

A DECADE **OF WRITING AND** **CRITICAL COMMITMENT IN** **THE POSTCOLONIAL** **HUMANITIES**

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| 2026 18 10th Anniversary Issue | |

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

- 10 years of writing and critical commitment in the postcolonial humanities 3
Annalisa Oboe

ARTICLES

- Seawork, language, coffee and tomatoes 11
Iain Chambers

- Prospero and Caliban in Palestine. Anglosphere, English canon, Zionist dehumanization 22
Luigi C. Cazzato

- Arti, antirazzismo e accademia. Il caso di *Research as Vocality* a Napoli, tra vecchie criticità e nuove riscritture 35
Alessandra Ferlito

- From Discourse to Praxis: decoloniality, knowledge production, and everyday resistance in the European South 49
Mikal Woldu, Yodit Estifanos Afewerki, Ariam Tekle

- Echi da ደግዳሊ/Dogali. Tessere memorie, intrecciare storie. Co-progettare per ri-significare e depotenziare un monumento coloniale 65
Giulia Grechi, Gioia Toscani De Col

- The Right to Appear: sexual dissidence and postcolonial visibility in Revathi's *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* 82
Angelo Monaco

- Translating Black Lives Matter (and celebrating FES) 95
Pietro Deandrea

REVIEWS

- Attraversare le Americhe: compresenze forzate, nuove epistemologie e flussi culturali transnazionali 104
Donatella Marcatajo su *Attraversamenti. Traiettorie del postcoloniale e degli studi sulle migrazioni nelle Americhe*, a cura di Maria A. Fontes, Emanuele Leonardi, Renata Morresi e Anna Scacchi. Roma: Lithos editrice, collana Studi Transnazionali / Transnational Studies, 2025 (412 pp.)

| | |
|--|-----|
| A New World Italian Discourse in Brazil Barbara Gori on Giulia Riccò, <i>The Italian Colony of São Paulo. Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Brazil</i> , New York: Fordham University Press, 2025 (240 pp.) | 110 |
| Not an elsewhere but a deep entanglement Michela Gulia su Maureen Murphy, <i>L'art de la décolonisation. Paris-Dakar, 1950-1970</i> . Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2023 (278 pp.). | 115 |
| From Arcadia to the “Boulevard of Broken Dreams”: The Return of Ruinenlust and the Rise of Eco-Gothic Anxiety in the Anthropocene Federica Campaiola su Marco Malvestio, <i>Ruin Ecology: An Exercise in Environmental Imagination</i> . Elements in Environmental Humanities. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025 (80 pp.) | 118 |
| Struggling with the Postcolonial Bildungsroman: Formation in an Age of Crisis Francesca Furlan su Arnab Dutta Roy and Paul Ugor, <i>The Postcolonial Bildungsroman: Narratives of Youth, Representational Politics, and Aesthetic Reinventions</i> . Alberta: Alberta University Press, 2025 (517 pp.) | 123 |
| Chi ha paura di decostruire il proprio razzismo? Brandon Breen su Marilena Umuhoza Delli, <i>Chi ha paura del lupo bianco? C'era una volta il razzismo inconsapevole</i> . Trento: Erickson, 2025 (156 pp.) | 128 |
| Sulle macerie di Gaza: sopravvivenza di una colonia Marina De Chiara su Luigi Cazzato, <i>Palestina fra Oriente e Occidente. Anglosfera, ferite coloniali, re-esistenza decoloniale</i> . Milano: Meltemi editore, 2025 (268 pp.) | 133 |
| <i>Per Gaza</i> : le lezioni di umanità e <i>logos</i> di Tomaso Montanari Luigi C. Cazzato su Tomaso Montanari, <i>Per Gaza</i> , con disegni di Marco Sauro. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2025 (126 pp.) | 137 |

10 years of writing and critical commitment in the postcolonial humanities

Annalisa Oboe

University of Padova

ABSTRACT

Issue 18 (Spring 2026) of *From the European South* celebrates the tenth anniversary of the journal, which began in 2016 as a spinoff of the *postcolonialitalia* research project at the University of Padova. Over the years, *FES* has developed into a solid platform for post- and decolonial critical thinking and writing from the Global South, taking the planet and the future as its necessary horizons. This issue evidences the journal's roots in postcolonial studies, literatures and cultures, its dialogues with decolonial and critical race studies, and ongoing interest in the arts and activism. It also encourages the quest for a new critical language involving affect and sensibilities that might help us to work through the opacity of a war-ridden world that is difficult to articulate.

To celebrate this important milestone and to acknowledge the great work carried out over time by the more than 200 contributors listed at the end of this introduction, the editorial board has recently invested its efforts in transforming the open-access, peer-reviewed journal into a fully indexed publication in some of the most prestigious international databases, in order to enhance visibility and reach out to further global connections. This process is still ongoing, and the upgrade of *FES* will be fully operational in the second half of 2026.

Keywords

10th anniversary, affect, anti-racism, arts-based research, Black Lives Matter, colonialism, decoloniality, dehumanization, European South, everyday resistance, language, mobile methodology, Palestine, postcolonial Italy, postcolonialism, re-signification, sensibility, sexual dissidence, translation

Anniversaries are moments of celebration and recollection of what has been achieved, but also opportunities to raise questions, looking both backward and forward: the ten years spent working to promote postcolonial studies in the humanities and to build an international network for transcultural dialogue compel us to reflect on what levers we may use to maintain a fresh gaze despite the polycrises we are living through, and how we might or should re-read what we have written—believing, with Canadian author Margaret Atwood, that “a word, after a word, after a word is power.”¹

The eighteenth issue of *From the European South* (*FES*) is dedicated to all those who, in various ways, have contributed to the growth of the journal—authors, editors, reviewers, readers, followers, friends and allies—and have cultivated a perspective from the European South, the Mediterranean, and the Global South, practicing critical and engaged thinking in

search of transdisciplinary lenses through which to read our troubled times. Over the years, *FES* has kept asking questions and investigating new areas of knowledge and of literary, artistic, and cultural production, and Issue 18 is no different. But what strikes me positively is that the 10th anniversary has elicited contributions with a distinct ‘southern’ mediterranean voice that reconnects *FES* to its beginnings, while at the same time updating its aims and contents.

A ‘postcolonial turn’ in the Italian humanities became visible in the second decade of the 21st century. The time seemed indeed effervescent, despite its belatedness when compared to the temporal frame of development of postcolonial critical theory and studies in other parts of Europe and the world, and marked a moment of promise in which the postcolonial started to speak to a wider public. In her article on “Arts, anti-racism, and academia” written for the journal’s tenth anniversary, Alessandra Ferlito reads 2015 as a pivotal year, when scientific and cultural events happening at the same time (groundbreaking initiatives such as the international conference *Archives of the Future. The Postcolonial, Italy and the Time to Come* at the University of Padova, and major cultural events like the Venice Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor) signalled a sort of ‘coming out’ of the postcolonial that began to interest not only academia, but various expressions of the art world and social movements. In the following years, however, the postcolonial was largely adopted in the Italian context as a thematic rather than a critical framework, and only rarely embraced as an ethical orientation capable of reshaping artistic, curatorial or institutional practices. What Ferlito sees as productive areas of research and critical investment today, at the intersection of academic and artistic exploration, are practices that have approached the postcolonial as a process of dismantling Italian ‘whiteness’, exploring the potential of art as an anti-racist discourse and practice as proposed by the interdisciplinary project *Research as Vocality. Tracing the African Presence in Naples* (2022–2025).

A decisive shift from critique to praxis may be detected in *FES* 18. Postcolonial and decolonial thought are less referred to as analytical frameworks, and more as sets of practices that unfold across artistic, pedagogical, and activist domains. However, coloniality continues to shape contemporary political realities, epistemologies, and subjectivities, and decoloniality remains a central although disputed reference point. Therefore, the issue at hand extends beyond critiquing inherited archives or narratives to take on the urgent task of asking again how knowledge is produced, mediated, and mobilized. Mikal Woldu, Yodit Estifanos Afewerki and Ariam Tekle’s “From Discourse to Praxis: Decoloniality, Knowledge Production, and Everyday Resistance in the European South” provides a multivocal answer to this question. The article, co-authored by three Black-Italian women working across academia, activism, community organising and cultural curation, asks: How do we move beyond elite discourse to praxis that grounds decoloniality and anti-racist commitment in everyday resistance and

solidarity? What role can academia play in building equitable collaborations which acknowledge and redress existing power inequalities in knowledge production? The text examines how research tools and institutional practices shape access to knowledge, influence whose voices are amplified, and determine inclusion or marginalisation. It also explores ethical collaboration, focusing on the distribution of leadership, authority, and agency, while promoting the extension of decolonial practices beyond academia into everyday life. By bringing their own distinctive practices into close dialogue, the authors contribute to decolonial scholarship by demonstrating how practice-led, collaborative, and reflexive approaches can challenge epistemic hierarchies and reorient decoloniality towards meaningful, accessible, and transformative praxis.

The emphasis on multivocality, closely tied to a broader reconfiguration of epistemic authority, may be found also in “Echoes from ዶግሊ/Dogali” by Giulia Grechi and Gioia Toscani De Col, who focus on public memory and heritage sites in Italy, and illustrate a collaborative and decolonial project carried out in Rome in 2025, in connection with the restoration of the colonial monument dedicated to the Battle of Dogali (1887). Their work, rooted in critical heritage, memory studies, and theories of haunting, conceptualizes Italian colonial monuments as material and symbolic survivals of colonial power that continue to shape public space, historical knowledge, and collective perception. Against such fraught legacy, the project advances ‘re-signification’ as a methodological and political practice. Through a process of co-design, the monument is approached as a site of dialogue and debate, so that the Dogali case is eventually re-signified as an example of how participatory, multivocal approaches can transform colonial monuments into spaces of critical engagement, fostering historical accountability, ethical remembrance, and forms of symbolic repair within European public memory.

So, the questions we are dealing with in *FES* 18 are no longer the ones we started to ask ten years ago. In his incisive “Seawork” intervention, Iain Chambers poses the question of “How to write and research in the light of migration, genocide and decolonial imperatives,” grounding it squarely in the violence of the present. Writing and doing research in times that defy understanding is a challenge that invites a quest for fresh methodologies and words. Inspired by his long-standing reflection on the fluidity of the maritime world, and the drifting nature of language itself, Chambers proposes the critical opening of a mobile methodology, which means “registering how language is inflected and loses its illusions of transparency and neutrality when confronting the brutal fashioning of the modern world, ultimately prompting us to change our language and infuse it with another register of affects and sensibilities.”

Language as a constitutive force is a central concern running through the articles: it emerges as a terrain marked by historical violence, in which processes of dehumanization, exclusion, and domination are both enacted and contested. This is clearly visible not only in

Chambers' invitation to articulate alternative narrative and affective registers that may help us see and feel and think differently, but also in the analysis of colonial literary genealogies and their afterlives in present-day political discourse, as in Luigi Cazzato's "Prospero and Caliban in Palestine." In the work of Palestinian writers and activists, Cazzato argues that the character of Caliban is figurately reappropriated to reclaim agency, language, and historical presence, in ways which reveal that struggles over linguistic representation are inseparable from struggles over land, self-government, and humanity. Ultimately, his essay contends that recognizing the linguistic, discursive and political genealogy of 'dehumanization' in Western colonial history is key to understanding the ongoing structures of violent settler colonial power in Israel/Palestine. A further focus on language surfaces in Angelo Monaco's analysis of how, in her autobiography, prominent Indian transgender activist and writer A. Revathi reinterprets the experience of social exclusion and 'shame' (connected to her being a *hijra*) as a form of resistance and emancipation, as well as an aesthetics of liberation that asserts the political and resistant nature of precarious lives.

The concluding contribution on "Translating Black Lives Matter" is a collaborative critical and linguistic exploration of translation as a politically charged practice, promoted in spring 2025 by Pietro Deandrea during a seminar with a group of students at the University of Turin. The four poems offered here in their Italian translations are a selection from a volume titled *Black Lives Matter. Poems for a New World* (ed. Ambrose Musiyiwa, Civic Leicester, 2020), containing 107 poems by various authors who respond to the murder of George Floyd and the ensuing forms of protest against the oppression of racialized communities worldwide. This translation work is precious for its pedagogical import, the political reflections it involves, and the compelling linguistic practice it develops, and is well received for its having been conceived as a celebratory 'gift' to our journal in its tenth anniversary. We are very grateful to the editor Ambrose Musiyiwa and the poets Panya Banjoko, Julian Colton, Joel Scarfe and Paul Francis—who generously permitted the re-publication and translation of their works—and also wish to warmly acknowledge, with Pietro Deandrea, the commitment of the forty-one students in the seminar on literary translation by naming them all: Francesca Alborghetti, Aurora Amoroso, Alex Ancarani, Antonio Assisa, Erika Bondesan, Alessia Brafa Misicaro, Elena Canu, Arianna Cavallaro, Alessia Anna Colla, Martina Colomba, Alessandro De Bonis, Elena Dominici, Emily Falcioni, Clarissa Maria Farruggio, Elena Fiorelli, Laura Gaiano Cappelli, Alice Garello, Alice Gorla, Sara Grassini, Eligio Langella, Carlo Lopresti, Chiara Lorenzato, Monica Macaluso, Sara Merlino, Martina Molsitti, Silvia Monterosso, Davide Morazzoni, Chiara Novo, Luca Orlando, Milena Peretto, Egle Pertile, Matilde Sacconi, Agnese Sampaolo, Maria Sapone, Sara Sheikhi, Elena Silvestri, Simone Spano, Matilda Spanu, Federica Tarantini, Carlotta Tiddia, Chiara Wasowski, Raffaella Zunino.

