distance between different understanding of both migration

[3] The Lisbon treaty of 2009 established a common frame "on asylum, immigration and external border control" (arts. 67(2) and 79(2), but left to member state control over the volume of admissions (Art. 79(5)).

and the Mediterranean. A growing polarization emerged between those who looked at migration as the result of the unsettled and unequal nature of economic and political relations across the Mediterranean and those for whom the sea represented a border between peoples bearing incompatible histories and traditions.[4] Salvini's Lega was quick to build upon the idea of migrants from abroad as the new "dangerous class", a menace to Italy's safety and identity (Chebel d'Apollonia 2012).

The stigmatization of foreign migrants by Salvini well reflected a common feature of "twenty-first century new nationalism", a phenomenon that Christian Joppke described as "a world apart" from the "optimistic" nationalism of the nineteenth century, geared toward nation-building (Joppke 2021; Eger and Valdez 2015). Nineteenth-century nationalism contained a modernizing and emancipatory element, which played an important role in the genesis of the "Southern Question". The Neo-nationalism of the twenty-first century, by contrast, was entirely concentrated on preserving existing boundaries and separating "us" from "them". Salvini succeeded in making this new exclusionary nationalism the new home of a once separatist party. The social fracture between Northern and Southern Italy that the early Lega had emphasized was now replaced by a new narrative of national unity against a common danger, coming from a new and deeper South. The Meridione was reinvented as an extensive border of exclusion, the last bastion against the "attack" coming from the Mediterranean south (Musi 2018).

Between Violence and Civility: The New Liminality of Italy's South

In the Southern regions of Italy, the intensification of migration meant that territories historically marked by mass emigration became quickly home to a growing number of people often deprived of both legal status and networks of protection.

The occasional explosion of simmering tensions, such as the Rosarno revolt from which I started, did much to shape the image of the South as

[4] With a certain level of simplification, it could be argued that the first position adopted a broadly postcolonial perspective, while the second followed Samuel Huntington's *clash of civilizations* thesis, applying it to the Mediterranean. See among others, Chambers (2008), Giaccaria and Minca (2011); for the second, Huntington (1996), Bottici and Challand (2006).

a space of precarious accommodation and widespread abuse. A territory where national institutions were barely in control and illegality and conflict thrived. Next to this image, however, another soon unfolded around the civic mobilization and solidarities from below that migration also elicited. These two narratives, illegality and marginality versus the effort to reclaim social and political agency, often coexisted as the two faces of the same phenomenon.

The "Rosarno's revolt" well-represented the multiple narratives that emerged from the transformation of the South in a place of immigration. As well as showing the enduring power of criminal organizations in the South, the events of Rosarno encouraged a response from below to the inertia of institutions.[5] As the association 'Radici/Rosarno' put it, 9th January 2010 showed that "real anti-racist politics" required both "real" knowledge of migration and the willingness to develop processes based on "analysis and shared decisions."[6] For the following decade, the events of January 2010 were commemorated through artistic and cultural events, as well as through more traditional political initiatives, while a number of small and large associations found in Rosarno a reference point for activism. The initiatives that flourished around Rosarno, in which both Italian Southerners and immigrants reclaimed voice and visibility, were not an isolated case. A number of actors across Southern regions, including both independent associations and local institutions, insisted on the need of dealing with complex problems through an approach based on civic participation and shared responsibilities. The radical experiment in integration conducted by Domenico Lucano, the mayor of the small town of Riace (also in Calabria), and the outspoken position taken by the mayor of Lampedusa Giusi Nicolini on the duty of rescuing and protecting migrants at sea captured international attention in their efforts to present counter-narratives to the logic of exclusion that had come to dominate both European and national migration politics.

[5] Among the most significant political initiatives was the national "migrants strike" proclaimed on the 1 March 2010 with the aim of highlighting the essential economic role played my migrants in Italian economy; see among others, Antonella Cardone, "La prima volta degli stranieri in sciopero", "La Repubblica", February 24, 2010, https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2010/02/24/la-prima-volta-degli-stranieri-in-sciopero.html?ref=search, accessed April 17, 2021.

[6] "Dalla rivolta verso la rivoluzione: il 7 gennaio 20111 la comunità africana di Rosarno ci ha insegnato la democrazia", Rete Radici Rosarno, Saturday, January 7, 2012, http://reteradici.blogspot.com/, accessed April 17, 2021.

Reappropriated from below and reclaimed by at least part of southern civil society, places such as Rosarno, Riace, and Lampedusa became sites of memory and active critique to the mismanagement of migration. They also became a powerful rebuke of images of the South as passive and corrupted.

As illegality wrestled with civic engagement and political activism, and old social and economic issues met the most complex consequences of globalization, the South appeared both as a mirror of Italy's shortcomings and as the country's critical conscience.

Conclusions

Edward Said argued that the Occident had constructed the Orient as "its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience". He also argued that such construction was instrumental to a particular exercise of authority and power. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Italy's "Southern question" offered to a newly unified country whose political and economic motor was solidly anchored in the North, "its complementary other half", a "complement" within the same country.[7] The creation of Italy's South was in significant measure a product of national unification. For over a century, the Southern Question shaped both the narrative of a country depicted as fatally divided and the style of governing the South. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, the arrival of the Lega on the political scene brought the North–South duality to its extreme conclusions. Bossi's party campaigned for the separation of the North using long-standing stereotypes, now deployed to argue the irreconcilable alterity of the Italian *peoples.*

This long-established duality, started to falter at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as the result of the intensification of international migration, the transformation of a once secessionist party into a neo-nationalist force, and the transformation of the Mediterranean into a militarized external border by the EU.

As foreign migrants took the place once occupied by Southerners as Italy's Other and the Mediterranean became the country's most significant border, a new "South" emerged, showing all the characters once

[7] I am here paraphrasing Larry Wolff's (1994, 4) description of the "invention of Eastern Europe as a product of eighteenth-century Western Europe, as "its complement within the same continent".

attributed to the *Meridione* (from poverty to cultural and social backwardness), only in a purer and more intense form.

Italy's South, by contrast, appeared more and more as a zone of transition where inclusion and exclusion found a complicated articulation. The new in-betweenness of Italy's South encompassed political, cultural and geopolitical realms. In the neo-nationalist narrative, Italy's southern regions came to represent the last frontier of Western civilization, the extreme outpost of Europe before the watery border of the sea. For those who resisted this reading and insisted on the need to find new forms of accommodation in the face of migration, the South represented the place where narratives of centuries-long encounters and contamination could find new declinations.

As it is often the case, art rather than political analysis offered, perhaps, the best representation of the ambiguous and changing position of Italy's South.

Since 2008, the *Porta di Lampedusa-Porta d'Europa* by Mimmo Paladino stands as a huge door frame on Lampedusa's (and Europe's) southernmost tip. Paladino's gate faces and frames the sea. Depending on the position of the viewer, the work marks the geographical end or the beginning of Italy and Europe. As its name suggested, the Lampedusa Gate was also Europe's Gate. At the time of the construction, the work was presented by Paladino as a meditation on travel and the sea, as well as an image of openness and hope. In the following decade, thousands of deaths at sea transformed the Gate into a place of memory and commemoration. The Gate provides also a powerful representation of the South as a place of transit and transition, its meaning constantly open to reinterpretation.

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The Italian *White Burden*: Anti-racism, Paternalism and Sexism in Italian Public Discourse

Gaia Giuliani and Carla Panico

In 1995, at a time when intersectionality issues had just entered the Western feminist debate (Hooks 1981; Rich 1984; Hill Collins 1989; Crenshaw 1989; Frankenberg 1993; Mohanty 2003), Kumari Jayawardena

In the case of Gaia Giuliani, this article is an outcome of the project "(De) Othering: Deconstructing Risk and Otherness: hegemonic scripts and counter-narratives on migrants/refugees and 'internal Others' in Portuguese and European mediascapes" (Reference: POCI-01-0145- FEDER-029997), funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology FCT (DL57/2016/CP1341/CT0025, CES-SOC/UID/50012/2019) and FEDER, the European Regional Development Fund, through the COMPETE 2020 Operational Programme for Competitiveness and Internationalization (POCI), and by other Portuguese institutions through the FCT. In the case of Carla Panico, the author acknowledges the support of the Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation (FCT) through the PD/BD/142794/2018 scholarship.

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published *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule* (1995), in which she examined the relationship between whiteness, the civilising mission and notions of womanhood and sisterhood in the colonial era. As her research makes clear, in colonial times, far beyond the British Empire's borders, humanitarianism was presented as the benevolent (and female) side of colonial rule, while colonial violence was implied to be merely a response to the need to control the colonised "barbarian" who might not be willing to be subjected to the forces of progress and the idea of white superiority. Together with many other postcolonial feminist thinkers, she therefore engaged in historical research that could shed light on the relationship between the colonial feminisation of the civilising mission and the contemporary white hegemonic feminist approach to race and cultural difference.

This chapter aims to contribute to this feminist research through an analysis of the Italian "white burden", namely the Italian white anti-racist imaginary and the implications of its humanitarian discourse for certain figures within the civilising mission. As anti-racist feminist scholars engaged in a constant deconstruction of public discourses on, and iconographies of, race and whiteness, questioning the white normative imaginary behind both humanitarianism and securitarianism, we are committed to a critical analysis of this discourse in order to reveal some of its "racial grammar" (Said 1993). Our research's method connects a postcolonial critique to an intersectional approach, using critical visual studies, as well as critical security and border studies.

