

Methodologies of Blackness in Italy: Past, Present, and Futures

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Abstract This chapter explores Italy's methodologies of Blackness in relation to post-coloniality by tracing a trajectory of emergence from the field of literary fiction to current artistic practices characterised by a broader diversification of forms and media. It contends that these practices are calling postcolonial publics into existence by adopting a historically grounded and future-oriented approach. In addressing Italy's fraught relation with coloniality and national formation, I connect the institutional and political challenges these practices are facing to some of their most significant features, such as collaboration and strategic adaptation.

Keywords Italy. Blackness. Coloniality. Literature of migration. New media.

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1 Introduction

In a recent book that explores the intersections of culture and digitality among African diasporic communities, Kelly Baker Josephs and Roopika Risam (2021, ix) write that “Black people have always been intimately familiar with technologies, both repressive and emancipatory”, and that it is crucial to “emphasize how Black communities have taken advantage of the affordances of technology to assert their humanity, histories, knowledges, and expertise” (2021, xiii). Baker

Josephs and Risam aim to intervene in current debates on digital humanities by displacing the field from its Anglophone and white-centred methodological approaches and theoretical models. To do so, they invoke Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993) and propose to investigate digital practices that span across global geographies of cultural production. They term these practices "methodologies of Blackness" (2021, xiv). Drawing on this theoretical framework, in this essay I explore the emergence of methodologies of Blackness in Italy, a country that has been traditionally resistant to acknowledging the cultural and artistic contributions of Black communities to its history, society, and national imagination. In response to this unwillingness, methodologies of Blackness have forcefully drawn attention to Italy's colonial histories and persisting racial inequalities, while foregrounding Blackness as a site of artistic invention, political resistance, and social emancipation.

Beginning in the 1990s, the publication of literary texts that addressed the experience of Afro-Italian and migrant subjects - the so-called literature of migration - has launched a trajectory of emergence from the restricted field of literary fiction to wider and non-specialised audiences. Today, a wide range of multimedia and transdisciplinary projects testify to the vitality of cultural and artistic practices that centre on Blackness to envision decolonial horizons. By exploring this trajectory, this essay approaches postcolonial publics "as *made* and *emergent*, as being called into existence" (Baker, Blaagaard 2016a, 5), and wants to trace the formation of a postcolonial consciousness among Italian audiences.

Methodologically, I do so by drawing into conversation methodologies of Blackness and postcoloniality. There are several reasons behind this choice. First, the literary and digital projects I study participate in the broader project of decolonisation by envisioning a pluriversal world (Mignolo 2011) that accommodates forms of knowledge, sensibilities, and worldviews that coloniality has historically suppressed or deemed inferior. If decolonisation requires a "symbolic overhaul, a reshaping of dominant meanings" (Boehmer 1995, 3), Italy's methodologies of Blackness have deployed artistic and symbolic strategies to redefine discursive practices and, in doing so, to actively intervene in the social and political fields. Secondly, in the Italian context, the postcolonial approach has been particularly productive for connecting forms of racial and colonial oppression that have been experienced globally to political histories and social phenomena that are peculiar to Italy. Indeed, the study of Italy's postcoloniality, as Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (2014, 3-4) have stressed, requires that we take into consideration several determinants: "the emigrant nature of Italy's colonization of Africa"; Italy's "internal colonialism" in relation to its South; forms of "indirect postcoloniality" that arise from the substantial presence of mi-

grant communities from ex-colonies of other European empires; and the geographical position of Italy at the centre of the Mediterranean basin. In this sense, bringing together postcoloniality and methodologies of Blackness allows me to develop a critical approach that moves across scales of analysis while being attentive to contextual specificities. On the one hand, “the transhistorical and geographically expansive nature of postcoloniality” (Lombardi-Diop, Romeo 2014, 4) is coupled with a focus on localised political struggles; on the other, Baker Josephs and Risam’s call to develop a “method for incorporating and foregrounding transnationality and cross-temporality” (2021, xi) informs my exploration of literary and digital projects that engage Italy’s history to actively intervene in the present.