A celebratory ‘vibe’ can be detected in the REVIEWS section of the journal as well: this anniversary issue is exceptionally rich, and full of enlightening critical interventions which dialogue closely with the reviewed texts, with each other, and also with the ARTICLES section. The voices of the reviewers belong both to established academics and to early-career researchers, whose brilliance is undeniable. Thank you all for joining in.

Finally, to celebrate this important milestone and to acknowledge the great work carried out over the last decade by the more than 200 contributors listed at the end of this introduction, the journal’s editorial board has recently invested its efforts in transforming the open-access, peer-reviewed journal into a fully indexed publication in some of the most prominent international databases, such as Scopus and DOAJ, in order to enhance visibility and reach out to further global connections. This process is still ongoing, and the upgrade of *FES* will be fully operational in the second half of 2026.

Notes

¹ Atwood’s poem “Spelling” is part of the 1981 first edition of *True Stories*, Oxford University Press, p.18.

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|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Achille Mbembe | Farah Polato | Lucia Abbamonte |
| Alessandra Ferlito | Federica Campaiola | Lucilla Lepratti |
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ARTICLES

Co-editors

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Seawork, language, coffee and tomatoes

Iain Chambers

Independent researcher

ABSTRACT

How to write and research in the light of migration, genocide and decolonial imperatives? This short essay proposes a way of moving through such questions while seeking to avoid their reduction to disciplinary objects and to a discursive regime of representation. Writing in the Mediterranean as a site of intersecting histories, cultures, and migrations, and insisting on the fluidity of the maritime world and the drifting nature of language itself, the deliberate inconclusiveness of the writing seeks the critical opening of a mobile methodology. This means registering how language is inflected and loses its illusions of transparency and neutrality when confronting the brutal fashioning of the modern world, ultimately prompting us to change our language and infuse it with another register of affects and sensibilities.

Keywords

Maritime archives, language, opacity, mobility, creolisation, criticism

The title of this essay is stolen. It was coined by Enrico Fravega to describe the methods used by the research crew aboard the *Tanimar* during their recent marine encounters with questions and practices surrounding contemporary migration in the central Mediterranean (*Equipaggio della Tanimar 2023*). In its appeal to fluidity and the imprecision of boundaries and disciplinary horizons, it challenges the more assured ethnographic stability of 'fieldwork' and appeals to 'scientificity', 'critical distance' and neutrality. More than simply participant observation, being at sea, as also a vernacular term for being lost, is to experience the threat of losing one's moorings. It suggests the need for another critical style, altogether more tentative and vulnerable in its pretensions; one that operates in the ruins of earlier certainties. If we are to take the Caribbean poet's famous assertion – *The Sea is History* – seriously, then we are moving in a medium where terra-centric premises are required to float, and sometimes need to be abandoned and left to sink (Walcott 1992). This involves uprooting and re-routing our languages, moving in currents we have not necessarily authorised. Going adrift, our words and concepts encounter other inflexions and destinations. And given that here in the Mediterranean everything orbits around a body of seawater, it is surely the case to think with the materiality, and not simply the symbolism, of the sea. It is a fluid archive that avoids capture in institutional

logics and disciplines. As a shifting seascape, it promotes a democracy of thought and unauthorised movement, promising other histories that remain irreducible to a single narrative. The sea, as a social construction and cultural configuration, constantly sustains multiple interpretations, change, and transformation.

Compared with the stability and order infamously affirmed by the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt's concept of *nomos*, with its well-defined state and legal boundaries ultimately secured in blood-and-soil, we can recognise another way of mapping and receiving the world. I am especially thinking of the critical thinking that has developed in the Caribbean archipelago, which questions the language we have inherited from the classical Mediterranean world. After Descartes, after Kant and the Hegelian world spirit that separates the mind from the senses, reason from the body, subject from object, we encounter other versions of modernity that are in it but not entirely of it. I am thinking here of the 'Caribbean school' of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Stuart Hall, and Edouard Glissant, accompanied by the poetics of Derek Walcott, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Dionne Brand, M. NourbeSe Philip, and Bob Marley. Questions of racial capitalism, the Black Atlantic, and Black critical studies have established lines of flight that challenge the dominant exercise of time and space. Black music has established a dynamic counterpoint, evading reduction to the policed rationality of representation. From Charlie Parker to Jimi Hendrix, from a field holler to dub, a series of sonic interruptions has persistently bent and cut the brutal lines of power. It has produced other historical spaces and temporalities. Much more than an essentialist Black time opposed to white hegemony, we hear sounds escaping the world that seeks to colonise the present. There is not just an overturning at work but an instructive undoing, like John Coltrane's rendition of 'My Favourite Things'. Accompanied by the planetary reach of the sounds of the Black diaspora, one could speak of a critical continent emerging from the sea, part of the West yet not reducible to it. Occidental criticism and philosophy have yet to really respond to these other histories of our spacetime.

Our current language has increasingly been occupied, taken hostage, and transformed into a regime of meaning based on exclusion and the rejection of others who might disturb our cultural, historical and political management. This search for monolingual purity, which translates into the explicit defence of white supremacy, is continually contaminated and creolised by the histories and cultures it seeks to repress. It is pointless to deny it: the political and legal apparatus that today seeks to define, direct, and manage migration in the Mediterranean and to negate genocide on its Asian shore is brutally and unashamedly explicit. It is the product of the planet's long history of racial hierarchisation, which has justified its possession by Western modernity for centuries.

Today's travellers, those who refuse to remain in their allotted place, hijack the colonial languages. These languages are de-anchored through acts of political and poetic piracy to

respond to other geographies of the present. After all, no one owns or invents a language. Spoken, written, and sung again, they establish a listening space that eludes the capture of our representations, registering escape routes that challenge our sovereignty and grip on the world. This, of course, explains the fear expressed in the violence and anger of our reactions to the idea of the Mediterranean, and, as Achille Mbembe would say, the world, becoming Black. Subaltern histories, denied and rendered clandestine, exist, resist, and persist, suspended and sustained in those fluid and uncontrollable archives of the sea: from yesterday's Black Atlantic to today's Mediterranean.

The essay as critical form

Set against the desired clarity of reason, the sea, in its opacity, reminds us of the sabotage of language. Language is not, as is often presumed, simply a transparent tool of transmission, conveying pre-established facts and knowledge. Rather, it is a historical assemblage and social construction in which facts and knowledge are forged, contested, refused and articulated. Language constantly slips away, drifts into other accounts of spacetime. It migrates. So, if our language has been occupied – these days we apparently cannot talk about Gaza, genocide, the encumbering military and political defeat of Europe in the eastern steppes, the rights of Palestinians, migrants, or even the right to have rights – its instability and fluidity permit travel and escape. Even when occupied, language continues to speak and insist in defiance of censorship and brutally imposed semantics. It continues to demand who has the right to narrate and manage the Mediterranean and modernity?

So, how to think today with genocide, with people on the move rendered illegal, with the bonfire of international law and the increasing authoritarian regimes of the modern state? How can we avoid simply turning them back into objects of academic enquiry, confined and muted within disciplinary management, and instead let language carry us elsewhere? While the former procedure establishes points of critical departure, the latter leads to the open, inconclusive journey of critical thinking and practice. The latter, where critical distance is contaminated and annulled, is the methodology I propose. What I am pursuing here is not a scholarly paper, signalled by authorities in the field and supported by footnotes and bibliographic references. Or, rather, it might be ghosted by such an apparatus, but that structure of reasoning is destined to be crossed by movement and by questions it is unable to authorise or necessarily recognise. That, I suppose, is the way indicated by poetry, literature, and music, by the art that poses a problem for rationalities that presume the world can be rendered transparent to their will. It proposes other geographies of the present, other ways of being in time.

This all involves recognising that language is not an accessory to the facts. In a profound sense, it is the fact. Here, we could follow Theodor Adorno and insist on the distinction between

the critical essay and the scientific paper, in which the former discards the shackles of disciplinary protocols. In this light, and citing an authority to undo authority, the essay, as Theodor Adorno puts it, is a heresy that 'suspends the traditional concept of method'. It works the gaps, inhabits the breaks to dismantle discursive rationality, and extracts its method from language itself by refusing 'to eliminate the irritating and dangerous elements of things that live within concepts' (Adorno 1984). As a deliberate interruption, language here insists on the non-conceptual knowledge that adheres to the concept. Adorno almost certainly had his friend Walter Benjamin's analytical style in mind. To cite the noted phrase by Stuart Hall (1986), this is to propose analyses 'without guarantees'. We could also marry this prospect with Saidiya Hartman's proposal of 'critical fabulation', which seeks to escape the stunted anonymity of the official archive and propose speculative historiography and experimental sociology (Hartman 2008). Rather than seeking to fill in the gaps and complete the picture, this is about permitting contemporary concerns to travel into another spacetime, where they are reconsidered, modified, and critically reworked. The disciplines are not cancelled. But at this point, they are treated as moments of departure, ultimately to be abandoned as ruins and engaged with as ghosts.

Liquid archives

Returning to the question of thinking with the Mediterranean, we find that it is not simply about applying historiographical methodologies, identifying documents and archives, constructing an object of analysis, and then explaining it. What holds this whole operation together is language and its configuration of narratives, explanations, and analyses. In a profound sense, language is the factor of truth, whether in historiographical, sociological, political, or anthropological terms. We operate as though it were a transparent medium, a neutral modality of communication. But we know, whether through the male lineage of Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Derrida, or through feminism, subcultural semiotics, critical race studies, and decolonial thought, that this is not the case. Language not only has its say but is also the ultimate instigator and custodian of what we say and recognise as meaning. This more vulnerable perspective loosens ties to a single semantics and narrative, opening unplanned encounters along forking paths rather than a unique way and destiny.

If the sea is a liquid archive, its ceaseless movement sustaining endless interpretation, this knowledge can also be brought ashore. Even the most rigid historical understandings underpinning the institutionalisation of memory remain open to further reading and contestation. This is the already noted 'seawork' rather than 'fieldwork'. The marine perspective makes explicit what terrestrial concerns often seek to avoid: that histories, cultures, social relations and lives are sustained in movement. And what sustains them – from the materiality of the environment and its life forms to climate and weather – involves forces that never simply commence nor conclude with the human. At this point, our language begins

to recognise a choppy ride, rather than the smooth unfolding of the sentence seeking linearity and decisive conclusions.

Thinking with the sea, with its stratified sedimentation of the lives and crossings that constitute the modern world, takes us from sea-borne empires and contemporary container logistics to today's illicit migrations, from the moral ambiguities of colonial horizons to the maritime cemeteries of lives denied. While European 'progress' pursues its ambitions across the surfaces of the globe, the sea, as Édouard Glissant reminds us, insists with its depths. Against the geometrical imperialism of maps that confine the world and render it transparent to their will, to journey at sea without immediate coordinates is to understand the depths on which we depend. Precisely in their indifference as maritime life and organisms, in their organic and inorganic persistence, they force a reckoning with the confidence of our language and the passage of our thought. The sea will always survive where we fail.

Who has the right to the sea? Today, increasingly militarised, transformed into patrolled zones of economic and political concern, and rendered an abstract resource for the extraction of food and fossil fuels, it nevertheless resists ready control. Other histories have transformed it into a deadly space of possible freedom from poverty, war and all the 'collateral damage' accompanying capitalism on the rampage in warfare, lawfare and ecocide. Against this flattening of life into economic accountability and fiscal measurement, those who today arrive from the sea, invariably from the multiple souths of the planet, push against the boundaries of that brutal paradigm. Some pay the price of being left to die; others live on, bringing into the equation elements that simply cannot be integrated (read cancelled) to face racism, social ostracism and political targeting. But these other cultures, histories and lives exist, resist and persist in an emerging mix. If this is hysterically signalled in the outrage of increasingly hostile authoritarian responses across the political spectrum it betrays all the tantrums of a threatened white supremacy. The privilege of property, Ivy League schools, and Oxbridge – Europe and the West considering themselves above the law that is to be applied only to the poor and the dispossessed – suddenly seem rickety structures, prone to panic rather than accustomed aplomb.

This is not about asking the subaltern to carry the burden of our hope, as though they were the bearers of unknown alternative futurities, which they are. It is, simply and more directly, about registering the present unwinding of structures of power that operate as if eternal.

Dispersal

For Hannah Arendt, despite the atrocities of the 1930s and 1940s, the German language still offered a home, a bottom line of belonging. It is what, in the last instance, remains (Arendt 1994). Today, the English through which I express myself is also a home. Yet it is irreducible to a stable geographical place, linguistic legislation or literary canon. It is perhaps more a raft

than a fixed abode. In varying degrees, this is true of all modern European languages that present themselves as the national reference. Colonialism has stretched and snapped those ties. English, most obviously, but also French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and German, accommodate histories and cultures that far exceed state boundaries and political confines. If language is the heart of both individual and collective identity, it is also a mobile home. English and French are also 'native' to the Caribbean and West Africa, as is Spanish to Latin America and Portuguese to southern Africa and Brazil. This introduces a fundamental displacement. Inhabited, reworked, rendered local and creolised, the languages of colonialism speak back with other accents, histories and cultural concerns, both in once-colonial spaces and in the ex-imperial metropolis. The once-confident identification of national identity with a language, and perhaps even Arendt was still seeking this connection, is increasingly dismantled.