We have applied a critical discourse analysis of iconographies and mainstream visual discourses on migrant and refugee flows towards Italy to newsmedia, photojournalism, cinema and interviews on these topics with journalists, activists, film-makers and artists that Gaia Giuliani conducted online (between May and November 2020) for the Italian case-study of the "(De)Othering" project (see note n. 1 infra). More specifically, our chapter aims to unpack the colonial and racist archive (Stoler 2002; Wekker 2016) underpinning this grammar through a visual and discursive analysis of white anti-racist iconographies.

In claiming the coloniality of the Italian hegemonic humanitarian discourse, we do not imply the direct legacy of the civilising mission in all contemporary white anti-racist humanitarianism: a constellation of grassroots solidarity practices organised by leftist as well as catholic collectives, movements, and associations take place every day in Italy focusing on migrants and refugees' rescue at sea, recovering from traumas caused by

border violence, individual and collective basic needs (e.g. sheltering, food, job, health, legal support and language skills), and the creation of communities for mutual aid. Their actions are based on an analysis which sees border regimes as the ultimate outcome of global neoliberal capitalism and its neocolonial power relations, and the reproduction of racial inequalities they sustain and are based on (Gilmore 2020). They acknowledge migrants' "right to escape" (Mezzadra 2001, 2004), and also claim European and national responsibility for border "necropolitics" (Mbembe 2003).

Rather, we engage here in an analysis that locates the hegemonic humanitarian discourse of EU and Italian institutions—as well as cooperatives and major NGOs involved by local and national institutions to participate in the management of migrants' detention as well as sheltering (that what has been labelled as the 'business of immigration')—within the same "discursive order" of the mission. Many differences in engaging with the hegemonic humanitarian discourse can be found in Italy among grassroots and more institutional humanitarian organisations, and the latters' a-critical adhesion to the neocolonial feature of this discourse often clashes with the grassroots' humanitarian actions that *de facto* counteract it. In our opinion, these practices and the way they contrast with the hegemonic humanitarian discourse do not emerge in the public—for a number of reasons—and offer an alternative to the dominant narratives of migration. As argued by analysts, journalists and activists like Angela Azzaro, Annalisa Frisina and Mackda Ghebramariam Tesfau', among these reasons there is the reluctance of mainstream media to give space to anything that could challenge an alleged We/They opposition and the polarisation between hegemonic humanitarianism and militarised securitarianism structuring the political agenda of Italian governments and parties (Azzaro, interview, 13/06/2020; Tesfau', interview, 26/05/2020; Frisina, interview, 22/09/2020). Moreover, whenever a more radical stance emerges in the public sphere it becomes the target of an increasing criminalisation of grassroots solidarity (see the current Italian law on immigration, Maneri 2019; Tazzioli 2018). In our opinion, the criminalisation of grassroots solidarity together with the silencing of the many humanitarian interventions on the European national territories function as discursive and material devices operating the legitimation of only one dominant humanitarian discourse which is structured by a renewed civilising mission. If in the colonial past, the hegemonic humanitarian discourse advocated a war for territorial expansion against barbarism outside the so-called global north

that implied saving brown and black victims from brown and black backwardness, to paraphrase Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak (1988), today it depicts receiving countries in the so-called global north as willing to save the innocent (Ticktin 2016), while fighting evil barbarism. This is identified with Islamist terrorism in many newsmedia and public discourses that covered the attacks occurred in France, UK, Belgium, Germany and Austria from 2015 (Santos et al. 2020); it is also presented as a means to prevent an increase of criminality (seen as coming from the global south through illegal immigration) from entering receiving societies, that is, the civilised space of Europe. Our understanding of hegemonic humanitarianism draws on the critical work of Didier Fassin, Miriam Ticktin, Michel Agier, Nicola Mai, Rutvica Andrijasevic and Martina Tazzioli, among others. We therefore see it as the set of organised institutional and social discourses and practices that are meant to intervene in favour of the victims of a humanitarian disaster, based on an imaginary of physical as well as moral salvation still structured by colonial and racist archives.

Humanitarian discourses and practices draw their civilisational vocation from these archives, shaping it from notions of protection and victimhood which are, in turn, based on what Giuliani has called "figures of race", namely the stereotypes through which the white Italian We and the migrant Other are hegemonically and racially interpreted in post-colonial times. The colonial figure of the *white saviour*, from which the corresponding post-colonial complex derives, is one of these figures.

As a corollary to this figure, those who must-be-saved are desubjectified, infantilised and anonymised, only forming the indistinguishable mass of the wretched in need of help. Moreover, this notion of victimhood acknowledges very few types of victimhood—for instance, the one defined by Cynthia Enloe as the rhetoric of "women-and-children" (1993) and by Sharon Meagher as "women and children first" (2004)—yet requires these few victims to be, and remain, "innocent" to be entitled to receive aid (Ticktin 2016, 2020; Mai 2016; Pinelli 2019). This same "ontology" of the victim sustains both securitarianism, based on the criminalisation of those not identified as victims, and racism, with criminals deemed to be inherently so (see also Aradau 2004; Mai 2016; Bigo 2002; Agier 2008; Ticktin 2016; Tazzioli and Walters 2016).

Today, humanitarian discourses structure certain, particularly centre-left and leftist, Italian institutional and media representations of Italy as a benevolent host country, as well as Italian white anti-racist narratives opposed to border restriction and violence. As it were in a continuity with

the myth of the "Italiani brava gente" ("decent Italians", see Giuliani 2019) vulgarised during Fascism and then adopted by the republican public discourse to minimise the impact of colonial violence in the Italian colonies (1911–1943), the hegemonic humanitarian discourse conjugates Italians' innocence in relation to both the violence and structural racism of the border, and their benevolence towards newcomers and long-staying migrants and refugees (a continuity stressed also by Frisina, interview, 22/09/2020). In a context in which the public sphere hosts countless increasingly violent racist and anti-migrant examples of hate speech, representations of Italy as a benevolent host pass unchallenged, while advocates of the Italian *white saviour* accept humanitarianism without deconstructing its cultural foundations, primarily its Western-centric notions of disaster. As Giuliani has highlighted (2020), the dominant definition of disaster is structured by oppositions between civilisation and barbarity, between those able to "master" nature and those who are overwhelmed by it, and between those who benefit from neoliberal racist capitalism and those who bear its disasters (such as the side effects of climate change or air pollution, and the conflicts both engender), summed up in the distinction between "places *of* disaster" (the west) and "places *for* disaster" (its rest) (Giuliani 2017a, b). Within this framework, disaster is seen as an uncontrollable event occurring elsewhere in the world outside Western space, where barbarity is systemic (Brown 2017, 28). In our opinion, this distinction grounds the institutional, legal, media and socially accepted opposition between migrants and refugees according to which refugees are the "perfect victims" (Pinelli 2019, 168) of an uncontrollable event (e.g. warfare) while migrants are people who are not able to forge livable conditions in their countries of belonging. This incapacity is thus deemed as ontological—that is, inherent to former colonised populations—as if migrants' will to flee was not related to the objective causes at the root of contemporary migrations, that is, any sort of race-, gender-, sexuality-based discriminations, "wars and misery, environmental catastrophes and political and social tyrannies prevailing in vast areas of the planet" (Mezzadra 2004, 270) which are the outcome of local and global neoliberal and neocolonial power relations (Giuliani 2021, 99).

Moreover, according to this distinction, trauma, injuries and death associated with the Mediterranean middle passage are seen as caused by disasters—as if they were something "natural" (caused by a storm at sea, for example) or as resulting from the bad will of those who benefit from suffering (the evil smugglers), and external rather than belonging to the

space of the *white saviour* and border regime. The consequence of the naturalisation of border violence is that, in the Italian dominant narrative of migrations, securitarian and humanitarian alike, trauma, injuries and death are depicted as something the asylum seeker, as a perfect victim, has to experience to receive European protection as a refugee, as the consequence of their voluntary illegitimate choice to *invade*. These conceptions deny the institutional responsibility for the inherent violence of the border regime (Bodemann and Yurdakul 2006) and the multilevel social complicity (including the hegemonic humanitarian discourse) that sustain it.

This chapter explores the grammar of hegemonic white humanitarianism, connecting it to historical representations of the white coloniser as *white saviour* which form part of a broader discourse legitimating white innocence, benevolence and ultimately superiority. The first section traces this figure back to twentieth-century Italian history, drawing on some particularly illustrative iconographic materials. Using discourse analysis, it then explores the past and present relationship between this figure and three social dynamics, namely "white anxiety" (Giuliani 2021), "*white innocence*" (Wekker 2016) and "white fragility" (DiAngelo 2017). The first refers to representations of the "(post)colonial Other" as an inferior and criminal mass invader (Panico 2019; Hage 2016; Maneri and Quassoli 2016); the second to the representation of Italians as innocent and extraneous to historical racism directed towards former colonised subjects specifically as a consequence of their experience as racialised people (Petrovich Njegosh 2012, 13–45; Giuliani et al. 2020); and the third to the claim that Italian culture is impervious to contemporary racism. This claim makes Italians defensive towards any accusation of systemic, collective or individual racism. Accordingly, accusations of hate crimes and hate speech are downplayed and referred to as individual socio-pathologies, while more subtle forms of racism are denied and referred to as innocent jokes. Italian *white fragility* therefore represents the fear of being unveiled as racist, and denies any form of individual, collective, cultural, social and institutional responsibility.

In Italian public discourse, the coexistence of the *white saviour complex*, *white anxiety*, *white innocence* and *white fragility* is not a recent phenomenon, as shown in the dialogue between Gaia Giuliani and Italian antiracist intellectuals Annalisa Frisina, Andrea Pogliano, Marcello Maneri and Barbara Pinelli, reflecting on the evolution of anti-racist discourse in Italy, which took place in 2020 during her fieldwork for the project "(De) Othering" (see Note 1 infra). These four elements emerged in the

aftermath of the Second World War, to be contextually rearticulated in the late 1980s and early 1990s when certain infamous racist crimes (e.g. the homicide of the South-African agricultural worker Jerry Masslo in 1989) and the arrival of the ship *Vlora* to the Italian port of Bari (on 8 August, 1991) triggered a wider debate on racism and anti-racism.