It is then from this localised yet world-oriented perspective that I argue for the fruitfulness of linking postcoloniality to methodologies of Blackness, as a way of exploring Italy’s own colonial past and histories of racialisation, as well as the traces that this recent and less recent past has left in the present. Only through this exploration can the boundaries of Italianness and of cultural belonging be radically rethought. By understanding postcoloniality as a transnational, history-driven and future-oriented analytic, it also becomes possible to revive the political imperative articulated by Antonio Gramsci ([1948-51] 2014, 1376) – whose work has been key to postcolonial theorists in Italy and abroad – when he wrote that “the beginning of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what critical elaboration really is; that is to say, it is ‘knowing thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory”. Creating such inventory and making it available to Italian and European audiences through literary and cultural practices continues to be a most urgent task – and the only one that can carve a path into decolonial futures.

Finally, the study of methodologies of Blackness as postcolonial practices compels us to attend to how theories and analytics travel across cultural fields and adapt, not without frictions, to local contexts. In Italy, whereas the first forays into postcoloniality were aimed at translating theories originating in the Anglophone and Francophone spaces, starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s a school of Italian postcolonial studies has begun to address the complexities of Italy’s own postcolonial condition. More recently, a similar process of localised adaptation of the analytical categories of global Black studies has informed the work of the Black Mediterranean Collective, whose intervention wants to “provincialize North American approaches to the study of Blackness” (Danewid et al. 2021, 16). In engaging these critical traditions from the perspective of Italian literary and cultural studies, this essay traces the progressive formation of postcolonial publics in Italy. It does so by attending to the complex challenges that Italy’s emerging methodologies of Blackness

are facing, and by showing that only a future-oriented and context-attentive approach can address and overcome them.¹

2 Beginnings: Literature of Migration

2.1 History and Coloniality

The partly arbitrary yet conventionally accepted beginning of *letteratura della migrazione* (literature of migration) in Italy coincides with a shocking event: the murder of South African migrant and agricultural labourer Jerry Essan Masslo in August 1989. From a political and legal perspective, Masslo's murder exposed with tragic clarity the inadequacy of Italy's legislation on immigration. After escaping Apartheid South Africa, Masslo had reached Italy, where his application for political asylum was rejected because he was not born in Eastern Europe. This principle of geographic limitation, which established that refugee status could only be granted to individuals fleeing the USSR, shed light on the arbitrary differentiation between migrants who deserved protection (refugees and asylum seekers) and those who allegedly did not (the infamous economic migrants) – a distinction that continues to shape perceptions of immigration today. Masslo's murder led to a change in legislation. In 1990, a new law (Legge Martelli) that redefined immigration policies and eliminated the geographic limitation principle was approved. Most significantly, this tragic event prompted a reckoning with Italy's changing social fabric and with the emergence of new identities that would further destabilise an ideologically precarious national homogeneity.²

It is within this sociopolitical framework that a series of texts that would have been later categorised as 'literature of migration' began to appear. Primarily interested in exploring the condition of migrancy and in denouncing forms of everyday and institutional racism from an autobiographical perspective, these texts oscillated between journalism and literature and were often co-written or prefaced by an

1 A note on my own positionality as a scholar: I write about questions of migration, Blackness, and cultural belonging from a position of privilege within the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo 2011). I am a white (or, as someone has told me, 'spicy white') Italian scholar who has mostly worked in Anglo-American academic spaces. My family history has been shaped by Italy's internal colonialism and mass emigration from the South, and this has deeply informed my thinking about racial categorisations, whose plasticity and historical mutability I have witnessed in the different countries where I have lived.

2 From 1988 to 1994, Italian journalist Massimo Ghirelli hosted a rather popular TV show, *Nonsolonerò* (Not Just Black), on immigration and racism. Masslo was interviewed by Ghirelli a few months before being killed.