Consider the perennial mantra of integration, constantly invoked in response to the purported threat of contamination and invasion from migration. What, exactly, does it mean? Integration into what? And why? As a surveillance mechanism that seeks to maintain the status quo and its unequal distribution of political, cultural and historical power, integration is merely another name for endorsing the machinery of house rules and hegemony. By now, there is a well-established tradition in Italy, as elsewhere in the world, of street-style music and videos accompanying youth culture, from rap to trap, from Amir, Karima 2G, and Tommy Kuti to Baby Gang, which explains all of this (Sarti 2025; Seroussi 2025). The continual composition of multiple roots and routes, from sub-Saharan and North Africa to Islam, has appropriated, folded and extended the cultural lessons of the Black diaspora into configurations capable of interacting with the racially supervised brutalities of contemporary Italian and European life. Paradoxically, it has exposed the failures of the latter to really integrate into the traffic of historical processes that constitute the making of the modern world. If the perennial search for the scapegoat to explain the nation's economic woes and cultural crisis has historically concentrated on rebellious youth, since the 1950s, this has been compounded by migration, race and, more recently, religion (read Islam). Folk devils, media amplification, and moral panics provide a constant analytical frame for reading the policing of the perennial crisis in the West today (Hall et al. 2026). More importantly, this scenario forces us to register the inventive cultural responses of ostracised youth who refuse to remain caught in the deadly grip of that violent narrative.

A measure of the world

What we call modernity, and what much of the rest of the planet has historically called colonialism, shows race, slavery, colonialism and creolisation returning to the metropolis to complicate, reassess and extend all local arrangements. The colonial constitution of liberal democracy is increasingly exposed. The once-spatial and temporal distance of the imperial world is now part of our urban immediacy. In the UK, reggae music, sound systems, dub poetry

and locks were not simply the jagged soundtrack of 'migrant' communities. In Italy, Black Italians have become key members of the country's world-champion women's volleyball team. As in the anglophone and francophone world, Italian national literature and popular music are simultaneously being rewritten and replayed by other histories and lives. These are not simply signals of multiculturalism, a point increasingly underscored by the visceral racism they encounter. These are historical, almost ontological, announcements. Identity, being Italian or European, turns out to be an altogether more complicated and continually unfolding affair. It cannot be grounded in a unique location, local language or skin pigmentation. It can also involve, in complicated and transformative ways, being Muslim. After all, Islam is Italy's, and Europe's, second religion.

These are clearly not questions confined to parliamentary debate, newspaper articles, or television talk shows. They constitute the fabric of everyday life. In more measured lexicons, such questions also inform the guidelines for pedagogical practice, spilling into the classroom and the education of the nation. The recent proposal to reduce the study of history to an exclusively Occidental affair, that is, the expression of the documents of white European 'civilisation', is only one of the more blatant examples of a shameless exercise in ideological violence that simply strikes other histories, cultures and lives off the culture register. In the near future, it looks likely that criticising Israel, suggesting that Palestinians have rights, or proposing that the West is not the unique measure of the world will be penalised through disciplinary procedures and juridical punishment.

Racialised bodies in the street and on the water – faceless foreigners and migrants, as opposed to the local variety of homegrown natives – are considered at best a surplus population of expendable lives for the ebb and flow of the labour market, ultimately to be allowed to die at sea or to languish in urban peripheries and overcrowded prisons. Their very presence, no matter how 'Italian' they are (how many generations have to pass before you stop being a migrant or Afro-descendant?), threatens the homogeneous illusion of the nation. This 'more than' Italian, in cultural, religious, musical and culinary terms, this creolisation that emphasises the profound historical principle that culture is always on the move, is apparently dreaded. Hence, the frustrated rage, the frothing sentiments, the moral panics and dehumanising violence, and, in the end, the sadistic brutality and barbarism of expulsion and the detention camp.

Tomatoes and coffee

More than merely identifying reactionary tendencies and the fascism in our midst and within ourselves, this suggests we must dig far deeper. For if the struggle over the cultural terrain – from the mass media and the university lecture hall to everyday encounters at the bar and in the supermarket – is simultaneously and always culturally scripted, then we need to understand how politics draws on a sedimented heritage and its traditions to establish shared

meanings and common sense. We know that, like culture itself, identity and tradition are constructions. All are outcomes of historical processes, not expressions of timeless truths. If tomato and coffee are seemingly central to the identification of modern Italian identity, we can quickly unpack the myth to reveal histories of a more worldly, rhizomatic constitution. From Peru to Europe via Spanish colonialism, the tomato, initially considered an ornamental fruit, became a vegetable and a central ingredient in Italian cuisine only around 150 years ago. Coffee, known in Eighteenth-century Europe as the Muslim drink, arrived, along with those coffee houses so central to Jürgen Habermas's thesis of cultivated public exchange and the making of modern democracy, via the Ottoman Empire from Africa, from Ethiopia. An Aztec fruit and a Turkish beverage subsequently became essential elements of the nation's modern identity and its inhabitants.

To insist on the absolute autonomy of national history, cultivated exclusively on European soil, is, of course, to negate history. Whenever external elements are occasionally acknowledged, they are immediately domesticated. Italian humanists supposedly gained access to classical Greek thought through the flight of a handful of monks from Constantinople after its seizure by the Ottomans. The longer, deeper history of the transmission and translation of texts from ancient Greece through Islamic Spain is sidelined, even though it provided the basis for European philosophy and science through to the Sixteenth century. Along the way, it introduced innovations, including commentary, interpretation, algebra, and optics, into the cultural traffic. This would require recognising Islam (and Judaism), not simply Christianity, as an integral part of Europe's cultural formation. Islam has certainly been present in significant parts of Europe – from Spain and Sicily to the eastern Mediterranean – long before Christianity converted and conquered pagan territories in the Northern Crusades waged by the Order of the Teutonic Knights in the marches of Baltic Europe.

Of course, one could object at this point that we are simply talking about capitalism and colonialism, or, more bluntly, that capitalism is colonialism. As such, its mechanisms require the banishment of other narratives and the subordination, even the extermination, of others. But, with the imaginative lines of flight sustained in the science fiction of Ursula Le Guin and the Afro-futurism of Octavia Butler, Sun Ra and Jimi Hendrix, or, more simply, in the escape routes of music, poetry and the visual arts, we need to insist on other spaces and temporalities and return to Hannah Arendt's statement that what remains is language.

Such an altogether more open understanding of language, identity, and subject positions is, of course, not merely a linguistic or cultural matter. It has profound historical and political implications. For if language provides a fluid process in which identity is constructed on the move, so to speak, this both impacts and contests the altogether more rigid considerations of national belonging, citizenship, and the confinement of identity within the murderous narrative of blood and soil. It also troubles disciplinary and academic claims about our understanding of these phenomena. Although we are told that comparisons are not permitted, that they are even

antisemitic, the terrifying resonance between Arendt's Germany of the 1930s and Israel today is difficult to ignore. And then, of course, the murderous insistence on a linguistically and racially homogeneous nationalism has vibrated through European colonialism into every corner of the planet. This, of course, is racism.

Interrupting the occupation

Concerns about belonging and language, the means by which we frame and explain the world, raise questions about structural power. Some languages, both linguistically and institutionally, and some bodies, largely white and Occidental, currently have far more power than others. If we are witnessing a shift towards Asia and the southern parts of the world, that hegemony has certainly not yet evaporated. Present-day hysteria, which ratchets up the viciousness of responses and increases calls to defend white supremacy against threats of replacement, is only the most obvious sign. As those who work in postcolonial and decolonial studies, or simply think critically about the ongoing political and historical composition of the modern world, we are among the first to acknowledge this shifting axis. However, we have been rightly informed that decolonising our language (and sense of belonging) is not a metaphor. This means it cannot be reduced to a syllabus or curriculum change. The question posed carries us into the heart of our modernity, which itself has been (and still is) articulated through colonialism. What Bob Marley called 'mental slavery'. In other words, language and knowledge, which authorise us to speak, teach, write, and move through the world, have been occupied by a machinery of power that strives to reproduce the status quo; that is, existing Occidental power (in the present assault of naked force, even the mask of hegemony slips).

The immediate objection is that language is always occupied. It does not operate or speak in a void. This is the double-bind so consistently explored and exposed in the work of Jacques Derrida. Despite the pioneering work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the French-Algerian philosopher's contribution remains insufficiently understood within postcolonial and decolonial studies. Today, we might rightly insist that beyond dismantling or deconstructing the master's discourse, it is imperative to register responsibility. Rather than looking away from colonialism, slavery, genocides, and the violent formation of the modern world through divisions of race, class, gender and sexuality, and carrying on with business as usual, the intellectual and philosophical task is to inscribe this disquieting heritage into our language and understandings of belonging, into our identity.

At the outset, it means contesting the packaging of knowledge into disciplinary reserves and the scholarly policing that accompanies it. After all, the modern university, with its faculties, disciplines, research fields, and evaluations, is also a product of the colonial matrix. In an epoch when the West is still considered the unique measure of the world, it embodies those universal pretensions in its language. All of which means more than adjusting language, modifying the reading lists, and talking ineffectually about interdisciplinarity. Rather, it means

bringing to the encounter of even the most traditional proposals and perspectives a set of unsuspected and unauthorised interrogations. Such an interruption, which takes place *within* the existing disposition of knowledge and power, is not about an abrupt overturning and cancellation. Derek Walcott rewrites Homer's *Odyssey*; its latest English translator crosses the poem with a feminist accent (Wilson 2018). Historiography, anthropology, and sociology become altogether more speculative and experimental in their understanding of how the objects of study are constructed. This is because the discursive social object is neither stable nor permanent; after all, it could not exist without the human observer.

Now, all of this is not an idle reckoning with the state of play in the social and human sciences. It is not about chasing the latest wave of theory and the cutting edge of intellectual inquiry – terms so dear to the apparent progress of neoliberal society – but rather about responding to and taking responsibility for the mess we are in. Genocide in Gaza, silence over Sudan, the fascism in our midst, and the unfolding wave of right-wing righteousness in Occidental governance have not simply stirred up the doldrums of a comfortable, at least for some, liberal consensus and welfare; they have also sharply exposed the brutal limits of our language and its claims on the world. To move beyond this enclosure requires, more than ever, inhabiting this frontier, being incorporated in its margins to live along its edge with

...the sound
like a rumour without any echo
of History, really beginning. (Walcott 1992)

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Prospero and Caliban in Palestine: Anglosphere, English Canon and Zionist Dehumanization

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ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the historical, cultural, and ideological role of the Anglosphere—primarily the UK and the US—in shaping the modern political condition of Palestine. The analysis situates this history within a broader Western tradition of dehumanizing colonized peoples, tracing a continuum from literary representations of the master/servant relationship—in such paradigmatic dyads as Prospero/Caliban, Crusoe/Friday, and the figures populating *Heart of Darkness*—to present-day Zionist political rhetoric that casts Palestinians as sub-human in order to legitimize dispossession and genocide. In dialogue with anticolonial thought (Césaire and Fanon) and postcolonial literary criticism (Achebe and Said), the essay highlights how Palestinian writers and activists figurately reappropriate the character of Caliban to reclaim agency, language, and historical presence. Their interventions reveal that struggles over linguistic representation are inseparable from struggles over land, self-government, and humanity. Ultimately, the essay contends that recognizing the discursive and political genealogy of dehumanization in Western colonial history is essential to understanding the ongoing structures of violent settler colonial power in Israel/Palestine.

Keywords

Palestine, Anglosphere, canon, dehumanization, colonialism

Anglosphere and Palestine

Central to the dominant Zionist narrative was the claim that Palestine was “a land without a people for a people without a land.” The 1917 Balfour Declaration—through which the British Foreign Secretary pledged “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”—partly rested upon this foundational myth. From that moment onward—most notably from the beginning of the Mandate in 1922 until its end in 1948, when the State of Israel was established and the corresponding Nakba unfolded—the British bore major responsibility for shaping the fate of the Palestinian people. This responsibility did not end in 1948: it was instead shared with their ‘cousins,’ as the baton of Anglospheric influence was transferred from British hands to those of the United States.

Therefore, Anglosphere has played—and continues to play—a central role in the question of Palestine. Although the term ‘Anglosphere’ was coined only after the end of the Cold War, the historical reality it describes is more than a century old. It can be defined, in its

simplest form, as the sphere of influence in which English is spoken and within which political, cultural, and strategic action follows the interests associated with that language. Whether one occupies the position of master, like Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (who teaches his language to his slave Caliban so that he may better obey) or the position of servant (who uses the imposed language if only to curse the master he must serve), one is nonetheless compelled to operate within the grammar and constraints of that single language. The term's recent appearance, then, serves to revive the late 19th-century debate on Anglo-Saxonism—a debate no longer framed in terms of racial superiority, but rather in terms of cultural superiority. In any case, both the late-19th-century debate on Anglo-Saxonism and the late-20th-century one on Anglosphere seem to have emerged at moments marked by the rise of the US and by the decline of the UK.

The first debate, on Anglo-Saxonism, emerged after the Spanish-American War in 1898, when the victory of the United States marked the beginning of its entry into the international foreign rule. The second debate, on the Anglosphere, emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which marked the beginning of a unipolar world dominated by the United States, a world that now is perhaps no longer unipolar, notwithstanding the violent Trump's administration attempts to recover this dimension.