A turning point came in the wake of the 2011 mass exodus from Tunisia and Libya, the shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa on 3 October, 2013 resulting in the death of 368 people, mostly Ethiopians and Eritreans, and the 2015 so-called refugee crisis. Following these events, the figure of the *white saviour* has been evoked by both the Italian media and institutional discourse to counteract any accusations that Italy was responsible for, or complicit in, the violence generated by border restrictions and the externalisation of border control to Libya and Turkey (Maneri, interview, 30/9/2020). At the same time, the *white saviour complex* has been evoked in a context in which *white anxiety* and *moral panic* over "invasion" by migrants and "racial replacement" (Santos et al. 2020) is accompanied by the recrudescence of hate speech and hate crimes against migrants and racialised citizens. *White anxiety* can be distinguished from *moral panic*, since the former signifies a cultural element ingrained in postcolonial metropoles, generated by the idea that former colonised subjects, blinded by aspirations to participate in white wealth and superiority, are invading and preying on the host country, whereas the latter refers to the outburst of panic over the loss of (white) identity that occurs in parallel with violent events (such as crimes committed by the racialised Other). All these cultural, social and psychological dynamics are the result of converging ideo- and media-scapes (Appadurai 1996) that construct an image of a nation "under siege" (Hage 2016; Maneri and Quassoli 2016). The outcome of the triple action of the *white saviour complex*, *white anxiety/moral panic*, and *white innocence* is to render racialised people's subjectivity, experience of violence, claims and desires invisible. The complexity of their personal and physical journeys as well as the violence of the border regime is silenced: at the same time and for the same reasons, the structural racism produced by institutions, society and culture, as well as borders, is concealed.

Proceeding from this cultural and historical analysis, the second part of the chapter focuses on media representations of humanitarian versus securitarian renditions of grassroots solidarity, such as the iconographies of the *Sea Watch 3* captain Carola Rackete produced in 2019. More specifically,

it analyses the images of Rackete produced by and circulated in white anti-racist media and social media.

The conclusion summarises our analysis, highlighting how invisibilisation and appropriation are seen in contemporary Italy as viable elements of a humanitarian and benevolent anti-racist lexicon.

The Context of the Analysis

Since 2007, when the right-wing coalition won the election with an electoral campaign that focused on the invasion and the murder of Giovanna Reggiani by a Romanian man living in a Roma camp (30 October 2007), the idea that Italy was under siege and threatened by migrants and racialised internal Others (among which Roma and Sinti are traditionally identified regardless their Italian citizenship) became a means of state propaganda: the response by white anti-racist movements aiming to distinguish between criminalisation and the populist demonisation of migrants (Wodak 2015) was to "victimise" every migrant and refugee ("atteggiamento pietista", Maneri 1998, 242).

Since then, the polarisation between criminalisation and victimisation has structured the anti- and pro-migrant debates. During the financial crisis (2008–2010) and the technocratic government of Mario Monti (2011–2013), the impact of anti-migrant propaganda and state racism seemed to be slight. However, with the new wave of arrivals due to the upheavals of the Arab Springs (2011–2013), especially the Syrian crisis (2015–), racist discourses proposed by the Lega and Movimento 5 Stelle paved the way for the idea of the legitimacy of the "necropolitics" (Mbembe 2003) of "letting them die" in the Mediterranean (for Maneri's periodisation see, in particular, 2019; Frisina, interview, 22/09/2020). This approach culminated in the so-called Porti Chiusi decree (2019) passed by the Lega-5 Stelle government: its former Minister of Home Affairs, Matteo Salvini (leader of Lega) is now charged of kidnapping by the Procura of Palermo for having impeded the docking of Spanish NGO Open Arms rescuing boat in the port of Lampedusa and the disembarkation of its 147 exhausted, dehydrated and traumatised migrants between 1 and 20 August 2019. This is the context in which we need to read the increasingly embittered polarisation between ontological criminalisation (at the core of far-right discourses) and ontological victimisation (deployed by institutional and mainstream white anti-racism). Giuliani defines ontological criminalisation as stemming from the colonial equation between

racialised people and barbarians prone to crime (2017), and ontological victimisation as a discourse that deprives peoples in mobility of their subjectivity, whose corollary is the *white saviour* who rescues and gives hope.

At the centre of both ontologies is the construction of the body of the nation as inherently white, regardless of social imbalances and pre-existing forms of internal racism (against southerners, Jews and Roma). The character of the *white saviour* is feminised here or, in other words, equated with a motherly body that saves, protects and patronises without challenging the causes of violence (the border regime or structural racism). It juxtaposes the figure of the inflexible (male) defender of the nation (which Matteo Salvini has constructed for himself), who halts the apocalyptic invasion of inherent "monsters" (Giuliani 2021) and prevents the death of the white body of the nation. As Barbara Pinelli (interview, 01/10/2020) stresses, this image of the feminised/motherly version of humanitarianism and its securitarian implications is confirmed by the disembarkation and first aid procedures used by the Italian police, associations and NGOs. In privileging the most vulnerable they operate a gendered and racist divide between *women and children first*, who are portrayed as submissive and desperate, and youths and adult men, whose racialised masculinity is viewed as dangerous. In addition to the gendered and racist violence perpetrated by separating male and female young and adult friends and family members in shelters and detention centres, the approach to the traumas experienced by women migrants—both in their country of origin and during their journey to Italy—treats them as victims whose experience and protests against the border regime do not break through the silence imposed by the mainstream media and public discourse. As anti-racist activists, artists and intellectuals outlined, they are silenced as war victims usually are, by virtue of a gendered and racialised construct that sees them as dual victims: of their (racial and cultural) backwardness and of the "war at the frontier" and its intrinsic humanitarian catastrophes (Djarah Kan, interview, 6/11/2020; Angelica Pesarini, interview, 21/09/2020; Barbara Pinelli, interview, 1/10/2020; Oiza Obasuyi, interview, 18/06/2020; Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau', interview, 26/5/2020; Medhin Paolos, interview, 15/6/2020; and Wissal Houbabi, interview, 12/06/2020). The pervasive use of the language of war (Ticktin 2017), structured by terms such as defence, national security, militarised border and soldiers, to refer to border regimes is understood as implicit in the discourse on the state of siege and the fear of (barbarian) invasion (Jones 2016; Pereira et al. 2020). In addition to the strong and resolute defender

of the nation, this language is also used to describe the motherly humanitarian aid-giver: humanitarian agents, as opposed to criminal grassroots solidarity activists, are celebrated and honoured as the "humanitarian-soldiers" (Musarò 2017) of the motherly (welcoming and benevolent) nation.

It is in this context that the public demonisation of hate crimes has to be framed. As Annalisa Frisina and Andrea Pogliano (2020; Frisina's interview, 22/09/2020) have noted in their study of the 2018 Macerata case, the individual who committed the crime–a white man, Luca Traini, a militant in far-right movements and parties–was represented in the centre and left-wing media as neither a terrorist, nor the extreme product of an intrinsically racist society, but simply a psychopath or deviant. On 3 February he shot six black men and women (Wilson Kofi, Omar Fadera, Jennifer Odion, Gideon Azeke, Mahamadou Toure and Festus Omagbon) in the street in self-proclaimed retaliation for the murder of a young white woman by a Nigerian citizen near Macerata (Giuliani 2019; Santos et al. 2020): Although in public discourse and the media the crime led to a renewed debate on racism, the rapid dismissal of the question of systemic racism in Italy was accompanied by the two coexisting discourses of "white racism ignited by the blacks" and "good Italy welcoming poor victims (far too much)" (Panico 2018).[1] As a corollary of Italian white innocence, the blame for racism is attributed to its victims, whose numbers are seen as the reason for both the discontent or exhaustion of Italian goodwill, and populist and far-right hate of migrants.

Meanwhile, as iconographies of the landings indulge in dead victims whenever a tragedy occurs, in a pornographic rendition of the tragedy so well popularised by the prize-winning *Fire at sea* (*Fuocoammare*, 2016) by Francesco Rosi (Giuliani and Vacchiano 2019), the image of Carola Rackete should be understood as the goodwill response to both the figure of white psychopaths such as Traini and the *white fragility* triggered by a sense of impotence in the face of suffering.

[1] http://www.euronomade.info/?p=10240, accessed 19 April 2021.

The White Saviour of *White Fragility*: The Iconisation of Carola Rackete

In June 2019, the *Sea Watch 3* ship rescued 53 migrants in the Mediterranean. After refusing to dock in the port of Tripoli—which was not considered safe by both the EU and NGOs—the captain of the ship, Carola Rackete, decided to head for the port of Lampedusa, in accordance with maritime law.

On 14 June 2019, the Italian government had passed a decree (n. 53 converted in the Law 77 on 8 August 2019) that did not allow NGO rescue ships to dock and disembark migrants: after two weeks, alarmed by the passengers' health and psychological condition, the captain Carola Rackete defied the ban. Only ten migrants disembarked: children, pregnant women and sick people. On arrival at the port of Lampedusa, Carola Rackete was immediately arrested on charges of abetting illegal immigration and resisting the Italian maritime military authority.