Italian journalist (typically a man), who would lend his institutional and symbolic power to legitimise the migrant's voice and thus create an audience that was still non-existent. Canonical in this sense is one of the most successful texts of this phase of emergence, *Io venditore di elefanti* (1990), co-written by Pap Khouma and Oreste Pivetta. These forms of collaboration were highly problematic, being based on the paradigm of the native informant and often motivated by self-congratulatory humanitarianism.³ Nonetheless, these initial experiments drew attention to the fact that Italy, historically a country of emigrants, was turning into a host country for migration fluxes of increasing magnitude. Most importantly, these texts became the starting point in the formation of Italy's postcolonial consciousness as they encouraged a reflection on the ideological construction of Italianness - which had been coalescing around the intersecting axes of coloniality and migration.

As Rhiannon Noel Welch (2016, 27) has convincingly argued, the constitution of Italy as a nation-state was founded on the production of its citizen-subjects in biopolitical terms. Crucially, this happened in three interconnected areas: "the southern question, migration, and colonialism, in which Italian racial discourse took shape". In other words, the invention of Italianness as a biopolitical and racial category meant that both the mass emigration of Italians in the late nineteenth century and Italy's colonial expansion (which began in the same decades) had to be reframed as naturalised outcomes of Italy's vitality and colonial reproductivity (Welch 2016, 6). This process has been decisive in shaping Italy's self-image as a country of emigrants while foreclosing a serious engagement with Italy's colonial past. When literature of migration began to emerge in the 1990s, these structures of self-perception had hardly been questioned. It is then within this framework that we should understand, on the one hand, the tendency of the cultural and literary field to analyse those earlier literary examples within the reassuring framework of a politically deflated multiculturalism that fails to interrogate the deep foundations of national belonging, and on the other, the particularly challenging process of emergence of postcolonial publics in Italy.⁴

3 In parallel to more established publishing channels, literature of migration has been circulating through street sellers, small independent presses, and self-publishing ventures. Among the numerous critical studies on literature of migration, those that offer a more exhaustive overview of its history, formal features, and themes, are: Quaquarelli 2010; Pezzarossa, Rossini 2011; Mengozzi 2013; Comberiat, Pisanelli 2021.

4 In a scathing retrospective analysis of literature of migration, Fulvio Pezzarossa (2018, 321) rightly criticises scholarly assessments that idealise multiculturalism and creolisation, and in so doing reinforce "the oppressive infantilisation of the other" ("la soggiogante infantilizzazione dell'altro"). Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Italian are by the Author.

2.2 A Difficult Emergence

Developing a postcolonial consciousness always involves addressing coloniality in its historical and epistemological depth. In Italy, this has been done through scholarship and works of fiction that have critically challenged myths about Italianness. In 2005, historian Angelo Del Boca, who spent his career deconstructing narratives about Italy's supposedly minor or less brutal colonialism, publishes *Italiani brava gente?*, a book that debunks the persisting and self-absolving myth of Italians 'good people' (*brava gente*). Around the same time, two anthologies of short stories – *Pecore nere* (Black sheep, 2005) and *Amori bicolori* (Bicolour love stories, 2008) – bring to Italian publics the work of so-called 'new Italians', in which the authors call for a radical rethinking of Italianness and cultural belonging by foregrounding the experience of Black and migrant subjects. Ingy Mubiayi, an Italian writer and cultural activist of Egyptian and Congolese background, has recently described this period as a moment of euphoria and political utopia. A period, she adds, that regrettably did not last long, due to a lack of strategic communication and to increasingly hostile political conditions.⁵ These examples, when read along Mubiayi retrospective analysis, point to a pattern that has characterised the laborious emergence of literature of migration and, more generally, of a postcolonial consciousness in Italy: on the one hand, the work of a small but vocal group of writers, activists, and cultural actors has brought to public attention questions of identity, migration, and citizenship; on the other, and despite substantial demographic and social changes, the fundamental unwillingness to question Italy's constructed self-image has resulted in institutional and political blockages, as well as in enduring and systemic forms of marginalisation.