John Randolph Dos Passos (the US novelist's father) was one of the theorists of Anglo-Saxonism. He proposed the Anglo-American way as a means of achieving peace. It is surprising that he did so using a messianic language similar to that of Zionism. He asked: "Are we the chosen race of Israel? Are we the peoples of the earth, elected to lead the van of civilisation and peace?" (Dos Passos 1903, 62). The question was of course rhetoric and so the Anglo-Saxons were deemed, like the Israelites 3000 years ago, God's chosen people, and the Promised Land, at this point, the entire planet. The Anglo-Saxonism debate seems to stem, above all, from the policy of appeasement between the British and Americans at the very beginning of the 20th century, when the latter peacefully resolved the Venezuelan crisis on the basis that two Anglo-Saxon entities (the UK and the US), as vanguards of civilization, could not be opponents. From then on, the British proclamations on Anglo-Saxonist concord multiplied, like those of the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain and of the writer Joseph Rudyard Kipling.

The former, while on his way to the United States, had impressed on his mind an idea: the greatness of the destiny "which is reserved for the Anglo-Saxon race, for that proud, persistent, self-asserting, and resolute stock, that no change of climate or condition can alter, and which is infallibly destined to be the predominating force in the future history and civilisation of the world" (Chamberlain 1897, 6). In sum, the duty of the British was to establish and maintain permanent ties of friendship with their relatives, since:

Across the Atlantic is a powerful and generous nation, using our language, bred of our race and having interests identical with ours. I would go so far as to say that, terrible as war may be, even war itself would be cheaply purchased if in a great and noble cause the stars and stripes and the union jack should wave together over an Anglo-Saxon alliance (Chamberlain 1898).

Kipling, for his part, in *The White Man's Burden* (1899), admonished the Americans that their “childish days” had come to an end, urging them to assume the onerous civilizing mission directed toward those he notoriously described as “fluttered folk and wild [...] Half devil and half child”. Above all,

Comes now, to search your
manhood
Through all the thankless years
Cold, edged with dear-bought
wisdom,
The judgment of your peers!

He was suggesting that it was time for the Americans to take on their colonial action and be judged accordingly by their imperial peers, above all the British. Ultimately, the Anglo-Saxonist debate sought to encourage the English-speaking world to forge a unified “racial alliance,” envisaging the creation of a Greater Britain that would bring together all English-speaking peoples.

The first to fully imagine the future of the Anglo-Saxonist alliance, shortly after the end of the Second World War, was Winston Churchill, who called this geopolitical entity: “the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples. This means a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States.”¹ In his well-known 1946 “special relationship” address, delivered in the United States shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War, he stated: “if all British moral and material forces and convictions are joined with your own in fraternal association, the high-roads of the future will be clear, not only for us but for all, not only for our time, but for a century to come”. Historical events soon vindicated his prediction. Nowhere was this clearer than in Palestine, where the anglospheric “fraternal association” empowered Zionist forces to carry out their colonial enterprise around that time and in the future.

Indeed, Churchill, serving as Colonial Secretary, was instrumental in pushing forward the Zionist project well before 1946. In 1921, confronted in Jerusalem by an Arab delegation demanding an end to Jewish immigration, he retorted that he neither possessed the authority nor the desire to overturn the Balfour Declaration. His justification, in essence, reiterated Balfour’s own position: “We think [the Jewish national home] will be good for the world, good for the Jews and good for the British Empire, but also good for the Arabs who dwell in Palestine and we intend it to be so; they shall not be supplanted nor shall they suffer but they shall share in the benefits of Zionism” (cit. in in Dockter 2015, 175). Subsequent historical developments

have demonstrated the contrary: the gains have been overwhelmingly Zionist, whereas the burdens and suffering have been borne almost entirely by the Palestinians.

Colonial dehumanization and master/servant relationship in the English canon

The genocide of the Palestinian people constitutes only the most recent occurrence in a protracted history of genocidal practices—*ante litteram*—carried out by the West against the non-West, in which those who styled themselves as ‘civilized’ systematically subjugated those they deemed ‘uncivilized.’ In order to achieve this objective, in Western history, whatever its devoted defenders may argue, white people have rationally organised the dehumanisation of non-white people, ever since the so-called ‘discovery of America’, when European colonizers began questioning whether Indigenous peoples possessed a soul and could therefore be regarded as fully human. According to Frantz Fanon, there has been a persistent zoological process of the colonizer who has made constant reference to the bestiary to describe the colonised, especially the blacks: “Avoir la phobie du nègre, c’est avoir peur du biologique. Car le nègre n’est que biologique. Ce sont des bêtes” (Fanon 1952, 134).

In the long history of the master/servant relationship across the space of colonial difference, the phenomenon we might also term ‘animalisation of the native’ has been observable since Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Owing to its thematic opacity and structural ambivalence, Shakespeare’s play has elicited numerous, often contradictory, readings.² Perhaps the most convincing hermeneutic compromise is that proposed by Rocco Coronato, who observes: “*La Tempesta* ha che fare col colonialismo, ma non era *già* colonialismo” (Coronato 2025, 14). Be it as it may, the play’s first performance in 1611 took place a few years after the establishment of Jamestown in 1607, the earliest permanent English settlement in North America. In Shakespeare’s play, the portrayal of Caliban fluctuates between the native as a sympathetic ‘noble savage’ (Montaigne)—who has deep feelings, fine language, and at times a morality superior to his master—and the native as an unsympathetic ‘ignoble savage’, who exists in a sort of liminal space between human and animal. Undeniably, he is presented as the “savage and deformed slave” in the *dramatis personae*³ and as “A freckled whelp hag-born” (I, 2) in the middle of the 1st act. When Caliban appears on stage, he is introduced by this Prospero’s call:

Thou poisonous slave, got by the Devil
himself
Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!
(*The Tempest*, I,2)

Caliban is the offspring of the Devil and a witch, called here “dam”, which was a word largely used for the animal female parent. A couple of years before the first performance of the play, in *A Good Speed to Virginia* (1609) Robert Gray writes that the native Americans “differ very

little from beasts, hauing no Art, nor science, nor trade" (cit. in Cohen 1985, 400). Similarly, from the outset in *The Tempest*, Caliban is framed more as a beast (a freckled puppy) than as a human being. Throughout the play, he is repeatedly addressed with animal appellations: "tortoise", "strange fish", "mooncalf"; "beast". In short, the animalisation or monsterisation of Caliban as 'ignoble savage' is predominant with respect to the construction of him as a 'noble savage'. Therefore, if in an ambivalent and complex way,⁴ ultimately Shakespeare participates to the process of the natives' exclusion from the civilized order, a process functional to his subjugation by the European master. Drawing on theological, philosophical, and literary conceptions of 'creatureliness,' Julia Reinhard Lupton reframes Caliban not simply as a racialized or animalized other, but as a *creature*—a being always in the process of creation and whose ontology is suspended between nature and culture, instinct and reason, body and language. And yet, Caliban still is viewed as an emblem of 'bare life' (Agamben): "pure vitality denuded of its symbolic significance and political capacity and then sequestered within the domain of civilization as its disavowed core" (Lupton 2000, 2).

Also, if "le Malgache, encore assez peu évolué, dit que les chefs blancs sont des dieux" (Mannoni 1950, 232) as Octave Mannoni has it, then it is easy for the French psychologist to set a theory of the dependence complex ("le complexe de Caliban") because of which the blacks need to be colonised, as well as the white man, in obedience to his authority complex ("le complexe de Prospero") needs to colonise accordingly. But no fear, Césaire remarks, with biting sarcasm, that in the end with Mannoni nothing will be lost. "Rien ne manquera, pas même le célèbre fardeau de l'homme blanc" (Césaire 1955, 25). Mannoni calls it "le lourd fardeau de responsabilité" (Mannoni 1950, 232) that the black subjects would place on their white gods, on whom they need to rely on insofar as they would be neither fully manly nor fully human; half devil and half child, to invoke once more Kipling's paradigmatic racial trope.

A similar argument was articulated at the start of their propaganda by the Zionists, who saw Palestinian Calibans as needing guidance for their civil advancement. For instance, the Russian-born Zionist leader Menachem Ussishkin, comparing British colonial administration in Egypt with Jewish administration in Palestine, stated that if the British sought only their own good and not that of the Egyptians, the Jews, while uniting with the ancient world of the East, would bring their "brethren to the race, a real culture, a culture of existence not a fictional one," and so solving the infamous "problem of the East" (cit. in Pappé 2008, 618). Thus, the Zionists are likewise shaped by this "authority complex," a posture that travels from West to East under the guise of "assisting" the supposedly helpless Orientals.

Going back to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and its monster-like native islander Caliban who attempts to rape Prospero's daughter Miranda, it is useful to recall Césaire's take of the episode in his rewriting of the play:

Prospero: c' est que c'est ta lubricité qui m'a obligé de t'éloigner. Dame! Tu as essayé de violer ma fille!

Caliban: Violer! Violer! Dis-donc, vieux bouc, tu me prêtes tes idées libidineuses. Sache-le: Je n'ai que faire de ta filleè [...] (Césaire 2011, 30)

According to Césaire's Caliban, Prospero's accusation amounts to an incestuous projection of his own depraved desire onto his daughter. For Fanon, likewise, Prospero's attribution of the animal lust to Caliban reminds the posture grounded in the long-standing fantasy that black men constitute a sexual threat to white women. Indeed, to him, this reflects the white erotic need to find the half-animal side in the blacks:

Ce besoin de retrouver chez les singes anthropoïdes, chez Caliban ou chez les Noirs, et même chez les Juifs, la figure mythologique des satyres, touche dans l'âme humaine, à une profondeur où la pensée est confuse et où l'excitation sexuelle est étrangement liée à l'agressivité et à la violence [...] (cit. in Fanon 1952, 134).

If we move on in literary history, from the early stages of the colonial process towards its apogee, along the road, we find Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, where Friday is given animal-like qualities—obedience, tameness, instinctual loyalty—which evoke less a human being than a faithful dog, eager to please his master Crusoe, who is intent on taming everything inhabiting the island.

After Crusoe, we encounter Marlow and Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where—after almost two centuries—they continue to regard the natives still in bestial or grotesque fashion, or as 'savage and deformed' if we like, thereby validating ultimately the racial prejudice that underpins Conrad's narrative perspective. When Marlow and his comrades penetrate the region of Congo, "deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness," and suddenly see the natives, they are portrayed as "a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling..." (Conrad 1988, 108). In particular, the African helmsman on Marlow's boat was described as "a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs" (Conrad 1988, 112). Hence, he was an animal clumsily performing the role of a human being. Conrad conveys this pathetic ambition of black people of being human through Marlow's hesitation in considering them (non) human. It is the following passage that prompts Chinua Achebe to denounce Conrad as a "bloody racist" (Achebe 1978, 9). On this "prehistoric earth", Marlow reflects that

men were not — No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it — this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly (Conrad 1988, 110).

It is true, as Nicoletta Vallorani claims, that Conrad—offering a merciless description of the dynamics of exploitation—undoes the 'essential Englishness' of the canon and that his vision operates as a glove turned inside, inasmuch as "essa esibisce, per volontà o per caso,

l'immagine obliqua di un colonialismo che non è mai arrivato, neanche ora, a ri-conoscere l'altro come parte di sé. Piuttosto lo identifica come un'ombra da rimuovere per stabilire la luce abbagliante di una presunta civiltà, da Leopoldo II a oggi" (Vallorani 2026, 84). Nonetheless, his censure of European domination and abuse—articulated through well-known Kurtz' canonical phrases such as "exterminate all the brutes!" or "the horror the horror"—remains insufficient. For Marlow, really, there is something even more troubling than perceiving the native as non-human: the intolerable and "ugly" suspicion that he may, in fact, be human after all: a realization awakened in Marlow by the dying gaze of the black helmsman claiming a "distant kinship" with him. As Edward Said memorably concluded:

Conrad's tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that "natives" could lead lives free from European domination. As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them (Said 1994, 34).

What, then, of the master/servant colonial relationship in occupied Palestine a century later?

The colonial elephant and other animals in the Zionist room

Before October 7, the Indian anthropologist Somdeep Sen, in his 2020 field study in Gaza, reports on a conversation between an Israeli tour guide and his client. The background to this was a knife attack in Jerusalem by two Palestinian teenagers who wanted to avenge their brother, who had been shot in his head by an Israeli soldier. The guide explains that this was how life worked in those parts: even if they were just kids with scissors in their hands, they had to be eliminated. To persuade more his converser, he also adds: "Look, this happens all the time. Israel attacked Hamas in Gaza, and they say a pregnant woman died. But crazy dogs get pregnant too. That doesn't mean that we don't kill them" (Sen 2020, 21).

Therefore, Israeli Zionist discourse on Palestinians constitutes no exception to the broader colonial logic of dehumanization. Since the Zionists arrived in Palestine, Palestinians have always been 'crazy dogs' within the justificatory rhetoric of colonial domination. The central problem within mainstream information systems is that Zionist discourse and practice have not largely been recognized as colonial in nature. Israel's status as a settler-colonial formation thus remains the proverbial elephant in the room: an obvious structural fact that many perceive yet few are willing to name, even after two years of genocidal violence in Gaza.