This event marked one of the most visible points in the so-called migrant crisis and transformed Carola Rackete, a thirty-year-old German woman, into "the fresh new face of Europe's migrant crisis".[2] This new face nonetheless retains the oppositional construct of the white radical activist as both smuggler and *white saviour*, which is also the *pendant* of the dual subalternising representation of migrants as essentialised criminals or inherent victims. This type of image draws on colonial and racist archives mobilised (Stoler 2002; Wekker 2016) by what W.E.B. DuBois (1903) defined as the "white gaze". By "white gaze" we mean the positioned point of view that shapes what and who can or cannot be seen and how things and people are seen. The white gaze constantly composes images of proximity and otherness: it makes those who rescue closer to the viewer, since they are placed at the centre of the story and unwillingly celebrated as extraordinary. In this regard, we must remember that in July 2019 both Carola Rackete and Pia Klemp—captain of the ship *Iuventa*—were awarded the Grand Vermeil medal by the city of Paris, an honour that they both refused. On this occasion, Pia Klemp wrote a text explaining her decision:

[2] https://fortune.com/2019/07/01/shes-31-a-ships-captain-and-she-just-torpedoed-italys-relationship-with-eu-partners-2/, accessed 19 April 2021.

> You want to award me a medal for my solidarity action in the Mediterranean Sea, because of our crews "work to rescue migrants from difficult conditions on a daily basis". [...] I'm not a humanitarian. I am not there to "aid". I stand with you in solidarity. We do not need medals. We do not need authorities deciding about who is a "hero" and who is "illegal". In fact, they are in no position to make this call, because we are all equal. What we need are freedom and rights. It is time we call out hypocrite honouring and fill the void with social justice.[3]

In fact, Carola Rackete, Pia Klemp and the grassroots solidarity of their NGO play an important role today in a context in which institutional protection systems in the Mediterranean have been eroded. Many other activists are also committed to a very difficult and emotionally hard course of action that is nevertheless rendered through the imaginary of the white saviour in hegemonic white and anti-racist discourses. As another member of the *Iuventa* crew, Miguel Duarte—the first Portuguese citizen to be charged with solidarity crime in Italy—stated in a 2019 interview with Carla Panico[4] in Lisbon (Panico and Duarte 2019):

> The problem with the figure of the "white saviour" is that he (or she) is white for very well-defined historical reasons: we can go back in history to colonialism to explain why there is a hegemony of Europe that puts European people in the privileged position of engaging in humanitarian activities. Yet, outside the heroic narratives, who saves whom is not so well defined. (...) Who is the "saviour"? The white person? No: we are simply the ones who have boats, life jackets, equipment and if something happens to us, by chance, a helicopter immediately appears and comes to rescue us. They don't.

The hypervisibility that Rackete received resonates with what Barbara Pinelli identified (interview, 30/09/2020) in her analysis of representations

[3] https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/captain-of-migrant-rescue-ship-refuses-paris-medal-over-hypocrisy_uk_5d5e955ee4b0b59d257069f1?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAK2Y8k4lEDrKqhwDzMWxTnH_5WrQlYIpHYrviTox-QbnJue08HJ6PZI2IrGEwS_ErPs31hcz_pKNN6C5G-fmfuaAy1tDoUf9t707L_vlWFuKb6l-F7pLgOGDtQt2kJ74woRt-5Dnz6g9tXnDpDdPOFiRsOTCclTqOkpViIhwqgtQw, accessed 19 April 2021.

[4] http://www.lamacchinasognante.com/i-sommersi-e-i-salvatori-recuperi-marittimi-diritto-alla-vita-vendetta-di-stato-intervista-a-miguel-duarte-a-cura-di-carla-panico/, accessed 19 April 2021.

of contemporary migrations as "the humanitarian exceptionality of women at the border", which evidently does not only refer to women-and-children but also the representation of the exceptionality of the she-activist, either as a motherly white saviour or an ugly, masculinised criminal who is an accomplice in the invasion.

During the landing of Sea Watch 3—and the consequent arrest of the captain—at the port of Lampedusa in the middle of the night, a small crowd was waiting for the ship. They were far-right sympathisers who welcomed the captain with whistles, howls of reproach and insults. The shame attached to her figure should be seen as an extension of both the long-standing criminalisation of radical activists and militants (Maneri, interview, 01/10/2020) as "blind fanatics who threaten either the nation or Europe" and the shaming of white women from the leading country of EU who betray their whiteness. In the case of Rackete, criminalisation and white shaming took the form of sexist slurs and body shaming: both on the piers and on social media, Rackete received hundreds of messages hoping she will be "raped by the blacks she rescued".[5] Then, as she does not fit the hegemonic representation of the feminine, she is smeared as a dangerous anti-social, ugly and masculinised (therefore unnatural) female in right-wing newspapers and social media alike: her unshaven armpits (shown in a picture taken on 2 July when she arrived in Agrigento[6]), as well as her braless figure under her masculine T-shirt (shown in a picture taken on 20 July in Agrigento[7]) are used by the media to make a case for her alleged disrespect for Italian institutions based on the idea that she was unwilling to meet the basic requirements (including gender performativity) of a decent conduct in court. Italian institutions should be understood here as extending far beyond the state: the institutions here are whiteness and the conservative models of white femininity she is seen as betraying, triggering *white anxiety* and unveiling the workings of violent borders and the vacuity of Italian *white innocence*.

It is within this context that the anti-racist humanitarian discourse is building a "new moral stability pact" (Giuliani 2015), a politically correct semantic context in which, although the structural causes of border

[5] https://the-view-from-rome.blogautore.repubblica.it/2019/07/01/salvini-v-rackete-the-battle-of-the-captains/, accessed 19 April 2021.

[6] https://static.nexilia.it/giornalettismo/2019/07/Carola-Rackete-1-1024x560.jpg, accessed 19 April 2021.

[7] https://images.vanityfair.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/24120208/portrait27.jpg, accessed 19 April 2021.

violence are not questioned, only Lega and other far-right formations are seen as guilty of structural racism (63). This "new moral stability pact" is evident in the humanitarian anti-racist slogan of summer 2019 which, contrasting Rackete with Salvini, states "The Captain (as Salvini was named by his supporters) *vs* The She-Capitan" (Rackete) (Il Capitano *vs* la Capitana). Hence, the centre-left parties' (particularly the Democratic Party) white hegemonic anti-racism and the mainstream media humanitarian discourse appropriate Rackete to blame Salvini and recover innocence. Salvini and a broader right-wing and populist criminalising discourse are demonised as quintessentially racist, in opposition to which a new humanitarian We materialises. Thus, the new humanitarian We does not need to question its own *white anxiety* over invasion or border regimes and their power to reproduce racism, suffering and death. In fact, the humanitarian discourse that iconises Rackete as a white saviour does not seem to care about the larger routine operations of violent borders after disembarkation—including constraints, detention and forced repatriation (Esposito et al. 2019; Pinelli 2019, 186–198). In this discourse, the focus on the saviour and the innocents prevents any public debate on both the causes of the tragedy and the migrants' lived experience of it. In fact, the discourse on humanitarian compassion is not intended to make whites comprehend the pain, nor the blacks in Rackete's ship express their own pain and make it seen and heard: as Susan Sontag caustically explains, referring to images of the "pain of others", it is only to make whites feel reassured by the good actions of other whites (2003, 56–57). As such, the discourse celebrating and appropriating Rackete soothes Italian *white fragility*, preventing compassion from providing scope for action against borders. The Italian *white burden* "the mission to rescue and support saviours—is therefore all about the celebration of the good We of the nation.

It is in this context that we need to understand the many images produced of Rackete as a reassuring, angelic white woman with long, blond hair who saves black children—or black adults represented as children. In those images, Rackete appears as a giant mother steering, holding or rescuing "her children",[8] or as "Saint Carola protector of refugees", as in the

[8] https://cdn06.artribune.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Illustrazione-per-Carola-Rackete-by-M.-P.-Ratti.jpg ; https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-rOJ47334h0M/XcMLMSuAm2I/AAAAAAAAG90/0lkTAu8vdtUiAJz8vTJcdHWFCtd6a5WjwCLcBGAs

mural that appeared in Taormina.[9] In another of these images, which appeared in a left-wing newspaper,[10] we see the figure of Rackete rising from the waters, casting a benevolent and complicit gaze over her naked right shoulder where smiling, scantily dressed mini-migrants—which the Italian-Ghanaian writer and feminist anti-racist activist Djarah Kan caustically identifies as Rackete's "brown head lice" (Facebook post on 21/11/2019; interview, 6/11/2020)—are hanging on to her dreadlocks.[11]

Appropriated as such, Rackete unwillingly embodies the figure of the Madonna and child of a motherly humanitarianism that manipulates both the silencing of the political charge of Rackete's radical activism, and the rendition of migrants as hopeless, desubjectified and infantilised victims. In these images, migrant men and women are reduced to "bare life" (Agamben 1995), whose only chance of survival is exceptionally good white captains operating against exceptionally bad white captains.

Conclusion

The imaginary of the *white saviour* projected onto Rackete reflects what Janine Jones (2004, 65–86), referring to the North American context, describes as the impossible empathy of goodwill whites have towards African-Americans whose emotions, goals and situations are totally extraneous to them. In the context of an analysis of photography describing the pain of Others, Susan Sontag describes that pain as something the Western "we" does not want to acknowledge because "it is intolerable to have one's own sufferings twinned with anybody else's" (2003, 113): similarly, goodwill and anti-racist Italians are far from achieving anything close to empathy, impeded by "a very complex dynamic of denial" of racism and colonial power relations. In Italy, this complex dynamic of denial is structured by a number of factors, the first of which is the naturalisation of the

YHQ/s1600/Grazie%2BCarola.jpg; https://cdn06.artribune.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Illustrazione-per-Carola-Rackete.jpg, all accessed 19 April 2021.

[9] https://www.ilprimatonazionale.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Santa-Carola-1.jpg, accessed 19 April 2021.

[10] https://static.ilmanifesto.it/2019/11/social-iorompo-carola-3.jpg, accessed 19 April 2021.