Such marginalisation has also depended on a crucial definitional problem. So far, I have been using *letteratura della migrazione* (literature of migration) as the most widely accepted denomination. Yet, this label is in many ways inaccurate: some of the writers 'of migration' are not migrant, since they were born in Italy; others do not necessarily see migration as the defining problematic of their work; still others reject the categorisation in toto as ghettoising. The plethora of definitions that critics have proposed – to name just a few, *letteratura italoфона, minore, dell'immigrazione, postcoloniale, afroitaliana* (Italophone, minor, of immigration, postcolonial, Afro-Italian) – reveals a certain anxiety, if not puzzlement, about the thematic and conceptual boundaries of the object of study. This definitional anxie-

⁵ These comments were made during an online event ("La scrittura come contronarrazione dell'immigrazione") organised by *Words4Link*.

ty, along with the cultural conservatism of Italian academia, has prevented the full recognition and inclusion of these texts into the contemporary canon of Italian literature.

Nonetheless, the literary field has played and continues to play an important role as a partially autonomous and mediating field of struggle (Bourdieu 1996): a struggle for visibility, for symbolic and cultural capital, and ultimately, a struggle to actively intervene in the social space. As the first literary example of methodologies of Blackness in Italy, literature of migration has foregrounded the experience of Black and migrant communities to open a collective discussion about coloniality, national belonging, and postcolonial futures. In the following sections, I address how these artistic practices have progressively emerged from the restricted field of literary fiction to forcefully reclaim spaces of expression that could engage wider publics, thus taking up the project of developing Italy's postcolonial consciousness through narrative, digital, and multimedia projects.

3 The Present: Methodologies of Blackness and Postcolonial Publics

3.1 Collaborative Practices

Within literary studies, critics of literature of migration have proposed to replace *letteratura* (literature) with *scritture* (writings) as a way of signalling the importance of memoirs, autobiographies and other non-fictional forms.⁶ This is certainly a welcome opening. Yet, it does not fully account for the formal and mediatic range of current cultural practices, which span from more canonical genres (fiction, non-fiction, journalism) to film, podcasting, music, TV series, and digital projects. It is then at the juncture of writings of migration, non-literary forms of expression, and postcolonial engagements with Italy's society and history that I identify the political potential of current methodologies of Blackness for articulating decolonial futures.

Collaboration has proved to be crucial to this end. Consider for instance the recent collection of short stories *Future. Il domani narrato dalle voci di oggi* (Future. Tomorrow narrated by the voices of today, 2019). The anthology consists of eleven short stories written by Afro-Italian women. It was curated by Igiaba Scego, one of the most vocal and recognised Afro-Italian authors, prefaced by Camilla Haw-

⁶ See for instance *Leggere il testo e il mondo* (Pezzarossa, Rossini 2011), whose subtitle is *Ventanni di scritture della migrazione in Italia* (Twenty years of writings of migration in Italy).

thorne, a US-based scholar with “African American and Italian roots” (2019, 21), and postfaced by Prisca Augustoni, a poet and professor working on multilingualism and diaspora in Brazil. The authors of the short stories are Italian women of African descent, whose family and personal histories intersect with global histories of migration, colonisation, and border crossing. Because they belong to different generations, some were born in Italy, others migrated to Italy at a young age and settled there permanently, still others have left Italy to work or study abroad. While the unifying thread of the anthology is the authors’ affective attachment to different African cultures and to a renewed idea of Italianness, the stories articulate a diversified network of affiliations that can be simultaneously – or alternatively – national, linguistic, and ethnic. As a consequence, the anthology challenges dichotomous narratives that monolithically oppose cultures and languages without considering the complexity of transversal and often contradictory attachments. This is a direct consequence of the collective nature of their work. Most importantly, what distinguishes *Future* from previous collaborative endeavours is, firstly, the rejection of the power asymmetries intrinsic to the ‘Italian journalist/migrant writer’ model; and secondly, the awareness that the symbolic and cultural work of writing is part of a larger political project that transcends literary expression.