If the operative logic is indeed that of settler colonialism, it is unsurprising that, after October 7, the Israeli Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant—speaking in the immediate aftermath of Hamas's attack—announced: "I have ordered a total siege on Gaza. No electricity, no food, no fuel, everything closed. We are fighting human animals and we are operating accordingly".⁵ Nor is it unexpected to hear the subsequent call to "destroy Gaza" issued by the former

President of the Israeli Parliament. One might also recall the current President, Isaac Herzog, who not only affixed his signature to missiles used in the genocidal campaign but also declared that no distinction can be drawn between civilians and combatants: "It is an entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved. It's absolutely not true."⁶

Everyone is involved, everyone, that is, except the horses, as anti-Zionist Nurit Peled-Elhanan from Jerusalem reminds us with bitter irony:

In one of the reports about the 'war' in Gaza on the right-wing TV channel 14, the reporter surprised his audience by announcing that there are also 'uninvolved' in Gaza. He laughed heartily with the joy of a magician about to pull a rabbit out of his hat. Then he showed a reel where "our soldiers whose heart is the biggest in the world" found some uninvolved beings and gave them water to drink (Peled 2024, 30).

Palestinians, on the contrary, "unlike the horses, they are not entitled to a glass of water" (ibid.) because they are all involved, all terrorists. Here, Palestinians are rendered as even less than animals. And what of children? They, too, are swiftly stripped of their humanity. Many in Italy may recall the now-notorious remark "define child," uttered during a television talk show by Eyal Mizrahi, president of the Federazione Amici di Israele—a formulation that chillingly encapsulates the discursive ease with which Palestinian childhood is denied. But it was not the first time that the definition of a child was at issue in Israel. Former Mossad official Rami Igra declared on Israeli television that only children aged zero to four should be regarded as children, and that above the age of ten they are all to be considered Hamas supporters and therefore 'involved,' i.e., subject to elimination.⁷

Above all, we should recall Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu when, in his letter to his soldiers before the invasion of Gaza, he quoted a violent passage from the Torah (the sacred Hebrew text), in which the God of the Israelites said: "Now go, defeat Amalek, devote to destruction all that belongs to him; do not spare him, but kill men and women, children and infants, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys" (Deuteronomy 26). Amalek, the Amalekites, the biblical enemies of Israel three thousand years ago, are today Hamas and all Gazans, who must be exterminated by Israeli soldiers, heirs of the Israelite warriors of that time. And, as 3000 years ago, the Israeli Prime Minister incited his soldiers thus: "This is a war between the children of light and the children of darkness. We will not relent in our mission until the light overcomes the darkness; the good will defeat the extremist evil that threatens us and the entire world."⁸ In other words, the conflict is framed as a confrontation between the 'law of humanity' and the 'law of the jungle': on one side stand those construed as human beings who merely 'defend' themselves (the Israelis), and on the other those reduced to non-human entities who purportedly 'attack' (the Palestinians).

That Palestinians are construed as animals is further confirmed by the testimonies of the refuseniks—the Israeli conscientious objectors who refuse to serve in the army. Let us listen carefully to the words of one of them in full:

The moral law applies to persons, so one can avoid feeling guilt by persuading oneself that the oppressed are subhuman. The doctrine of the sub-humanity of the Arabs is in full swing among us ('grasshoppers', 'cockroaches', 'one thousandth of a Jew', 'animals', 'the dirtiest people on earth'). But then, instead of guilt, one feels dread of their ultimate revenge. And because one has pushed their humanity into the unconscious, the oppressed seem not only like animals, but like animals with demoniacal properties. So one feels threatened and beats them harder, and then there is more guilt to avoid, so one de-humanizes them more, and on and on: it is the spiral of evil (Kidron 2004, 32).

These are, in many ways, definitive words on the Zionist process of dehumanizing the Palestinians. This refusenik even speaks of a veritable policy of dehumanization—a kind of prescribed code that produces an ever-escalating spiral of moral degeneration. It is the would-be human who, in the very act of dehumanizing the other, Kurtz-like, dehumanizes himself in a boomerang effect, reminiscent of Césaire's insight into the way "la colonisation travaille à déciviliser le colonisateur" (Césaire 1955, 77).

Subhuman or non-human, animals: dogs, said Winston Churchill in 1937. Undeniably, this doctrine of Palestinian dehumanization possesses a long and well-established genealogy. After the Great Arab Revolt, which had been brutally suppressed in blood by British forces—then serving as British Colonial Secretary—Churchill was consulted before the Palestine Royal Commission (Peel Commission). It is instructive to consider his words in full:

I do not admit that the dog in the manger has the final right to the manger, even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America, or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to those people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, or, at any rate, a more worldly-wise race, to put it that way, has come in and taken their place. I do not admit it. I do not think the Red Indians had any right to say, The American Continent belongs to us and we are not going to have any of these European settlers coming in here. They had not the right, nor had they the power (cit. in Gilbert 2009, 616).

Under Churchill's framing, the indigenous peoples are nether half devil nor half child. They are recast as nothing more than dogs in a kennel and thus rendered subjects devoid of both rights and political power.

It is clear, therefore, that in the process of dehumanization, as Palestinian writer Mourid Barghouti observes, "the battle for language becomes the battle for land," and before genocide a prior act of verbicide must be carried out. According to him:

The Israeli occupation imposes a double, triple, infinite redefinition of the Palestinian. Call him militant, outlaw, criminal, terrorist, irrelevant, cancer, cockroach, snake, virus: the list becomes endless. You give the definitions. Define! Classify! Demonize! Misinform! Simplify! Label! Then send in the tanks! Kill the enemy! (Barghouti 2011, 41)

Perhaps, Susan Abulhawa articulated the definitive words of *sumud* (the Arabic for ‘steadfastness’) when she was invited to Oxford on December 6, 2024 for a debate on the motion: “This House Believes Israel is an Apartheid State Responsible for Genocide.” She did so in Prospero’s language and concluded her speech thus:

You will not erase us, no matter how many of us you kill and kill and kill, all day every day. We are not the rocks Chaim Weizmann [Russian-born Zionist leader naturalised British] thought you could clear from the land. We are its very soil. We are her rivers and her trees and her stories, because all of that was nurtured by our bodies and our lives over millennia of continuous, uninterrupted habitation of that patch of earth between the Jordan and Mediterranean waters. From our Canaanite, our Hebrew, our Philistine, and our Phoenician ancestors, to every conqueror or pilgrim who came and went, who married or raped, loved, enslaved, converted between religions, settled or prayed in our land, leaving pieces of themselves in our bodies and our heritage, the fabled, tumultuous stories of that land are quite literally in our DNA. You cannot kill or propagandize that away, no matter what death technology you use or what Hollywood and corporate media arsenals you deploy⁹.

Abulhawa’s words, to my ear, echo Caliban’s words, when he addresses Prospero in the following terms:

You taught me language; and my profit on’t
Is, I know how to curse.
The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!”
(The Tempest, I, ii)

And Abulhawa goes on adding:

Someday, your impunity and arrogance will end. Palestine will be free; she will be restored to her multi-religious, multi-ethnic pluralistic glory; we will restore and expand the trains that run from Cairo to Gaza to Jerusalem, Haifa, Tripoli, Beirut, Damascus, Amman, Kuwait, Sanaa, and so on; we will put an end to the Zionist American war machine of domination, expansion, extraction, pollution, and looting. And you will either leave, or you will finally learn to live with others as equals (ibid).

Here Caliban’s words resonate once more, but this time it is Césaire’s Caliban to speak:

Ça me fait rigoler ta ‘mission’
ta ‘vocation’!
Ta vocation est de m'emmerder
(Césaire 2011, 106)

Finally, while in Césaire’s *A Tempest*, the master refuses to relinquish his island-colony, in Abulhawa’s speech he is asked either to depart or to “finally learn to live with others as equals,” rather than persist in viewing them as non-human. In this expanded anglospheric configuration, there may be room both for an overpowered Prospero and for an empowered Caliban, “from the river to the sea” as the catchphrase has it.

During the First Intifada, addressing the colonisers—those who “pass through”—and inviting them to leave the occupied land, Mahmoud Darwish emerges as seeking to overturn the dehumanised condition imposed upon his people.

O those who pass between fleeting words
 As bitter dust, go where you wish, but
 Do not pass between us like flying insects
 For we have work to do in our land:
 We have wheat to grow which we water with our bodies' dew.
 (Darwish 1988)

While reminding the impermanence of colonisers' power—figures who pass as vile sand between ephemeral words—they are recast as insects flitting above the land of its true custodians, people who labour and who “have the present, the present and the future / [...] this world here, and the hereafter.”

Notes

¹ W. Churchill, The Sinews of Peace (“Iron Curtain Speech”): <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-%20%20statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/>. Accessed March 28, 2026.

² To mention only a handful of perspectives: “The whole history of imperialist America has been prophetically revealed to us in brief parable” (Fiedler 1972, 238-39); “*The Tempest* is in a great many respects a New World play, but it is not a colonial play” (Edwards 1979, 109); “The play has at times seemed a disturbing document, but one that, despite its obfuscatory and subtly didactic Neoplatonic allegory, unwittingly provides insight into an early stage in the formation of colonialist ideology” (Cohen 1985, 400); “The play does not actually call into question the Jacobean process of colonization across the Atlantic at all, and suggests that of more importance for its audience would have been the depiction of the hegemony of the island nation of Great Britain as recreated in 1603” (Marshall 1998, 375).

³ Probably, this description of Caliban might be added by the in-folio editors after the Algonquian massacre of Virginia settlers in 1622.

⁴ As for the inherent ambivalence of the play, Vito Amoruso beautifully puts it in this way: “...mentre è misconosciuta a Calibano una qualche possibilità d'essere e di esistere sul piano ideologico, come essere umano come ‘natura’ che abbia una sua ‘nurture’ al di qua e prima della ‘civilization’, sul piano espressivo, nella lingua poetica, nostalgica, umanissima, al selvaggio è paradossalmente affermato il contrario: Calibano sente, pensa, soffre, ha coscienza, si esprime e vive, insomma, e possiede la stessa, dolente dignità d'ogni altro figlio del creato” (Amoruso 1974, 38).

⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/video/newsfeed/2023/10/9/israeli-defence-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza>. Accessed March 28, 2026.

⁶ The Wire Staff 2023.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEzy7zVOjI8>. Accessed March 28, 2026.

⁸ <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/spoke-pmo031123>. Accessed March 28, 2026.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZCWCGebAuU>. Accessed March 28, 2026.

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Arti, antirazzismo e accademia: tra vecchie criticità e nuove riscritture, il caso di *Research as Vocality* a Napoli

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ABSTRACT

From the perspective of artistic and curatorial practices in Italy, 2015 can be seen as a pivotal moment in the emergence of the “postcolonial” as a critical framework. Academic initiatives such as the conference *Archives of the Future. The Postcolonial, Italy and the Time to Come* (University of Padua), together with major cultural events such as the Venice Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor, contributed to bringing these debates to a wider public and encouraged artists and cultural institutions to engage with postcolonial questions. In the years that followed, this growing attention produced ambivalent and sometimes controversial outcomes. Although critical scholarship had already laid the groundwork for a radical interrogation of “white privilege” decades earlier (Chambers and Curti 1997), the postcolonial was frequently adopted as a thematic framework while only rarely embraced as an ethical orientation capable of reshaping curatorial and institutional practices (Cippitelli and Frangi 2021, 14). A survey of exhibitions produced since then confirms this tension, suggesting that the present moment is characterized by the coexistence of multiple and often contradictory forces, whose outcomes remain uncertain (Mbembe 2015). Against this backdrop, and at the intersection of academic and artistic research, some practices have approached the postcolonial as a process of dismantling Italian “whiteness,” foregrounding the importance of positionality.

This article, titled “Arts, anti-racism, and academia,” reflects on the interdisciplinary project *Research as Vocality. Tracing the African Presence in Naples* (2022–2025), which explored the potential of art as an anti-racist discourse and practice.

Keywords

postcolonial Italy, white privilege, arts-based research, anti-racist curating, positionality, reappropriation

Un momento ‘elettrizzante’

Nel febbraio 2015, in occasione del Convegno internazionale “Archivi del futuro: il postcoloniale, l’Italia e il tempo a venire” (Università di Padova), nel suo “bilancio provvisorio” del postcoloniale in Italia, il filosofo politico Sandro Mezzadra registrava una situazione “per certi versi elettrizzante”¹: nonostante l’ostilità cronica dell’accademia italiana, negli ultimi anni gli studi postcoloniali erano cresciuti numericamente e qualitativamente, giungendo alla formulazione di un ‘postcoloniale italiano’ (Lombardi-Diop e Romeo 2012), di una critica della ‘bianchezza’, della ‘razza’ e del razzismo in Italia (Mellino e Curcio 2012; Giuliani 2015; Scacchi 2016).