[11] This portrait of Carola Rackete published in the journal *Il Manifesto* caused a huge social media debate among Afro-Italian activists, writers and scholars to which also Djarah Kan, Oiza Q. Obasuyi and the Italo-Somali writer Igiaba Scego participated.

white norm that imposes a racial hierarchy, on the basis of which—as emerging from Giuliani's enquiry on the Italian news media's coverage of migrants and refugees for the already mentioned project *(De)Othering* (Giuliani 2022)—all non-whites are seen as either in need of emancipation or punishment in a public debate oscillating between two dominant narratives, humanitarianism and securitarianism. Italian *white anxiety* over postcolonial invasions, based on the "catastrophization" ("state of siege") of immigration (Maneri and Quassoli 2016, 71), can be considered another factor. The Italian pretence of *white innocence* in the face of colonial violence, together with *white fragility*, play an important role in this denial, structured by the idea that the goodness of some whites compensates for the wrongs of some psychopaths, as well as the racist traumas experienced by migrants. Finally, another factor can be seen in the white anti-racist hegemonic humanitarian discourse of centre-left and left parties and political cultures, whose appropriation of certain grassroots activists as heroes is functional both in the execration of extreme right populist securitarian discourse and the silencing of any critique of the border regime and its history of violence.

Nevertheless, we consider empathy, in line with Saidyia Hartman (1997), as disguising a search for white protagonism and, with Susan Sontag, as structured by the silent complacency of the "we" that is not involved in that suffering (2003): for that reason, we advocate rather what Sara Ahmed calls "skin-to-skin proximity" (2000), a grassroots solidarity practice that avoids the reproduction of racist othering and patronising attitudes.

The multiple ears that are required to "hear" the other, without transforming this other into "the Other" or "the stranger", are ears that are alive to, or touched by, the sensations of other skins. Such sensations open this other to other others, who are not simply absent or present in the skin-to-skin of the encounter. An ethics that keeps alive the circuit between mouths, ears and skin is hence not about making her body present. It is the act of getting closer to this other's skin that prevents us from fleshing out her body as "the stranger's body" (157–158).

In our opinion, it is through such proximity and an active condemnation of border regimes that we can counter the workings of the enduring colonial power relations and their colonising mission. In fact, as Susan Sontag reminds us, it is not enough to produce or watch an image of someone in pain and try to feel it:

> Who caused what the picture shows? Who is responsible? Is it excusable? Was it inevitable? Is there some state of affairs which we have accepted up to now that ought to be challenged? All this, with the understanding that moral indignation, like compassion, cannot dictate a course of action. (104–105)

What do we need to do to set a course of action? It will not only involve asking about the causes, but also actively mobilising against them.

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"Double-Sided Sleights of Hand": Race in the Mirror

Suzanne Maria Menghraj

Black figures in Eurocentric literature, film, and visual art are rarely presented without being given a distinct, racialized function, the import of which often goes largely undisputed, if not wholly unacknowledged, simply because the power of saying, of naming and describing it, has been withheld. The explanation for their presence and their function is hidden in plain sight, a double-sided sleight of hand between the maker and the subconscious, and between the maker and the receiver of the work. This sleight of hand intrigues me. Like watching two people (lovers? spies?) silently mouthing words to each other from across a crowded room, my comprehension of the message occurs surreptitiously. I know things I'm not supposed to know. I see without seeing, and witness an open secret, in a roomful of people where I am not the only one with such eyes.

—Tisa Bryant, *Unexplained Presence*

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Bruno and Roberto are on their way from Rome to Tuscany. The two men—the former a pleasure-seeking refrigerator dealer edging toward middle age and the latter a young, contemplative law student—have met by chance and only in the past few hours. Bruno has cajoled Roberto into giving study a break and going on a quick jaunt that is beginning to turn into an epic buddy excursion, maybe among the first of its cinematic kind. They stop for gas soon after they set off, but not before Bruno flirts with and zealously pursues two German blondes who drive by on the highway (he gives up when he realizes connecting with them might not be so easy) and honks at every car he passes as well as an exhausted if determined cyclist. Bruno has nothing for effort. What he likes is panache, appearances. Immediately after shouting to the panting cyclist that he ought to get a Vespa and just as he is about to comment on the unsightly indignities of cycling (he prefers billiards), Bruno interrupts himself to mock two men plodding along on—of course—a Vespa.

Notwithstanding a few passing suggestions of a deeply anxious and wounded man, Bruno is *uno stronzo*: one can imagine the equivalent term in English. Like most *stronzi*, he has no awareness of the burdens of his overbearing presence, his ephemeral desires, his easy judgments, his flippant ways—and, also like most *stronzi*, he can be so charming, so observant, so insightful, so quick-witted. He is two men—maybe several men—in one. The image of the individual who contains multitudes is suggested not only by Bruno's character but also, in a more subtle way, by the film's dialogue in a brief interaction between Bruno and a stranger he encounters at the gas station.

Just as Bruno tosses the station attendant the keys to his convertible and orders a full tank of gas, he is approached by a girl who says to him first in English, "I beg your pardon," and then in broken, earnest Italian, "*Darmi passeggio* [sic] *a Grosseto*?"[1,2] She asks Bruno if he would give her *un passaggio*—a lift—to Grosseto. She carries a large pack on her back and speaks Italian with an American accent. She has found herself at a highway gas station somewhere just north of Rome. In other words, she shows all the signs of being on a backpacking journey through Europe—or at least through Italy. There is just one thing that distinguishes her from the hordes of recently graduated Americans, Australians, Brits, and Canadians

[1] *Il sorpasso*, directed by Dino Risi (Italy: Fairfilm, Incei Film, Sancro Film, 1962). 00:22:59.

[2] The girl says "passeggio"—a walk but also a colloquial term denoting what streetwalkers do—when she surely means "passaggio," a lift. Bruno leaves this opportunity for a joke alone in favor of a color-based joke.

who, degree in hand, have for decades headed directly to the Continent: this young lady is Black.

A Black bit part would be a curious choice on the part of either Dino Risi, who directed 1962's *Il sorpasso* (literally, *The Overtaking*; I once saw it dubbed *The Fast Lane* and this is the title that, for me, best represents the film's animating principle), or Ettore Scola and Ruggero Maccari, who co-wrote the screenplay along with Risi and are credited with the film's dialogue. But without this disconcerting character, Bruno would not have the opportunity to deliver these lines:

> *No. Mi dispiace. Noi andare verso Roma. Voi, altra* direction. *Mi dispiace*. Sorry.[3]
> No, I'm sorry. We're headed toward Rome. You, the opposite *direction*. I'm sorry. *Sorry*.

As he walks away, Bruno mutters:

> *Vattene via, Pallidona*.[4]
> Hit the road, Paleface.

Bruno Cortona, played by Vittorio Gassman, explains to the young Black woman (uncredited actress) that he cannot give her a lift to Grosseto. *Il sorpasso*, Fairfilm, Incei Film, Sancro Film, 1962.

[3] *Il sorpasso*, 00:23:02.
[4] *Il sorpasso*, 00:23:08.

Bruno and Roberto are not heading toward Rome. They are northbound on the Strada Statale 1 Via Aurelia, which hugs Italy's west coast; they'll pass right through Grosseto on their way to Tuscany. In fact, they may not realize it at the moment but they will soon make an impromptu stop to visit with Roberto's family near Grosseto. As much of a lout as Bruno is, we can't fault him for not wanting to give the girl a lift. He's on a joy ride with his impressionable new pal and has no room in his conscience for an interloper, much less a Black one. But "*Pallidona*"? Paleface?[5]

He doesn't say it to her face—it seems unlikely she'd understand him if he did. Perhaps the epithet is meant to further augment quickly accumulating evidence of Bruno's poor character: Bruno is not merely *uno stronzo*, he is *uno stronzo razzista*. No matter whether Bruno understands himself to be *uno stronzo*, late in the film, when Roberto asks him if he is *razzista*, he dismisses the possibility, claiming in what appears to be a rare moment of earnestness to have once dated a woman who was Jewish and Black as well.[6] Even if Bruno's apparently diverse taste in women is no evidence of his self-proclaimed lack of prejudice, whether or not Bruno is racist is beside the point.

What is important is that we audience members hear Bruno's racializing aside and understand what he says. This understanding is a requisite for what Tisa Bryant calls in *Unexplained Presence*, her collection of essays on the function of Black figures in European arts, the "double-sided sleight of hand between the maker and receiver of a work"—an "open secret" (Bryant 2007, ix). For Bryant, the secret the maker and receiver of a work whisper to each other but never utter aloud has to do with the hidden significance of seemingly incidental Black figures in Eurocentric arts. There is probably no form of communication more secretive, more deceptive, more layered than humor, which leans so heavily on the postulation

[5] A literal translation of "Pallidona" would be something like "Big Pale One." As the Black girl is small in stature, "Pallidona" would then function as a dig at both her color and her size. "Big Paleface," however, doesn't sound quite right in English—Italian is more deft at the double dig embedded in "Pallidona." Incidentally, "paleface" is a term white American writers began using in the nineteenth century to fictionally represent how Native Americans refer to white people.

[6] Notwithstanding Ethiopia's Beta Israel Jewish community and other communities of Jewish Black people, given Bruno's irreverent sense of humor, his claim of having once dated a Jewish Black woman might seem to be a joke. The claim, expressed with what appears to be sincerity, nonetheless subverts easy racial and ethnic categories. It is notable, too, that in 1937, when Bruno would have been a teenager, laws were enacted in Italian East Africa that made sexual relationships between Italians and Africans a criminal offense.

of a community of listeners who understand that which is left unsaid. *Il sorpasso* is a comedy. Bruno calls a Black girl “Paleface.” Sarcasm may very well be the lowest form of wit and I hear in this illustration of the maxim an invitation to follow the joke to its hidden depths.