In stressing the connections between emancipatory politics and collaborative intellectual labour, *Future* compellingly illustrates how, by reclaiming a space of expression and cultural participation, emerging methodologies of Blackness are making “affective claims to agency” (Papacharissi 2014, 119) that are firmly grounded in current political struggles. In the preface, Igiaba Scego makes this quite clear when she directs a collective *J'accuse* to Italy’s cultural field and political class. Their unwillingness to recognise Afro-Italian identities and to view Blackness as Italianness prompts her to characterise this reluctance as “an open betrayal” (Scego 2019, 13). It is important to note here that Scego’s activist work of consciousness-raising is fuelled by very concrete sociopolitical struggles, particularly the fight to reform Italy’s citizenship law, which is founded on the principle of *jus sanguinis* (in Latin, right of blood). By favouring supposedly authentic blood affiliations, the current law prevents children of migrants who were born in Italy to become citizens until they turn eighteen – when they can begin a bureaucratically nightmarish application process. Despite several street rallies, cultural campaigns, and very timid attempts to reform the law in 2015, millions of Italians born from foreign parents are still negated citizenship rights.⁷

⁷ In 2015, the left-wing government tried to introduce the so-called *jus culturae* (right of culture), which would have tied citizenship rights to having finished a cycle of school-

Within this context, *Future* articulates a discursive project that is most profoundly shaped by the lived experiences and political engagement of its collaborators, who are both literary authors and members of the cultural association Razzismo Brutta Storia (Racism Is an Ugly Business). Since 2008, Razzismo brutta storia has been actively promoting anti-racist culture and practices through educational initiatives, workshops, and forums. Significantly, and in a tragic parallel with the beginning of literature of migration, the association was born in response to the murder of Abdel William Guibrem, aka Abba, a Black Italian teenager who was killed in a brutal racist attack by two white Italian men who had accused him of stealing a box of cookies from their store. The murder of Abba in 2008, just like the murder of Jerry Essan Masslo in 1989, of Samb Modou e Diop Mor in 2011, of Soumalia Sacko and Idy Diene in 2018, of Willy Monteiro Duarte in 2020, and of Youns El Boussettaoui in 2021 stand as hideous proofs that anti-Black violence continues to be a tragic reality in Italy, and that the cultivation of an anti-racist consciousness remains, despite self-absolving narratives of tolerance and multiculturalism, a most urgent collective responsibility, which members of Razzismo brutta storia have placed at the core of their political and cultural work. Their projects and initiatives range from workshops in elementary and middle schools to a web series on migration and social inequalities, and from promotional events for films and documentaries to musical performances in juvenile prisons.

Furthermore, because the collective Razzismo brutta storia is almost entirely composed of women, the collaborative element intersects with the deliberate choice of challenging gendered modes of knowledge production. In this way, the paradigm of the individual male intellectual producing knowledge to be delivered to the masses, which postcolonial writers and grassroots political movement have been questioning for decades, gets further eroded. By embracing the notion of “intellectual labor as collectively produced through social movements, digital technologies, and different forms of activism” (Ponzanesi, Habel 2018, xlili), this transdisciplinary and non-hierarchised ‘future’ collective experiments with alternative forms of collaborative knowledge production and dissemination, disrupts gendered ideas of intellectual labour, and grounds its work in social struggles and emancipatory politics.

ing in Italy. Not only was the proposed reform shut down by the Italian Senate in 2017, but in 2018, a newly elected right-wing coalition changed the waiting time for the application process from two to four years, effectively extending the state of uncertainty and lack of rights of thousands of petitioners. Consider also that ISTAT has calculated that, as of 2018, there were more than one million second-generation children and young adults born in Italy without citizenship rights. See “Identità e percorsi di integrazione” 2020.