Quelli intorno al 2015, per l'Italia, sono in effetti gli anni in cui 'il postcoloniale', come spazio teorico e politico che consente di mettere in discussione la presunta neutralità della conoscenza occidentale, e come categoria critica utile a riconfigurare le nuove relazioni e disposizioni di potere (Hall 1997), comincia a circolare con maggiore frequenza all'interno di un dibattito accademico sempre più interdisciplinare, capace di abbracciare anche le ricerche più creative e 'militanti', come quelle offerte dalle arti audio-visive e performative e dal loro intreccio con l'attivismo antirazzista. Al convegno padovano, per esempio, insieme a studiosè già notè e strutturatè e a giovani ricercatorè, c'erano anche artiste e collettivi che – per ragioni diverse e con diversi approcci e linguaggi – si stavano confrontando con l'eredità del colonialismo italiano (per citarne due: la regista e attivista Medhin Paolos, co-autrice del documentario *Asmarina*, e il collettivo *ideadestroyingmuros*). Alcuni dei nomi presenti a Padova si erano già incontrati in altre occasioni: le conferenze e i seminari organizzati dal gruppo *postcolonialitalia* dell'Università di Padova²; gli eventi curati dal progetto e rivista *roots&routés* (es. "Presente Imperfetto. Eredità coloniali e immaginari razziali contemporanei," Roma, 2014); ancora prima, i seminari organizzati dal Centro Studi Postcoloniali e di Genere (Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"), in particolare quelli che, dal 2011 al 2015, hanno portato a Napoli importanti riflessioni sul museo postcoloniale, o sulla necessità di decolonizzare i musei (Chambers 2012; Chambers et al. 2014). In quelle giornate di inizio 2015, all'Università di Padova, accademicè, artiste e studiosè delle arti interessatè a interrogare il presente postcoloniale stavano confermando pubblicamente quella che, in contesti più ristretti, si era già manifestata come una necessità condivisa: collaborare, interrogarsi, integrarsi e, pure, supportarsi reciprocamente per fronteggiare il persistente senso di superiorità morale e materiale che costituisce una delle principali componenti dell'eredità coloniale in Italia.

Nello stesso anno del convegno padovano, un ulteriore incoraggiamento a occuparsi di postcoloniale e colonialità con e attraverso le pratiche di ricerca artistica proviene dalla 56ma Biennale di Venezia diretta dal critico e curatore nigeriano Okwui Enwezor. *All the World's Futures*, la mostra internazionale da lui curata per gli spazi dei Giardini, può essere oggi utilizzata come termometro della coscienza postcoloniale degli italiani. Al netto dei limiti sollevati dalla critica internazionale, e da pochi nomi italiani (Pinto 2016), vale la pena di ricordare che all'indomani della nomina di Enwezor, tra le firme note del sistema dell'arte nazionale c'è stato chi ha maldestramente annunciato quell'edizione della biennale come 'afroglobale', auspicando tra le righe che il curatore in questione proponesse "un'esposizione completamente diversa" dalle sue precedenti, ovvero una mostra "solo in parte 'afroglobale'." D'altronde – conclude lo stesso commento – "multiculturalismo e post-colonizzazione sono temi passati di moda rispetto agli anni '90..." (Beatrice 2013). Espressione di un pensiero dominante tanto riduttivo quanto capillare, il commento appena riportato può essere letto come una prova schiacciante di quanto, invece, fosse necessario insistere sul postcoloniale in Italia;

più precisamente, sul postcoloniale come discorso e fare critico capace di smantellare il privilegio bianco e delegittimare la ‘bianchezza’.

Sebbene il postcoloniale stesse agitando il terreno dell’arte contemporanea internazionale dagli anni Novanta (esemplare la Biennale di Johannesburg del 1997, sempre a cura di Enwezor) e nonostante in quegli stessi anni la sfida postcoloniale avesse già fatto ingresso nell’accademia italiana mettendo in discussione le fondamenta dello ‘sguardo bianco’ (Chambers e Curti 1997), la questione in sé non poteva essere considerata superata nel 2013, quando il commento qui citato venne scritto, e non può essere ritenuta tale oggi, né in Italia né nel resto del mondo. Come ha rilevato la curatrice Maura Reilly, “Despite these widespread efforts since the late 1980s to address systemic racial discrimination in the art world, problems persist” (2021, 100). I problemi a cui Reilly si riferisce, in realtà, non permangono solo nel mondo dell’arte: dentro e oltre la sfera della rappresentazione, dentro e oltre le pratiche di ricerca, gli squilibri di potere che la critica postcoloniale e i movimenti antirazzisti analizzavano e denunciavano diversi decenni fa sono ancora drammaticamente attuali, spesso sminuiti o persino incentivati.

Sempre nel 2015, in uno scritto che sintetizza i contenuti di un ciclo di seminari tenuti in Sudafrica, il filosofo politico Achille Mbembe legge la scena socio-politica di quegli anni come una fase in cui sono all’opera molte forze contraddittorie, e ciò che potrebbe scaturire dalla loro interazione è tutt’altro che certo.³ Se astraiamo questa analisi dal contesto rispetto al quale ha preso forma, essa può descrivere bene anche il quadro che stiamo registrando nell’Italia della rappresentazione postcoloniale.

Esiti controversi

Negli anni successivi al 2015 – insieme a me, che al convegno padovano avevo presentato i primi passi di una ricerca dottorale ancora acerba, dedicata alle prospettive postcoloniali della curatela in Italia – nuove artiste e studiosse si sono aggiunte alla rete di chi sta provando a formulare critiche e proporre soluzioni a partire da una ‘decolonizzazione dello sguardo’. Questo fermento segnerà la produzione di nuove opere e mostre, la scrittura di nuovi articoli e libri. Convegni, conferenze e seminari sul tema continueranno a riservare un posto alle arti; e le pratiche artistiche, insieme alle teorie, usciranno dalle loro sedi ufficiali per parlare a un pubblico più ampio ed eterogeneo.

Questo interesse a sconfinare tra discipline e spazi (fisici e simbolici) nel tentativo di “performare” l’archivio coloniale (Gravano e Grechi 2016) e di “archiviare altrimenti” (Oboe 2016, 9) le memorie e le storie che la storia ufficiale ha silenziato a beneficio dei colonizzatori, non mancherà di produrre esiti controversi. A tale proposito, qualche anno fa, studiosse e *practitioner* come Lucrezia Cippitelli e Simone Frangi segnalavano che il lavoro critico sul colonialismo italiano in ambito artistico è emerso spesso come “un fenomeno ‘fuori fuoco’, diluito o attenuato”; nel nuovo millennio esso è apparso spesso come tema, talvolta come

metodo, ma raramente come “un’etica” (2021, 14). La loro nota critica – genericamente espressa nell’introduzione al volume, ma resa più esplicita attraverso alcuni contributi interni (soprattutto quello di Alessandra Ferrini) – riguarda quelle pratiche che approcciano l’archivio coloniale con l’intento di decolonizzarlo, ma finiscono, se pure involontariamente, per riprodurre la violenza dello sguardo bianco che lo ha generato. Si tratta quindi di una critica rivolta soprattutto a chi, nell’affrontare il (post)coloniale, trascura di interrogarsi sulla propria ‘posizionalità’.

La criticità appena riportata è particolarmente evidente se osserviamo la relazione tra l’Italia e la sua eredità coloniale dal punto di vista delle mostre prodotte nell’ultimo decennio. Una mappatura⁴ di questi eventi fa emergere quello delle esposizioni come un campo di continue tensioni e contraddizioni, dove il postcoloniale appare declinato nei modi più disparati. Qui vediamo persistere forme di “amnesia” istituzionale, “inconscio coloniale” (Ponzanesi 2004, 26) e manifestazioni di un postcoloniale “inconsapevole” (Oboe 2014). Non di rado, il postcoloniale continuerà a essere sinonimo di interesse esotico per l’‘altro’, o sarà interpretato come una sorta di ‘missione umanitaria’ che gli intellettuali bianchi possono abbracciare per ‘dare voce’ e ‘includere’ l’‘alterità non-occidentale’ (numerose sono le mostre dedicate all’‘arte africana’ o agli ‘artisti africani’ come categorie omogenee e fisse; o quelle – ideate da curatori bianchi – in cui il rapporto Italia-Africa è raccontato in termini pacificatori e autoassolutori).

Al contempo, non sono mancate le mostre che hanno saputo criticare l’eurocentrismo ostinato delle istituzioni culturali e la loro pretesa di mantenere una gerarchia di potere tra ‘noi’ e gli ‘altri’, facendosi portavoce di istanze anticoloniali e antirazziste, non di rado attraverso le opere di artiste che queste istanze le incarnano. Per fare qualche esempio: *Orestiade Italiana*, Quadriennale di Roma 2016; *Tutto passa tranne il passato*, Torino 2020; *Memory Matters*, Torino 2021; *Sediments. After Memory*, Roma 2022; *Bellezza e terrore*, Napoli 2022; nonché le mostre personali di Binta Diaw, Muna Mussie e Alessandra Ferrini – artiste a cui la storica femminista Luisa Passerini ha recentemente dedicato un libro intitolato *Artebiografia. Percorsi di artiste tra Italia e Africa*.

A questi episodi più consapevoli, o a manifestazioni ricorrenti come quelle realizzate nell’ambito del Black History Month Florence (promosso a Firenze, dal 2016, dall’artista e curatore Justin Randolph Thompson), va riconosciuto il merito di avere puntato i riflettori su una condizione che altrimenti sarebbe ancora ignorata da molte istituzioni culturali; di avere aperto la strada a un ragionamento etico, oltre che critico, sulle vecchie e nuove forme di conoscenza e rappresentazione; e di avere segnato la transizione dal postcoloniale come fascino per l’‘alterità non-occidentale’, al postcoloniale come (auto)critica della bianchezza italiana. Negli esempi qui citati la pretesa arrogante di ‘dare voce all’altro’ è sparita, perché si è recepito che l’‘altro’ è in grado di parlare per sé, non chiede e non necessita di essere rappresentato (Curti 2012).

A ben vedere, soprattutto dal 2020, anche a seguito delle proteste del movimento Black Lives Matter, a favorire questa ‘svolta’ sembra essere una più diffusa necessità di recepire le istanze antirazziste. Dalla mia prospettiva di ricercatrice bianca con cittadinanza italiana, a rendere urgente un’alleanza con la pratica (politica) antirazzista non è solo la lettura di testi critici che nell’ultimo decennio stanno insistendo sulla necessità di portare l’arte ‘oltre la rappresentazione’, ma soprattutto una serie di ragionamenti condivisi nel corso di una esperienza di ricerca interdisciplinare che mi ha coinvolta direttamente, insieme ad altre artiste, musiciste rapper, performer e attiviste antirazziste di provenienze diverse: il progetto intitolato *Research as Vocality. Tracing the African Presence in Naples*.

Nell’arco di un triennio, il progetto ha fatto emergere alcuni nodi critici – non più recenti ma ancora ‘caldi’ – del dibattito internazionale che si è sviluppato nella convergenza tra arti, accademia e antirazzismo. Nelle prossime pagine, coerentemente con i miei interessi di ricerca, mi soffermerò su alcuni degli argomenti che connettono il progetto in questione alla visione di una “curatela come pratica antirazzista” (Bayer et al. 2018). Prendendo in prestito l’esperienza di chi sta criticando la colonialità del presente in un altro paese europeo che, come l’Italia, ha cominciato di recente a fare i conti con il proprio passato coloniale, mi limiterò a commentare alcuni aspetti strutturali (fondi, figure coinvolte, durata del progetto, approccio). A motivarmi non è la tentazione di ridurre il progetto entro etichette facilmente spendibili nel mercato accademico, artistico o editoriale; semmai, è il tentativo di far dialogare questo percorso (auto)riflessivo con ragionamenti affini maturati in altre parti del mondo; nonché la convinzione che sia sensato insistere su alcune delle istanze che quel dibattito ha messo in circolo da anni e che tra le istituzioni culturali italiane faticano ancora a trovare sponde realmente accoglienti e ricettive.

Research as Vocality come atto di resistenza

Although the presence of Africans in the city of Naples has been well documented since at least the 15th century, personal and collective stories related to such a presence have been neglected or forgotten. As a consequence, African-Italian individuals and communities are still perceived as “other.” Issues of representation and citizenship within the Italian society have become even more complex as the stream of migration of the last decades unfolded. Artists and activists have confronted and challenged such perceptions while using their voices for artistic creations, political statements, and research-based analyses. [...] The project “Research as Vocality” highlights the physical, relational, political and expressive power of their voices, both their singing voices and their spoken voices, while bringing artists and activists at the forefront. From the political point of view, the main impact of the project is to center the historical and geographical relationships between Naples and Africa in order to build a new and more permanent understanding of contemporary issues of mobility, nationality, divides across race and gender, access to rights and opportunities.⁵

È con queste parole che l’etnomusicologo Gianpaolo Chiriaco descrive il progetto interdisciplinare *Research as Vocality. Tracing the African Presence in Naples*, da lui ideato e diretto insieme a Napoleon Maddox, rapper, performer, scrittore e artista visivo. Grazie a un

finanziamento istituzionale (Università di Innsbruck, Austrian Science Fund “FWF”), il progetto ha portato a Napoli, per tre anni consecutivi (2022-2025), un primo nucleo di persone che in passato avevano già indagato il ruolo delle *Voci Nere* – per dirla con il titolo di un libro di Chiriaco – nella decostruzione di immaginari coloniali. A questo primo gruppo si sono presto aggiunte altre persone attive nel capoluogo campano: ricercatrici accademiche e indipendenti e, soprattutto, artiste, lavoratore e produttore della cultura, afrodiscendenti e non, attiviste antirazziste.

La ricerca si è sviluppata in tre fasi. Durante il primo anno, una serie di workshop creativi ha permesso al team iniziale di esplorare e incontrare la comunità napoletana di artiste afrodiscendenti. Le artiste che hanno partecipato alla scrittura di questa versione napoletana, presentata il 2 giugno 2023, hanno poi continuato a lavorare, da sole o in gruppi più piccoli, alla produzione di nuovi progetti artistici.