* * *

In 1993, the semiotician, novelist, and essayist Umberto Eco gave a series of six lectures at Harvard University that would become *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, a book that illuminates the ways in which fiction and reality—and writers and readers—collaborate to create fictional worlds. As Eco explores instances in which the will to see what is not there takes us as it does fictional characters a long part of the way toward imagining into existence things that—even in the more loosely circumscribed world of a given fiction—are improbable, Eco introduces the novelist and playwright Achille Campanile's 1927 *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?* (*But What Is This "Love"?*), a novel in which in order to cover up an adulterous affair, a character, Baron Manuel, fabricates an ill friend in need of care. Baron Manuel is not at home with his wife because he must be there for this invented and ailing Pasotti who eventually and to Baron Manuel's surprise—especially given that he has finally announced Pasotti's death—shows up on the scene. This absurdist anecdote and Eco's admiration for Campanile made me curious about the book, which, as it turned out, had not been translated into English.

I instead read a few of Campanile's translated plays. One of them, *L'inventore del cavallo* (*The Inventor of the Horse*), makes a mockery of the intellectual class and their inflated, self-important discourse by creating a parallel world in which academics—and a poet—talk gibberish and take credit where it is not due. In a lecture to his academy hall audience, Professor Bolibine, the would-be inventor of the horse, claims he has limited himself to white, black, grey, and café au lait-colored horses but will soon produce horses in a full range of colors that could be put to all kinds of uses. A cavalry passes by the hall. Naturally, the cavalry contains horses. Bolibine is revealed to be a fraud. As Bolibine holds a gun to his own head, a photographer asks the discredited professor to pause for a picture and smile. “May I?” Bolibine, duly photographed, asks the photographer, who consents. “Thank you,” says Bolibine, who then shoots himself (Campanile 1995, 111). Campanile was fascinated by the tyranny of appearances.

I began to translate the novel. I was so thrilled by the language—its wordplays, its non sequiturs and malapropisms, line after line of miscommunication—and the puzzles of translating it that I reached out to Campanile's son, Gaetano Campanile, to inquire about the foreign rights to *Ma che cosa è quest'amore*? Gaetano was open to and even enthusiastic about my proposal to translate the book. Maybe he shares his father's sense of absurdism: I am not fluent in Italian and have no doubt Gaetano detected my lack of fluency. And yet he was down for the gambit. Lack of confidence nonetheless got the best of me. I was overcome by the idea that no matter the pleasure and at times strangely thrilling sense of unease I felt working out the puzzles of the novel's language, a Black American woman had no business translating this book. Removed as I was by era, gender, nationality, fluency, and race, who was I to muck about in the contortions of Campanile's language play? And so I got only as far as the first chapter, in which there appears a curious footnote to Campanile's narrative and a focal point to my own.

As the novel opens, we meet Carl'Alberto, who is seated in a train compartment in which all but one of the passengers, a beautiful woman, are also named Carl'Alberto. The protagonist Carl'Alberto decides to engage the beautiful woman by telling her a funny story about a man in Perugia. The man, Carl'Alberto explains, went to a hotel to ask for a room and the best the hotel manager could do was to arrange for him a room in which a Native American man—"*un pellirossa*" (Campanile 1927, 14), a "redskin"—was already asleep. Carl'Alberto forgets the rest of the story, including the part that is supposed to be funny. So he tries out a few other versions, finally landing on a tragic and quite personal ending—he explains that he knew this made-up man. The memory, however fictitious, causes him much sorrow (readers are no doubt encouraged to imagine Carl'Alberto doing his best to appeal to the beautiful stranger's sympathy). The novel takes off in yet another ludicrous direction—a fellow Carl'Alberto claims to have been the man in our Carl'Alberto's story and further claims that our Carl'Alberto has the story all wrong and proceeds to revise its most essential details, claiming before telling his version of the story that the Native American—but only that detail of an entirely supplanted story—is a complete fabrication.

To lighten the mood after two somber if absurd stories, an elder Carl'Alberto has tried to engage his compartment mates in late-nineteenth-century charade games that don't interest them. The narrator notes the old man's lament:

> *—La gioventú di oggi—disse il vecchio scotendo il capo—è debole in fatto di sciarade.* (Campanile 1927, 16)

> "Young people today," the old man said, shaking his head, "know so little when it comes to charades."

Conversation proceeds to the next absurd subject and we would easily forget Carl'Alberto's botched story were it not for this omniscient narrator, who knows the ending Carl'Alberto has forgotten. Almost as if the thought, triggered by the old man's reference to charades, has come to the narrator's mind a few moments late—but better late than never, the old man's lament ends with a reference for this footnote:

> *Il seguito della storia che Carl'Alberto voleva raccontare alla bella ignota era: quel tale che dormiva in albergo nella stessa camera con un pellirossa, svegliato prima dell'alba, s'alza e all'oscuro, per non destare il pellirossa, si lava la faccia in una bacinella che, cerdando a tentoni, trova in un angolo. Disgraziatamente la bacinella era piena di conserva di pomodoro. Appena fuori, quel tale si guarda allo specchio, si vede rosso, esclama: "Quell'asino dell'albergatore! Invece di svegliare me ha svegliato il pellirossa"; e torna a dormire.* (Campanile 1927, 16)

> The rest of the story that Carl'Alberto wanted to tell the beautiful stranger went like this: The man who slept in the same hotel room as the Native American awoke before dawn. Trying not to disturb his sleeping roommate, he gropes around in the dark, finds a basin in a corner, and washes his face. Unfortunately, the basin is full of tomato paste. Once outside the room, the man looks in a mirror, sees his red face, and exclaims: "That ass of a hotel manager! Rather than wake me, he woke the redskin!" And then he goes back to sleep.

Thirty-five years separate the novel *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?* and the film *Il sorpasso*. While Native Americans might not in 1927 have been the target in Italy of any special racist attitude, there is no denying that the joke Campanile's narrator tells relies on conceptions of "redness" and, implicitly, "whiteness" without which it could not function as a joke. According to American historian Frank M. Snowden, Jr., racial purity with regard to color as an explicit value did not begin to appear in the Italian press until nine years later, in 1936. As he describes in "Race Propaganda in Italy," an examination of the development of specifically anti-Black racism in the country, in July 1938 the publication in *Giornale d'Italia* of a

manifesto on race that included as its last of ten principles—which run the gamut from the existence of race to the existence of inferior and superior races to, among other hate-mongering principles, the exclusion of Jewish people from the Italian race—the idea that "[t]he purely European and physical characteristics of the Italians ought to be in no way altered" and that the "purely European character of the Italians would be altered by crossing with any extra-European race" (Snowden 1940, 105). The manifesto, as Snowden points out, was commissioned and disseminated by the Ministry of Popular Culture. A month later, as traced by Snowden, the publication of the first issue of the "much-heralded" *La Difesa della Razza*, as well as an article in *Il Giornalissimo* stating that "The Negroes of America … are only apparently civilized and—incapable of checking their barbaric instincts—are always ready to throw off all restraint and to stain themselves with alcoholism, with rapes, and with base revenges against the white superiors," helped establish a home in Italy for anti-Black racism alongside anti-Semitism (Snowden 1940, 103).[7]

Ma che cosa è quest'amore? and *Il sorpasso* thus appear at quite obviously distinct moments in the development of racial ideology in Italy. There is a kind of innocence in the way race comes into play in Campanile's novel—as if the concept of race as it relates to color, while reified, is not necessarily ennobled.[8] After all, the newly "red-skinned" Italian man makes little of having confused himself with the Native American man; in fact, he goes right back to sleep. *Il sorpasso*'s characters can claim no such innocence or indifference and indeed go to some length, despite Bruno's racial wisecrack at the gas station, to deny any possibility of their own racism in a film that has little if anything at all to do with race. Here, nearly two decades out from fascism's racist policies, we see awareness of race as a tool (that Bruno uses to belittle, for the audience's benefit, the Black girl at the gas station) and as a source of unease (whether or not they are racist, Bruno and Roberto anxiously deny the possibility). Still, something seems to me

[7] Other forms of racial propaganda in Italy—decorative blackamoor figures depicting dark-skinned peoples as servants, for example—precede by centuries the more explicit propaganda to which Snowden refers.

[8] I have two 1927 editions of *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?*, one published by dall'Oglio and one published by Corbaccio. (The publisher Enrico dall'Oglio purchased the Corbaccio name in 1923.) The dall'Oglio edition includes the footnote that completes Carl'Alberto's story about the man from Perugia. Curiously, the Corbaccio edition does not. One can't help but wonder what might account for the difference. Did Corbaccio deem the joke too controversial or did some other editorial sensibility guide its decision to omit the joke?

to bring the novel and film together if not in their audiences' internalization of racial ideology then in comedic premise, one dependent on the pretense—the charade—of appearances. What is that premise and what, in each instance, does it hide?