3.2 Strategic Adaptations

Among the modes of artistic production and political engagement directed at non-literary audiences, film and videography have become increasingly central for rethinking constructions of Italianness in relation to Blackness. In 2018, Fred Kudjo Kuwornu, an activist and filmmaker, created the multimedia project “Blaq•It”, as well as a web-page (blackitalia.info) with the goal of giving visibility to the complex universe of Afro-Italianness “without political interferences”.⁸ In foregrounding the importance of producing knowledge outside institutional frameworks and their stifling requirements, BlackItalia aligns itself with practices of “citizen media” (Rodríguez 2001; Stephansen 2016) - which, as scholars have highlighted, are characterised by the pursuit of a “non-institutionalized agenda” (Baker, Blaagaard 2016a, 1) and by the combination of virtuality and presence, digitality and concreteness. One of the projects of BlackItalia is a web series of short videos focusing on the work and experiences of Afro-Italian artists, musicians, filmmakers, bloggers, and entrepreneurs. In one of the episodes, Naths Grazia Sukubo and Bellamy Okot discuss the collaborative blog and web magazine they started in 2015 to challenge the invisibility of Black Italians in traditional media, *Afroitalian Souls*. During the conversation, Bellamy Okot poignantly captures the importance of citizen media practices when institutional media have willingly failed to address the emergence of new subjectivities. “The reality has *already* changed”, she points out, and then adds: “However, cultural institutions, the media, and those who are in power are not willing to show this new face of Italy”.⁹

It is this new face of Italy that methodologies of Blackness are forcefully drawing attention to through various strategic endeavours. More recently, activists and creatives have focused on leveraging the global visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement. In this case, the challenge has been to build connections with transnational struggles for racial justice without neglecting Italy’s contextual specificities in relation to questions of race, belonging, and citizenship. An example of this productive yet complex dialogue is the Vice-produced documentary series *Black Lives Matter: A Global Reckoning*, whose first episode centres on Italy.¹⁰ In the episode, African American journalist Alzo Shade travels to Italy and interviews a group of Black Italians to better understand their most pressing political concerns and

⁸ See the manifesto of BlackItalia (<https://www.blackitalia.info>) and their declared goal of “making visible the invisible”.

⁹ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmgeyU2AMPA&feature=emb_title.

¹⁰ The documentary can be accessed here: https://video.vice.com/en_us/show/black-lives-matter-a-global-reckoning.

how they might differ from those of the African American community. In the course of the episode, the interviewees discuss exclusionary construction of Italianness, Italy's colonial history, and the exploitation of Black agricultural laborers in Southern Italy within the framework of racial capitalism. Because of the global reach and symbolic prestige of the producing platform, documentaries such as *Black Lives Matter: A Global Reckoning* are able to reach transnational audiences. At the same time, they risk reinforcing a quite problematic narrative of belatedness or secondariness, as if Italy's struggles for racial justice and inclusion required a symbolic legitimation to validate their claims. This preoccupation emerges vividly in a recent conversation between Angelica Pesarini and Camilla Hawthorne, in which Hawthorne (2020, 73) voices her worries about "the usual refrain about Italy having to work harder to catch up with the level of political consciousness achieved by Black communities in the United States, as if there existed a single, linear path that every Black community in the world had to follow to achieve the right level of political consciousness". The key word here is 'right', whereby Hawthorne signals the problematic conflation of the historically proven fact that the struggles of the African American community are tied to longer and more brutal histories of oppression and systemic racism, with an implicit and questionable standard of moral and symbolic legitimacy.

These considerations, in touching upon the broader question of cultural hegemony, might also help to explain, without justifying it, the regrettable resistance encountered by anti-racist struggles in Italy. In the same conversation, Pesarini (2020, 75) writes that the reception of the Black Lives Matter movement has brought to light the presence of a young, multiracial, and politically active generation, but also the "inadequacy of [Italy's] white, left-wing antiracism, tied to the 1970s". This inadequacy is certainly connected to an unwillingness – common to the entire political spectrum – to address Italy's own racialised national formation. But it is also premised on the mischaracterisation of any social analytic, theory, or political framework coming from the United States as neoimperial, particularly among radical left-wing groups. In this sense, the creation of postcolonial publics in Italy faces two major blockages deriving from opposite yet equally dangerous attitudes: the first flattens global anti-racist struggles by neglecting the specificities of diverse cultural spaces; the second aprioristically rejects any of their claims because it deems them inherently hegemonic. If, as Hawthorne suggests, it is crucial to cultivate a critical approach when absorbing and readapting analytical concepts and political demands coming from dominant spaces, this effort should not result in a self-absolving attitude that mistakes forms of transnational solidarity between marginalised groups for cultural imperialism.