Personalmente coinvolta in tutte le fasi, oggi vedo *Research as Vocality* come l’esito di un percorso (auto)riflessivo di lunga data. Il modo in cui il progetto ha affrontato una serie di questioni e scelte richiama non solo molti temi della letteratura ‘classica’ postcoloniale, ma anche le osservazioni critiche maturate nel terreno della curatela militante, in cui sono stati evidenziati, da una parte, il potenziale discorsivo delle mostre che hanno parzialmente riscritto il canone occidentale attraverso lo sguardo dei soggetti storicamente esclusi (Reilly 2021); dall’altra, il dubbio che un nuovo canone sia davvero un obiettivo auspicabile (Bayer et al. 2018, 24); e soprattutto, la permanenza di forti limiti strutturali: le istituzioni culturali europee, pur mostrando un interesse nei confronti del postcoloniale come tematica, non riescono a ripensare radicalmente i propri metodi e scopi.

Nel libro intitolato *Curating as Anti-Racist Practice*, in una conversazione a tre voci, le sue curatrici avvertono che in Germania “The discourse about ‘opening up cultural institutions’ is often mere lip service that does little to support practices that create more than just symbolic visibility for marginalised positions” (Bayer et al. 2018, 26). Nello stesso volume, altre ricercatrici e attiviste registrano l’ipocrisia palese, eppure ben mascherata, di un panorama culturale egemonico che “usually only welcomes criticism and change if it does not challenge the foundations of established hierarchies” (Micossé-Aikins and Sharifi 2018, 127). E ancora, in altri contributi si pone l’accento su come le istituzioni tedesche stiano strumentalmente utilizzando il postcoloniale e il decoloniale come etichette utili a cavalcare una tendenza globale con lo scopo di ripulirsi le coscienze. Anche in Italia questa tendenza istituzionale al ‘washing’ è stata rilevata dalla critica antirazzista; da attiviste che, soprattutto dal 2020, stanno denunciando con sempre maggiore forza la violenza discorsiva e materiale delle politiche sociali e culturali – italiane, europee e globali – che quando non criminalizzano l’‘altro’ pretendono di ‘integrarlo’, ‘includerlo’, come se questo processo non implicasse il mantenimento di una gerarchia coloniale.

Pur senza avere messo la teoria in primo piano, o avere fatto della elaborazione teorica l'obiettivo principale, il progetto *Research as Vocality* sembra avere condensato ed elaborato tutte queste riflessioni. Molti aspetti di questo percorso di ricerca, a partire da quelli strutturali che verranno commentati di seguito, possono essere considerati una risposta concreta a interrogativi – tanto basilari e noti quanto ancora attuali – come: “Who is speaking for and about whom? Who and what can be canonised under what conditions?” (Bayer *et al.* 2018, 26).

Innanzitutto, a dirigere i lavori del gruppo sono state due persone – un italiano attivo tra l’Austria, l’Italia e l’Etiopia e un afroamericano attivo tra gli USA e l’Europa – impegnate da molti anni, e talvolta insieme, a percorrere una terra di mezzo collocata tra ricerca storica e antropologica, riflessione teorica sulla colonialità, scrittura saggistica e creativa, performance artistica, produzione culturale. In sostanza, si tratta di due persone che non si sono improvvisate esperte di una questione di cui vale la pena di occuparsi perché ‘alla moda’ e, in quanto tale, può godere di buoni finanziamenti; ma che hanno semmai colto l’opportunità di usare un finanziamento pubblico per portare avanti una pratica di ricerca (estetica, etica e politica) di lunga data e proiettata nel lungo termine. Il loro procedere, la relazione che entrambi instaurano con l’istituzione mi ricorda, allora, quello che Stefano Harney e Fred Moten hanno definito come un “rapporto criminale”:

non si può negare che l’università sia un luogo di rifugio e non si può accettare che sia un luogo di rivelazione illuminista. Alla luce di tali condizioni, non si può entrare nell’università se non furtivamente e, una volta dentro, rubare tutto il possibile. Abusare della sua ospitalità, ostacolare la sua missione per unirsi alla sua colonia di profughi, di rifugiate, al suo campo nomade, per essere nell’università ma non dell’università – questo è il percorso dell’intellettuale sovversiva nell’università moderna. (Harney e Moten 2021, 60)

In seconda battuta, alla definizione del percorso di ricerca, sin dall’inizio, hanno partecipato alcune figure che stanno contribuendo attivamente alla ri-scrittura della narrazione dominante come protagoniste dell’esperienza diasporica in Italia. Tra queste, alcune delle voci che hanno ottenuto un riconoscimento proprio nell’ultimo decennio: la scrittrice, performer e attivista italo-ghanese Djarah Kan (autrice del racconto *Il mio nome* del 2019, e del libro *Ladra di denti* del 2020); la ricercatrice, traduttrice e attivista italo-haitiana Marie Moïse; la performer, poeta, artista multimediale di origine marocchina Wissal Houbabi. E ancora, alla definizione del progetto sono state invitate a partecipare artiste, produttore e operatore culturale afrodiscendente che, arrivati a Napoli da adulti o radicati qui da quasi tutta la vita, stanno provando a portare avanti il loro lavoro culturale in città: Thieuf Ndiaye, produttore e rapper senegalese; Samba Ngum (aka Sir X), rapper e video-maker gambiano; Assane Ndaye (aka dj Sass) dj, rapper e mediatore culturale gambiano; Flavia Giglio (aka Hothabanera), coreografa e maestra di dancehall di origine brasiliana; Catarina Del Jesus, performer e scrittrice della diaspora brasiliana – solo per nominare le persone attive durante l’intera durata

del percorso. Stimolate dal concept del progetto e dalle numerose riflessioni condivise da Napoleon Maddox nel corso degli incontri informali e dei workshop creativi, sono state tutte queste voci a dare forma ai discorsi e alle direzioni da intraprendere collettivamente.

La scelta del direttivo di aprirsi a questa voce collettiva ‘transnazionale’ e antirazzista risponde alla domanda: “For who is in a position to define the framework, the process and the added value of these so-called participatory projects; who can make decisions that can become reality?” (Bayer *et al.* 2018, 26). A decidere cosa fosse o meno degno di diventare ‘realtà’, nel nostro caso è stato il gruppo intero, influenzato più dalle circostanze materiali e dalle specificità sociali del territorio fisico in cui si è lavorato che dalle ambizioni teoriche o creative di chi ha scritto e coordinato il progetto. *Research as Vocality*, in questo modo, ha contribuito non solo ad arricchire quella che Enwezor ha definito “costellazione postcoloniale” (2003), ma anche a scombussole le relazioni di potere e le gerarchie a cui, come ricercatore e lavoratore della cultura in Europa, siamo abituati. Con le parole di Luisa Passerini, potremmo dire che il progetto è riuscito a “‘Cambiare la gerarchia delle rilevanze’ [...] per fare largo alla storia orale tra le monumentalità della storia tradizionale e fattuale” (2024, 40). “La storia della schiavitù e del razzismo si riproduce nel presente perché nega il riconoscimento di ciò che è stato” – ha ribadito Marie Moïse durante una performance pubblica realizzata dal collettivo. “Trasmettere memorie, allora, è un atto di resistenza, e la voce, i linguaggi artistici, sono il veicolo storicamente più efficace per sfuggire all’obliterazione.”⁶

Una zona di conflitto

Il panorama descritto dalle critiche formulate in Germania qualche anno fa, poc’anzi riportate, non è molto diverso da quello italiano – mi avvertono le presenze diasporiche che hanno scelto di partecipare al progetto ‘napoletano’. Le loro pratiche ‘resistenti’, le loro critiche ‘incarnate’ hanno arricchito il quadro delle visioni, analisi e narrazioni in grado di smascherare la violenza dell’identità bianca-italiana attraverso i temi che la letteratura postcoloniale ha reso ormai familiari, ribadendo il rischio che processi come quello decoloniale vengano svuotati di senso, cioè depoliticizzati e strumentalizzati per mano di un mercato – accademico o artistico che sia – sempre più ‘modaiolo’, spettacolarizzante ed estrattivo. Questa riflessione, necessaria in generale, assume ancora più rilevanza nello specifico contesto di un progetto finanziato da una università europea popolata principalmente da persone bianche.

Durante i primi incontri e workshop con artiste attive a Napoli, mentre Napoleon Maddox condivideva la sua idea iniziale nel tentativo di coinvolgere nuovi compagni di percorso, si è parlato anche di questi argomenti. In ciascuna di queste occasioni erano presenti rapper di diverse età e provenienze, arrivati a Napoli in momenti diversi; alcuni resi clandestini da un apparato legislativo e burocratico sempre più ostile nei confronti degli ‘stranieri’. Non sono mancati i momenti in cui le disuguaglianze prodotte dal razzismo sono esplose in termini anche

molto diretti; come quando un rapper emergente della scena afro-napoletana ha messo in guardia i suoi ‘fratelli’ da quella che temeva essere l’ennesima operazione di ‘cattura’ del ‘soggetto Nero’: “We don’t need their help! We don’t need them! We have to reject them!” – le sue parole ferme e dure. I destinatari delle sue critiche (“them”) non erano solo i ‘cacciatori bianchi’ che costruiscono le proprie carriere professionali sullo sfruttamento dell’‘altro’, ma lo stesso Napoleon Maddox: Nero, ma con cittadinanza americana e una posizione sociale privilegiata, in quanto artista riconosciuto in USA come in Europa.

Il gruppo di partecipantə ha vissuto questi interventi come ‘irruzioni’, perché inaspettati, quanto meno nei toni; ma è stato immediatamente chiaro a tutti che si è trattato di irruzioni comprensibili, se non proprio necessarie quanto lo sono le ‘interruzioni’ anticoloniali espresse in forme poetiche. Interrogativi di questo tipo hanno trasformato alcuni incontri e workshop in vere e proprie assemblee politiche, e hanno spinto il progetto oltre la soglia della formalità istituzionale che spesso impedisce alle persone coinvolte – soprattutto se invitate per ragioni ‘inclusive’ – di esporsi apertamente. Di fatto, in questa ‘zona di conflitto postcoloniale’, le domande più scomode lanciate agli organizzatori hanno permesso a tutti i partecipanti (organizzatori compresi) di rendere sempre più chiaro l’obiettivo comune. “Unity Club,” il nome del luogo fisico in cui il gruppo di lavoro si è riunito e rifugiato più spesso per ragionare, creare insieme e performare, traduce bene il senso della direzione intrapresa per raggiungerlo.

Tempi lenti, spazi ‘comuni’

Research as Vocality, come ha sintetizzato Marie Moïse, si è sviluppato come “una residenza artistica in più atti,” e attraverso lo storytelling creativo e collettivo ha dato “espressione e forma a una nuova memoria collettiva.” A rendere possibile questo processo di ‘riappropriazione’ della storia è stata anche la durata del progetto: tre anni durante i quali il gruppo di lavoro si è incontrato fisicamente e con regolarità, creando momenti immersivi di riflessione, esplorazione e creazione. Ovvero, non episodi sporadici, ma un lavoro continuativo e costante, che ha impegnato tuttə nella produzione di ciò che è stato ritenuto sensato per chi partecipava, nei tempi che ciascuna ha stabilito essere quelli adeguati alle proprie esigenze. Anche questo aspetto apparentemente secondario può essere invece considerato come una risposta alla critica legittima nei confronti di quei progetti istituzionali il cui obiettivo primario sembra quello di produrre entro i tempi stabiliti ‘oggetti vendibili’ che giustifichino i fondi concessi. Da questo punto di vista, “The notion of taking time,” ossia la scelta di prendersi il proprio tempo – come osserva la curatrice Megan Johnston, nel formulare la sua idea di “Slow curating” (2014, 26) – diventa anch’esso un atto di resistenza. Così come diventa sovversivo l’atto di non produrre nulla, nel caso in cui questa produttività venga vissuta solo come un dovere contrattuale. Nel nostro caso, ci siamo concessi anche di non produrre, quando ci è sembrato non ci fossero le condizioni.

Ugualmente importanti sono state le scelte relative agli spazi da attraversare e da abitare, sia nella fase di ricerca collettiva, sia nei momenti di esposizione dei risultati raggiunti. Le voci critiche della curatela e dell'attivismo antirazzista, come ho già accennato, hanno puntato i riflettori anche su questo argomento facendo notare che gli spazi ufficialmente deputati alla ricerca e all'arte sono spesso delle 'fortezze' accessibili a addette ai lavori e a un pubblico privilegiato; non tanto perché questi luoghi impongano necessariamente dei limiti materiali (un documento da esibire all'ingresso o un biglietto da pagare), ma perché le modalità attraverso cui operano, così come il linguaggio che utilizzano per comunicare con l'esterno, creano una barriera invisibile tra chi parla e chi, a conti fatti, rimane 'parlato'. In altri termini, i 'soggetti postcoloniali', le persone razzializzate e marginalizzate che sono al centro di molte mostre ed eventi culturali, finiscono quasi sempre per rimanere escluse. Per chi, nel praticare la solidarietà antirazzista, tiene conto dei propri privilegi di 'razza' e classe, è impossibile ignorare quanto sia problematico che ancora oggi i discorsi e i luoghi della promozione culturale in Italia siano diretti e popolati principalmente da bianchi istruiti che parlano a un pubblico ugualmente bianco e borghese.