* * *

The most obvious premise is that of skin color, an apparently bottomless wellspring for comedy in twentieth-century Italy as elsewhere. In Risi's film as in Campanile's novel, the mark of color in the work, however ephemeral, invites us to witness Bryant's "open secret"—something that is clearly there and yet invisible (Bryant 2007, ix). As I try to make out the secrets' contents, I'm reminded of a passage from Henri Bergson's *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* in which Bergson examines, from the point of view of a white turn-of-the-century Frenchman philosopher, what makes non-white skin colors laughable. The passage I have in mind is worth presenting in full:

> Why do we laugh at a head of hair which has changed from dark to blond ? What is there comic about a rubicund nose? And why does one laugh at a negro? The question would appear to be an embarrassing one, for it has been asked by successive psychologists such as Hecker, Kraepelin and Lipps, and all have given different replies. And yet I rather fancy the correct answer was suggested to me one day in the street by an ordinary cabby, who applied the expression "unwashed" to the negro fare he was driving. Unwashed! Does not this mean that a black face, in our imagination, is one daubed over with ink or soot ? If so, then a red nose can only be one which has received a coating of vermilion. And so we see that the notion of disguise has passed on something of its comic quality to instances in which there is actually no disguise, though there might be. In the former set of examples, although his usual dress was distinct from the individual, it appeared in our mind to form one with him, because we had become accustomed to the sight. In the latter, although the black or red colour is indeed inherent in the skin, we look upon it as artificially laid on, because it surprises us.
>
> But here we meet with a fresh crop of difficulties in the theory of the comic. Such a proposition as the following: "My usual dress forms part of my body" is absurd in the eyes of reason. Yet imagination looks upon it as true. "A red nose is a painted nose," "A negro is a white man in disguise," are also absurd to the reason which rationalises; but they are gospel truths to pure imagination. So there is a logic of the imagination which is not the logic of reason, one which at times is even opposed to the latter,—with

> which, however, philosophy must reckon, not only in the study of the comic, but in every other investigation of the same kind. It is something like the logic of dreams, though of dreams that have not been left to the whim of individual fancy, being the dreams dreamt by the whole of society. In order to reconstruct this hidden logic, a special kind of effort is needed, by which the outer crust of carefully stratified judgments and firmly established ideas will be lifted, and we shall behold in the depths of our mind, like a sheet of subterranean water, the flow of an unbroken stream of images which pass from one into another. This interpenetration of images does not come about by chance. It obeys laws, or rather habits, which hold the same relation to imagination that logic does to thought. (Bergson 1921, 40–42)

What *Il sorpasso* offers in the gas station scene might not, by Bergson's logic, be sarcasm—not really. In the imaginative realm of the joke, Bruno sees through a disguise, revealing the white face we viewers know very well the girl does not have. In fact, by the joke's Bergsonian logic, the girl's Blackness doesn't exist at all: she is a white girl in costume, a costume we viewers need Bruno's caustic wit to see through. What viewers see of her—that she is Black—is momentarily suspended for the sake of the "dream dreamt by the whole of society" to which Bergson refers: In this case, the dream—not necessarily a conscious desire but a kind of illusory space—would have to be one of a purely white society (Bergson 1921, 40–42). Without that imaginative premise, one first explicitly propagated in Italy nearly twenty-five years prior, the joke falls apart.

And the premise is indeed a product of the imagination. Even Mussolini, of all people, declared—in 1932—the impossibility of "racial purity." Hear him in conversation with the German-Swiss biographer Emil Ludwig, who asks Mussolini for his opinions about racial purity and refers dismissively in his question to someone, a Professor Blank, who was apparently propagating racist ideologies:

> Of course there are no pure races left; not even the Jews have kept their blood unmingled. Successful crossings have often promoted the beauty and energy of a nation. Race! It is a feeling, not a reality; ninety-five percent, at least, is a feeling. Nothing will ever make me believe that biologically pure races can be shown to exist to-day. Amusingly enough, not one of those who have proclaimed the 'nobility' of the Teutonic race was himself a Teuton. … No such doctrine will ever find wide acceptance here in Italy. Professor Blank, whom you quoted just now, is a man with more poetic imagination than science in his composition. National pride has no need of the delirium that is race. (Ludwig 1933, 69–70)

Needless to say, Mussolini's belief was not as immovable as he contends here. He, too, soon came to fully inhabit the "poetic imagination," the "delirium" to which he refers—a hellish dreamscape where race, a concept that has no science, is not merely a "reality" but also a meaningful way to classify and assess people (Ludwig 1933, 69–70). Eco notes in *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* that while the results of fiction's impacts on real life can be pleasant, they can also turn life "into a nightmare instead of a dream" (Eco 1994, 139).

This is not just one night's or even one war's scare: once popularized, racial ideology is notoriously difficult to shake. To the extent that *Il sorpasso*'s late-mid-century Italian viewers were aware of it, the impossible dream of a purely white Italian society—in accordance with Bergson's framework, a dream ineluctably embedded in Bruno's aside—may not necessarily have been received as an affirmation of racial superiority (though it may have been that and have been received as that). The dream could have instead or also served as momentary assurance that their world was not changing *too* quickly. They knew all along how unlikely it was that a Black person should leisurely explore Italy. And look: in the imaginative world of the joke, she is not a Black person, she is a white person in disguise. This is the illogic—the "dream"—of the joke.

Why though, by the dream's logic, must the white lady paint herself Black and not, say, Calabrian or Jewish or Sardinian or Sicilian? In the context of cinema, what I imagine is one of the few places where, in 1962, Italian audiences might encounter a Black person, it can't just be for a quick laugh or even for further illustration of Bruno's poor character. What activity of the Italian collective unconscious does this painted-on Blackness hide? Posed another way, what does an Italian racial ideology, as momentarily illustrated in a passing joke made in *Il sorpasso*, a film that is not about race, conceal? What ideological resonances and dissemblances are hiding right there in plain sight?

* * *

In *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?*, color takes on a different hue but similar if more embellished disguise. As in *Il sorpasso*, a joke doubles the identity of its target: the novel's man from Perugia functions as both himself—a presumably white, Italian man—and a person of a different race, one who is effectively erased from the anecdote. After all, the Native American man doesn't physically appear; he is instead a bit of hearsay replaced, as the joke

glides over the surface of its own language, by tomato paste. In this way, the Native American man functions as a kind of ghost, the vision of a white man coated with Bergson's vermilion. The confused white man who looks in the mirror doesn't recognize himself behind the mask language has made for him. I imagine him walking from the mirror back to bed, now two men—one Native American, one European—in one body coated with surfaces that language has colored. The tyranny of appearances is laid bare.

* * *

There is also, between references to race in *Il sorpasso* and in *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?*, a common framework: the joke, of course—but what might be just as notable is the placement of the joke within the boundaries of aside. Literary and cinematic asides are by nature intimate, secretive. They momentarily shut out the worlds in which they are uttered in order to speak, surreptitiously, to us, in our worlds. A humorous aside—one shaped, à la Bergson, by society's dreams, its illusions—would seem to have an even more surreptitiously conspiratorial purpose.

Luigi Pirandello wrote in 1908 that humor breaks us apart in order to show us that we are not what we understand ourselves to be:

> All the soul's fictions and the creations of feeling are subjects for humor; we will see reflection becoming a little devil which disassembles the machine of each image, of each fantasy created by feeling; it will take it apart to see how it is made; it will unwind its spring, and the whole machine will break convulsively. (Pirandello 1966, 47)

If reflection on the asides in question disassembles the machines of the jokes they contain, I wonder what parts of the machines are now visible. Do these asides, Bruno's and Campanile's narrator's, show readers and viewers that non-white people humorously appear to be costumed or "unwashed" white people? Do they instead show white viewers and readers that if they find jokes about skin color funny, they themselves are racist? That there are racists? Why turn out all the lights and exit the narrative at hand only in order to momentarily turn on the lights in our own worlds and whisper throwaway lines that play on race? The machines these jokes disassemble must be more intricate than racism alone can suggest. I am curious to know what *Il sorpasso* and *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?* might be telling us about attitudes toward the young Black sojourner or the sleeping Native American but even more interested in what the language of

race in these works wants to say to their original audiences' understandings of themselves in relation to these racialized figures. I imagine machines made of mirrors of all shapes and sizes—reflective plates, cogs, chains, cranks—in parts on the floor. What do we have here?

In muttering under his breath—not to the girl and not to Roberto—Bruno speaks directly to us. In handing the forgotten elements of Carl'Alberto's story over to the narrator and disarticulating Carl'Alberto's primary purpose—to impress the beautiful woman—in order to squeeze in, for the reader's benefit, the story's racializing punchline, the narrator of *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?* seems likewise to speak directly to the reader, whispering strange things—impossible doublings, race charades we can't see but nonetheless recognize.

* * *

Racial doubling of a more blatantly fantastical and far less comedic sort appears in Vittorio De Sica's 1951 neorealist *Miracolo a Milano* (*Miracle in Milan*). In the film, which depicts the magical redemption of an underclass who live in a shantytown on the outskirts of the city, two minor characters—a white Italian woman and Black American man who live in the shantytown—cannot openly court each other because of their racial difference. The settlement's inhabitants surely include southern Italian migrants who, to borrow language Shelleen Greene uses in *Equivocal Subjects: Between Italy and Africa—Constructions of Racial and National Identity in the Italian Cinema* to describe southern Italians' low ranking in the hierarchy of Italian whiteness, are "racially conscribed by the north/south division," "white and not white" (Greene 2012, 188).

But apparently, a far greater divide than the one Greene describes exists between Italians from any corner of Italy and Black people. Indeed, Greene identifies in connection with the 1962 film *Mafioso* and the 1974 film *Pane e cioccolata* a postwar period when "an Italian white identity (for northerners and southerners) is becoming fairly secure as the country becomes a major Western European economic and political power" (Greene 2012, 188). Such security might not yet have been firmly in place in 1951 but it was well enough established as to render unthinkable a relationship between a white woman and a Black man.