3.3 Revisiting History and Envisioning Alternative Futures

Maintaining a critical perspective while strategically integrating and reframing concepts developed in the Anglophone space is the central objective of a recent podcast series, *Sulla razza* (On Race, 2021), created by Nadeesha Uyangoda, Nathasha Fernando and Maria Catena Mancuso. Collaborative both in its nature and in its delivery, created by three women from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds, and attentive to the nuances of Italy's history and contemporary society, *Sulla razza* translates a series of key concepts originating in the United States (such as colourism, model minority, tokenism, and intersectional feminism), and provides Italian audiences with a critical vocabulary and discursive tools to navigate questions of race and belonging. This transcultural work deploys a pedagogical approach while presenting complex ideas in a fresh and conversational tone. The podcast is accessible yet rigorous, and it can thus be seen as an effective instance of a travelling theory (Said 1983) that, rather than being domesticated and neutralised, is reworked and readapted for the context in which it is received. If, in Said's words, "the point of theory [...] is to travel, always to move beyond its confinements, to emigrate, to remain in a sense in exile" (2000, 421), *Sulla razza* demonstrates the potential of emerging media aimed at non-specialised audiences for transforming travelling theories into site-specific analytical tools. At the same time, it proves that this goal can be achieved without underestimating how and why theories travel, that is to say, without neglecting the unequal distribution of symbolic and cultural power that determines their circulation and reception.

Current artistic practices also highlight how calling postcolonial publics into existence requires the cultivation of a different historical consciousness. This is what Daphne Di Cinto, a filmmaker and actress, has done with *Il Moro* (The Moor, 2021), a short film centred on the figure of Alessandro De Medici, the first Black Duke of Florence from 1532 until his assassination in 1537. The illegitimate son of Pope Clement VII and of an unknown mother (a peasant or an enslaved servant), Alessandro is referred to by several historians of the time as 'the moor', due to his darker complexion and to other physical traits associated with people of African descent.¹¹ The short film, which

11 There has been a lot of scholarly debates about Alessandro De Medici's race and about his mother's identity, provenance, and class status. However, as Mary Gallucci acutely points out, these debates are interesting insofar as they demonstrate the complex and contradictory process whereby racial categories get naturalised. Commenting on the shifting racial descriptors employed by Italian historians, Gallucci writes: "from metaphorically mulatto and suspiciously Moorish to 'unquestionably black,' the categorical assertions by historians from the nineteenth century onwards demonstrate the increasing reification of race and the imperative to isolate difference" (2015, 46).

has been independently funded by anonymous backers on Indiegogo, is part of the wider project of revisiting Italy's history through a symbolically prestigious figures – a member of the De Medici dynasty – in order to give visibility to repressed histories of Blackness in Italy. Most importantly, the short film wants to draw connections and parallels with the present. As Di Cinto provocatively asks, “if the first Duke of Florence was someone we would call today ‘second generation’, why after five-hundred years is this debate still open?”.¹² Di Cinto is referring here to debates about citizenship – which, as I have shown, remains the most important political battle for more than one million Italians who are still legally excluded from it.

In stressing that the erasure of histories of Blackness constitutes the ideological foundation of structural racism today, *Il Moro* further demonstrates how this work of historical excavation has moved from more traditional academic research (Del Boca 1976-84; Labanca 2006; Stefani 2007) to other expressive forms and media. Consider in this sense the digital mapping project “Postcolonial Italy”, which, as “a collaborative project [...] of digital public history”, maps the traces of Italy's colonial past in the streets of some of its major cities – Bolzano, Cagliari, Firenze, Rome, Turin, and Venice.¹³ As the buildings, streets, and monuments pinned on the digital maps are contextualised and made available to those who might unknowingly walk through them – concretely or virtually – Italy's colonial past comes to light in everyday spaces and in the lived geography of the city. In this way, the project contributes, through free and open access knowledge, to redressing what postcolonial scholars have defined as Italy's “colonial unconscious” (Ponzanesi 2012, 52) and “colonial amnesia” (Mellino 2012, 91) – that is, the obliteration from the nation's collective memory of its colonial past.