And so Totò, the film's protagonist, intervenes: by the beneficence of the ghost of the elderly woman who cared for him when he was an orphan, he comes to own a dove—the sign of peace—that has the power to grant wishes. The white Italian woman whispers in Totò's ear the unspeakable

wish—the audience cannot hear her—to become Black while the Black man explicitly and desperately expresses his corresponding wish. As his hand stretches out to Totò, beckoning, the Black American actor Jerome Johnson's unnamed character pleads in English and in Italian for all but especially for Totò to hear,

> Totò! Please! I want to become…white! *Io voglio diventare…bianco*.[9]

"Sì," says the complaisant Totò and, just like that, the wish is granted. Graziella Parati describes the impact of Totò's magical intervention in her book *Migration Italy: The Art of Talking Back in a Destination Culture*:

> The dove works its magic, and the audience is confronted with the image on screen of a white woman with a blackened face, in the 'best' Hollywood tradition, and a black man whose skin we can only guess has become white because we see him from the back, and at a distance. The change in his skin colour is only hinted at and he quickly disappears from the screen and from the story. The couple can never be united, for the white woman who wanted to be black performs a mockery of blackness and the black man who wanted to be white cannot perform whiteness in full view of the audience. (Parati 2005, 104–105)

Where Parati detects in the white woman–Black man subplot a "separatist paradigm of interracial relations" (Parati 2005, 104), I see a further separation: not only of the racialized self from the racialized other but also of the outer self from the inner self. The white woman "performs a mockery of [B]lackness" something akin to the illusion of put-on skin that forms the basis for jokes in *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?* and *Il sorpasso* (Parati 2005, 105).[10] But what about this Black man who wears a white skin? What's the danger in seeing him? What if, were the Black man with white skin to turn around to face his Italian audience, the audience would see themselves as if, like the "red"-skinned white man from Perugia, they had, in a half-dream state, woken up and looked in a mirror?

[9] *Miracolo a Milano*, directed by Vittorio De Sica (Italy: Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche, 1951). 01:15:37.

[10] In *Unexplained Presence*, Tisa Bryant addresses another notable cinematic "mockery of [B]lackness," to borrow Parati's language, one found in a scene in Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'eclisse* (*The Eclipse*). In a moment of levity, Monica Vitti's character, Vittoria, dons blackface and dances around, performing an absurd, hip-thrusting impersonation of a Black Kenyan woman. The charade ends when Marta, a colonialist based in Kenya played by Mirella Ricciardi, says, "That's enough. *Adesso basta fare Negre, per piacere*": "*That's enough*. That's enough now. Let's stop playing Negroes." *L'eclisse*, directed by Michelangelo Antonioni (Italy: Interopa Film, Cineriz; Paris: Paris Film Production, 1962). 00:34:45.

* * *

There is a notable inaccuracy in Parati's description of this scene from *Miracolo a Milano*. She writes that viewers must guess that the Black man's wish has been granted, that the change in his skin color can only be assumed, that he "cannot perform whiteness in full view of the audience" (Parati 2005, 105) While each of the two characters have assumed—quite literally painted on—the other's color and this bilateral change leaves them in a reversed form of the same impossible position they were previously in, it is not at all the case that the whitened Black man cannot face his audience. In fact, we see him just as clearly as we see the white woman in blackface. Even if he appears, at first, to be thrilled about it, the white pancake makeup he wears is just as unconvincing on him as blackface is on the white woman. He calls to mind one of those porcelain-white blackamoor busts I've seen displayed in window shops in Italy: Black but white, white but Black.

Eager to woo a white love interest, a Black man played by Jerome Johnson reacts to the first sight of his newly white skin. *Miracolo a Milano*, Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche, 1951

It is curious that Parati does not discern the would-be white man this Black man has become. Where the blackfaced white woman performs a visible mockery of Blackness, the whitefaced Black man, however fully present on screen, is to at least one undoubtedly astute audience member, and perhaps to others as well, invisible—or at least indiscernible. The man's initial thrill at the sight of his new skin gives way to gestures of shame—we witness his downcast eyes, his slouching off-screen. After he sees the blackfaced white woman and recognizes that his disguise works no better than hers, it appears to be himself, not his audience and not even the woman to whom he is attracted, that the white-skinned Black man cannot face. In a way, both the blackened white woman and whitened Black man play roles similar to those played by characters Toni Morrison describes in her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*: Black people who, in Morrison's words, "ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis in literature not written by them" (Morrison 1992, viii). De Sica's characters will never find each other but, freshly racialized, they do function for each other, and potentially for us, as catalysts for revelation of the great distance between who they each are to themselves—what they each feel—and the skins they each wear.

In *Miracolo a Milano* as in *Il sorpasso* and *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?*, race is addressed not head-on but as a kind of stage whisper, a footnote to the main action. But unlike the later film and earlier novel, this scene from *Miracolo a Milano* is not a funny one. There are other jokes, mostly visual jokes, but not here. And yet there remains a place for Pirandello's machine, if not the humor that disassembles it. Far from the anxious denial of racism (alongside a muttered remark that plays on race) depicted in *Il sorpasso*, there is in *Miracolo a Milano* a quiet acceptance of racial ideology: as if the racial laws of fascist Italy remained internalized, a white woman and Black man cannot intermingle. The machinery of the construction of race grinds on, having turned the genuine, intimate feeling between two characters—one Black, one white—into surfaces that can be repainted and swapped but never destroyed. When two mirrors face each other, their reflections may seem infinite; even if smaller and smaller, the reflections appear to get closer and closer to the heart of what is pictured. But this sense of deepening infinity is an illusion. In fact, the images fade, light can no longer reach them. They eventually become invisible. The newly costumed characters—one a reflection of the other, unrecognizable not only to each other but also to themselves—walk off-screen in opposite directions.

Pirandello goes on in his treatise on humor to reflect on the role contraries play in humor's disassembling—one could say dissembling—work:

> Every feeling, thought, and idea which arises in the humorist splits itself into contraries. Each yes splits itself into a no, which assumes at the end the same value as the yes. Sometimes the humorist may pretend to take only one side; meanwhile, inside, the other feeling speaks out to him, and appears although he doesn't have the courage to reveal it. It speaks to him and starts by advancing now a faint excuse, an alternative, which cools off the warmth of the first feeling, and then a wise reflection which takes away the seriousness and leads to laughter. (Pirandello 1966, 47)

This scene in *Miracolo a Milano* might be read as a moment in a truncated journey toward laughter, as if the seriousness that precedes the wise reflection that in turn precedes laughter were suspended and left hanging there. Were the scene to complete the joke, perhaps each of the two characters would return to Totò with the wish to become themselves again only to find the other has done the same and then return again to Totò ad infinitum. Instead, as the characters look at themselves and then each other and each experience in ways they hadn't when they wore their own skins the disembodying and, most importantly, self-alienating feeling of the costume that is race, we in the audience must look at them, must take their predicament and self-alienation and alienation from each other seriously, must look at ourselves—at each other—as if in a mirror.

* * *

I've left much open, perhaps in part because I have no argument and, quite frankly, little use for argument. I could hardly come to any firm conclusion about Italian history, culture, or language in relation to race on the basis of the works I've discussed—this would be the case even if I were to discuss every instance of color-based jokes and doublings in Italian film and literature. I instead have only what I've observed: racial doublings in two Italian films and a novel that, read under the light of a few ideas about humor, have a funny—or strange—way of suggesting that we might find ourselves in those whose skins are different from our own. What I hear in these instances, chosen for the most part because I am intimate with them, I would expect to hear in many others: an undercurrent of acknowledgment of race as a kind of costume, a charade, an appearance: not only, as

Bergson would have it, for Black people but for everyone, including white audiences.

That proposition—that race is a costume each one of us wears—is at the very heart of *Il sorpasso*'s and *Ma che cosa è quest'amore?*'s and *Miracolo a Milano*'s race-attentive scenes. Their jokes or in the case of *Miracolo a Milano*, would-be jokes, layered as they are, work subtly to dismantle the fiction, the feeling, the charade of race: apparently, too subtly. As any number of cultural theorists readily point out, cinema and other media play important roles in not merely representing but in constructing ideology. Viewers' interactions with cultural production undoubtedly constitute a critical aspect of such construction. If race, an entirely specious notion, seems to have lost little traction in twenty-first-century Italy, it might in some small part be because few really got—or were ready to hear—the disruptive messages hiding in the prior century's jokes about it. Indeed, today, the revelry generated in response to images of Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio's deeply tanned face superimposed on the bodies of Black people suggests that the mirror such jokes hold up to those who laugh—Di Maio himself among them—is warped. In these seemingly idle but in fact schismatic images, race severs us from each other and from ourselves.

Eco writes in *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* that "fictional texts come to the aid of our metaphysical narrowmindedness" (Eco 1994, 115). I don't know that nonfictional texts created in response to fiction have this sublime capacity. Eco might say they don't, as they're beholden not only to the real world's rules but also to the rules laid out by a given fiction: The Black sojourner is not also a masked white lady, the man in Perugia is not two men of different races in one, the mutually enamored *Miracolo a Milano* characters separated by skin color are not symbols of the ways in which our skins obstruct our relationships to ourselves just as much as our relationships to each other. On the other hand, there are all the imaginative possibilities afforded by jokes: by the mirages that compose their landscapes, by the surreptitious, subversive messages they carry—messages perhaps sometimes hidden from the jokesters themselves. The "double-sided sleight of hand between the maker and the subconscious" to which Bryant refers suggests a deep-seated knowledge—of, say, a counter-racial ideology: race as a masquerade—of which even the maker might be unaware (Bryant 2007, ix). Under the guise of comedic or fantastical aside, the twentieth-century Italian works I've discussed, one on the far side of fascism's racist agenda and two on the near side, whisper

questions—truths—in want of a community of listeners: How might we regard each other if we knew our skins were merely costumes? Or if we knew ourselves to be, each of us, several people, maybe even all people, in one skin, each connected by history, by biology, by humanity? Isn't that, in fact, what we are? Isn't that the secret hiding in plain sight?

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by ‘n’ refer to notes.

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