Thanks to the trajectory of emergence that I have discussed so far – of literature of migration first, and of transdisciplinary artistic practices more recently – cultural spaces that had been traditionally insulated from emancipatory political struggles have had to come to terms with the forceful demands of new generations of Italians. In the field of pop music for instance, it is today much more common to hear singers and pop icons – such as Ghali, Alessandro Mamhoud, Marracash, or Elodie – foreground their migratory and multiracial background while unapologetically claiming their full and unquestionable Italianness. These artists have leveraged their success and visibility in mainstream media to celebrate the cultures that have shaped them. Pop singer Elodie, in a recent interview for *Vogue Italy*, has attributed her penchant for frequent aesthetic and stylistic trans-

¹² See <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/il-moro-the-moor>.

¹³ See <https://www.postcolonialitaly.com>.

formation to her mother, a Black woman from Guadeloupe: “I think I have taken [this desire for transformation] from my mother, who often changed hairstyle, as it is common in Black culture” (2021, 208). At the same time, institutionalised media have often toned down the social denunciation – of racism, class inequality, and gender hierarchies – which remains central to the work of artists who are less visible in mainstream culture. This is the case of Karima 2G, a Black rapper and beatmaker, whose songs denounce police brutality and racist rhetoric in public and political discourse, while advocating for the rights of Italians with migratory background. Karima 2G’s assertive participation in urgent political struggles is already visible in her artistic pseudonym, where 2G foregrounds her status as a ‘second-generation immigrant’. Furthermore, her artistic and political work is particularly significant because, through the transcultural lens that characterises the most powerful expressions of methodologies of Blackness, she explicitly refers to Afrofuturism as a source of inspiration (Fabbri 2020). Afrofuturism, she writes in a recent article/manifesto, enables Afro-Italian women to become subjects of their own stories and “contribute[s] to our liberation and to our future” (2021, 93).

4 Conclusion

If the increased visibility of Black singers and musicians in institutionalised media testifies to the creation of more inclusive spaces, a rhetoric of celebration and forms of selective inclusivity risk marginalising more radical and politically conscious voices. In this sense, the complex dynamics that entangle Italy’s methodologies of Blackness, post-colonial engagements with the nation’s past, and activist approaches to the present reveal the long-standing and thorny challenge that emergent forms of cultural production have always faced under regimes of global capitalism. To use Raymond Williams’ categories, as soon as emergent cultural practices manifest a potential for threatening the status quo, “the process of attempted incorporation significantly begins” (1977, 124). We should not then underestimate the risk of being incorporated into the dominant and thus politically neutralised, given that, as Williams notes, “much incorporation looks like recognition, acknowledgment, and thus a form of *acceptance*” (1977, 124). One of the challenges that current artistic and cultural practices are facing is thus navigating this space of possibilities and opposite pulls, where change is always threatened by incorporation, and emancipatory efforts by political neutralisation. This is why the formation of a post-colonial and anti-racist consciousness among Italian publics depends and will continue to depend on a receptive stance towards these practices and on the rejection of cosmetic forms of inclusion.

For more than three decades, Italy's methodologies of Blackness have denounced racial discrimination, resisted colonial structures of power and knowledge, and called for a serious rethinking of Italy's self-imagination. In this essay, I have traced their trajectory of emergence to show how they have acquired greater symbolic force and wider horizons of reception, despite institutional and cultural obstacles. In bringing these practices in conversation with postcoloniality, my aim has been to establish links and connections with colonial histories and with global struggles for racial justice, while highlighting the social and political specificities of the Italian context. The relevance of these practices is certainly artistic and cultural, but it also and most decisively historical. Commenting on the tragic history of the Caribbean and on the erasure of its collective memory in Western discourse, Édouard Glissant (1992, 64) wrote that the duty of the writer is to identify "a painful notion of time and its full projection forward into the future". He called this process "*a prophetic vision of the past*" (1992, 64). Ultimately, Italy's methodologies of Blackness encourage us to embrace this call as an opportunity to revisit the past, intervene in the present, and continue to work towards more equitable postcolonial futures.

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