Sulla base di queste riflessioni, e senza dover evocare le pur importanti analisi e teorie esistenti, il gruppo di lavoro ha scelto di incontrarsi ed esibirsi in spazi già realmente accessibili a chiunque. Così, per esempio, il primo incontro con la città si è svolto all'ex-Asilo Filangieri di Napoli, un bene comune autogestito dagli abitanti. Qui Napoleon Maddox, insieme al produttore francese Sorg, ha proposto un workshop introduttivo con cantantè, rapper e musicistè (luglio 2022).

Nei mesi successivi il gruppo di lavoro ha poi preso forma e si è consolidato attorno allo Unity Club, uno spazio indipendente di socialità e promozione della scena musicale afro-italiana. Nel corso di una intervista a più voci, Demba Jawo, uno dei responsabili delle attività dello Unity, ha condiviso le innumerevoli difficoltà che, insieme all'italo-americana Martina Lanfranchi e al dj gambiano Sass, deve affrontare per mantenere attivo un club come quello (una realtà 'piccola', come lui stesso l'ha definita) in una città come Napoli, e ha presentato lo spazio come un luogo per tuttè lè italianè – “not white, not black”, ma tutti, insieme.⁷ Marie Moïse, durante la presentazione di una delle prime performance pubbliche del collettivo nato attorno al progetto, ha giustamente definito lo Unity Club come un “punto di approdo per una comunità di fuggitivi.”

Ugualmente significativa è stata la scelta di proporre i laboratori creativi in alcuni spazi associativi che operano nell'ambito dell'accoglienza di 'migrantè', e in un liceo musicale della periferia di Napoli. E ancora più rilevante è risultata la scelta di presentare lo spettacolo *Twice the First Time. Resistenze e Musiche Nere a Napoli*⁸ all'interno di un altro spazio autogestito della città, lo Scugnizzo liberato, anch'esso un bene comune da sempre abitato da una comunità di napoletani bianchi e afrodiscendenti. Qui, l'informalità e la piena accessibilità che connotano lo spazio hanno offerto il terreno ideale per accogliere e fare dialogare mondi che

ancora oggi rimangono troppo spesso separati. Questo incontro inusuale si è materializzato non solo di fronte al palcoscenico che ha ospitato la performance principale, ma anche durante gli altri momenti di discussione previsti dalla giornata, come la presentazione del video documentario *Dove sei, Mama Africa?* (2023) di Djarah Kan. Insieme a lei, a presentare questo importante lavoro dedicato alla memoria di Miriam Makeba sono state invitate accademiche note del postcoloniale in Italia, come Iain Chambers e Annalisa Frisina, ma anche voci note dell'attivismo antirazzista, come la già citata Moïse e Didier Teoule, membro del collettivo "Castelvoturno suona antirazzista." Anche in questo caso, come in qualsiasi altro appuntamento proposto dal team del progetto, tra il pubblico non c'erano solo persone bianche, né solo addetti ai lavori.

Per un futuro antirazzista

If we are to develop an anti-racist curatorial practice, we should first understand how and under which conditions social activism and anti-racism have become socially acceptable in the cultural-political field, and how old and new modes of racist exclusion nonetheless keep on being reproduced and updated in institutional dynamics. After all, when we strive to establish an anti-racist practice in the cultural fields, we are working with these contradictions ourselves. (Bayer *et al.* 2018, 24).

Nel novembre 2023, dopo un anno e mezzo di ricerche condotte attraverso workshop creativi, interviste e incontri informali, in occasione di un seminario e di una tavola rotonda ospitata dall'Università di Innsbruck, il team del progetto ha provato a fare un bilancio, interrogandosi su quanto fatto e sui passi da compiere in futuro, e lasciandosi interrogare da chi era in ascolto. Tra questi ultimi vi era Kadir Monaco, regista emergente e attivista italo-somalo che fino ad allora non aveva partecipato al percorso collettivo e che, interessato ai processi attivati e ai temi affrontati, ha posto una domanda a ideatore e organizzatore del progetto:

Ma dopo che avete organizzato workshop, incontri, dibattiti e uno spettacolo con artisti Neri napoletani, questo progetto che parla di temi postcoloniali, di razzismo e antirazzismo, cosa può fare per migliorare le condizioni di vita di questi artisti che stanno a Napoli? È una domanda che vi state ponendo, oppure non vi interessa ragionare su questo aspetto perché il vostro lavoro è accademico, solo teorico? Voglio dire, a me pare che a molti progetti accademici come il vostro manchi l'aspetto della soggettivazione politica...

Anche questo interrogativo non suona come una novità per chi prova a 'fare il postcoloniale', perché riguarda la differenza tra il rappresentare l'antirazzismo e il praticarlo andando oltre il piano simbolico e strettamente discorsivo. Nell'intersezione tra Cultural Studies, Critical Theory e Critical Discourse Analysis c'è stato chi ha posto la questione in termini altrettanto schietti: "What does it help an asylum seeker that I perform an intelligent and politically committed analysis of her discourse?" (Threadgold 2003, 32). Domande come

queste ci costringono a confrontarci con le contraddizioni e i limiti in cui si inciampa inevitabilmente quando si porta l'antirazzismo in campo culturale.

Su questa scia, nel corso dell'ultimo decennio mi sono chiesta spesso se il compito della curatela che si muove tra teorie critiche e solidarietà antirazzista possa davvero ritenersi risolto nella costruzione di discorsi, visioni e metodi alternativi a quelli dominanti. Pertanto, la domanda di Kadir non solo non mi coglie di sorpresa, ma mi sembra del tutto pertinente, soprattutto in un presente in cui il razzismo è sempre più fomentato tanto dalle destre reazionarie in ascesa in tutto il mondo, quanto da una sinistra dal volto benevolente, che maschera le politiche discriminatorie dietro la retorica della 'sicurezza'.

La sociolinguista Terry Threadgold, citata pocanzi, porta avanti il suo ragionamento affermando che il nostro lavoro critico "will only help if I can use it to influence policies which determine the material conditions of asylum seeking" (2003, 32). Se proietto lo sguardo nel lungo termine posso trovarla una risposta soddisfacente: le memorie critiche della diaspora, ha ricordato Marie, hanno dimostrato il loro potenziale trasformativo, e insistere sull'uso dei linguaggi artistici per amplificare queste voci antirazziste potrà forse influenzare le politiche future.

Ipotizzando che questo procedere riesca davvero a generare esiti determinanti, spalleggiare la richiesta di Kadir mi sembra ancora più sensato, e mi porta a chiedermi più seriamente in quanti altri modi il privilegio bianco può essere sfruttato per ampliare i margini di agibilità dei 'fuggitivi'. Forse, accomunati da questo sentire, come ricercatore, artista e attivista possiamo sperimentare vie ancora inesplorate continuando a 'essere nell'università senza essere dell'università'.

Dopo il seminario a Innsbruck anche la voce di Kadir è diventata un'importante complice del nostro gruppo, ed è stato anche grazie al suo interrogativo che il progetto è riuscito a spingersi oltre gli obiettivi previsti, 'rubando' all'università tutto il possibile, per supportare l'economia di spazi indipendenti vitali per la città in cui abbiamo lavorato, la nascita di nuove produzioni artistiche dirompenti e, per finire, l'avvio di una nuova associazione culturale finalizzata alla "lotta contro la discriminazione, il razzismo e la xenofobia" attraverso l'arte. La sua vicepresidente è Flavia Giglio, la maestra di dancehall che ha lavorato con noi, e il nome dato all'associazione è "Alba": preludio di nuovi futuri auspicabili.

Note

¹ Si riportano le parole pronunciate da Mezzadra durante il suo intervento intitolato "Condizione postcoloniale, postcolonialismo, studi postcoloniali. Un bilancio provvisorio", 20 febbraio 2015, https://www.postcolonialitalia.it/Archivi-del-futuro_Programma.pdf. Ultimo accesso 30 novembre 2025.

² Il progetto postcolonialitalia – postcolonial studies from the european south (dir. Annalisa Oboe, 2013-2019), ha riunito studiose e studiosi delle scienze umane e sociali per discutere l'impatto di idee e pratiche d'indagine di ambito postcoloniale sulle rispettive discipline di studio e sulla cultura italiana contemporanea.

- ³ Il documento intitolato “Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive” è disponibile online: <http://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf>. Ultimo accesso 2 dicembre 2025.
- ⁴ Link alla mappa: <https://maphub.net/AlessandraFerlito/curatela-colonialita>. Ultimo accesso 12 dicembre 2025.
- ⁵ Dal sito web: <https://afrovocality.com/research-as-vocality/>. Ultimo accesso 10 dicembre 2025.
- ⁶ Link al video che documenta la performance musicale intitolata *Pre-Colonial Explorations for Real Post-Colonial Future*, 22 gennaio 2023: <https://vimeo.com/883928583>. Ultimo accesso 3 dicembre 2025.
- ⁷ Link alla video intervista realizzata il 22 gennaio 2023: <https://vimeo.com/883928583>. Ultimo accesso 3 dicembre 2025.
- ⁸ Link al video della performance presentata il 2 giugno 2023: <https://vimeo.com/1094102597>. Ultimo accesso 3 dicembre 2025.

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From Discourse to Praxis: Decoloniality, Knowledge Production, and Everyday Resistance in the European South

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ABSTRACT

Decoloniality remains a central yet contested project: despite intellectual traction, the voices and lived experiences of the descendants of formerly colonised peoples are too often marginalised in both scholarly and public spheres. This paper, co-authored by three Black-Italian women working across academia, activism, community organising and cultural curation asks: how do we move beyond elite discourse to praxis that grounds decoloniality and anti-racist commitment in everyday resistance and solidarity? What role can—and should—academia play in building equitable collaborations which acknowledge and redress existing power inequalities in knowledge production? Drawing on our work and positionalities as descendants of formerly colonised people living in Europe, we consider multiple ways of engaging—through academic, activist, cultural, and curatorial practices. We examine how the tools we use such as oral history, podcasting alongside institutional and discursive practices determine who has access to knowledge, whose voices are amplified, and who is centred or marginalised. We further explore what ethical partnerships look like, how leadership, authority, and agency are distributed in collaborative work, and how decolonial practices can reach beyond academia into everyday praxis. Ultimately, this paper aims both to celebrate achievements in postcolonial and decolonial scholarship over the past decade and proposes forward-looking strategies for sustaining its relevance and impact. At times of heightened global crises, rising far-right white-supremacist narratives, and persistent colonial legacies, we argue for a decolonial praxis rooted in solidarity, everyday resistance and redistribution of authority and knowledge-making.

Keywords

Decolonial praxis, everyday resistance, ethical collaboration, anti-racism

Introduction

Over the past decade, decoloniality has gained increasing visibility across academic, cultural, and activist spaces in Europe. Concepts such as decolonial praxis (Mignolo and Walsh 2018), epistemic justice (Fricker 2007, de Sousa 2015), and positionality (Haraway 1988, Collins 2000) have become central to critiques of Eurocentric knowledge production and colonial legacies. Yet, despite this growing attention, the voices and practices of descendants of formerly colonised peoples—particularly those located in the European South—remain marginal within dominant sites of knowledge production. Too often, decoloniality circulates as an abstract, theory-driven discourse embedded within elite academic spaces, while the everyday practices through which racialised communities contest power, generate knowledge, and enact solidarity are rendered secondary or invisible (Bhambra 2014, Tuck and Yang 2012).

The paper intervenes in this gap by foregrounding decolonial praxis as lived, situated, and relational and by centring practice-led reflections grounded in concrete experiences. It brings together the perspectives of three Black Italian women who engage in decolonial work through distinct yet interconnected approaches—academic research, community-based activism, and cultural production. Our work emerges in response to the specific social, political, and institutional contexts we navigate, shaped by Italy's colonial histories (Del Boca 2005), contemporary racialised exclusions (Hawthorne 2022), and persistent inequalities in who produces knowledge, who is recognised as an expert, and who is positioned as the intended audience (Bhambra 2014).

The paper developed out of a series of conversations among the authors, during which we identified both shared concerns and divergent challenges across our respective fields. Central to these discussions are questions of power and access: who speaks and who is heard, whose knowledge is legitimised, and how the tools, spaces, and outputs we employ shape the reach and impact of decolonial work (Smith 2021). We therefore ask a set of guiding questions, addressed through our respective positionality and practice: what context shapes our work? Who is our target audience, and what approaches do we use to engage them? What have we learned through this work? And why does this work matter in terms of impact and social transformation?

The first author examines how power hierarchies in knowledge production can be disrupted through ethical co-production and audience-centred outputs in academia. Drawing on initiatives such as *Eriwellbeing*, an online platform addressing mental health within the Eritrean diaspora, and collaboration with *Da'aro Youth Project*, a London-based grassroots organisation supporting young asylum seekers and refugees from the Horn of Africa, highlighting alternatives to academic elitism. The second author focuses on her work with *Tezeta*, an interdisciplinary youth association she co-founded, engaged in research, cultural dissemination, and education on Italian colonialism and contemporary migration. Specifically,

the author reflects on the importance of reversing dominant narratives on Italian colonial histories by centring colonised peoples' voice, agency and resistance (Fanon 1963, Quijano 2000). Finally, the third author examines social justice work on the ground through *Blackn[è]ss Fest*, a cultural space of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2009) and cultural resistance that centres Black and racialised voices at the margins of Italian society. The author critically interrogates what it means to co-create spaces that are truly inclusive vis-à-vis a cultural landscape that privileges performative and watered-down forms of resistance.

By bringing these practices into dialogue, this paper contributes to decolonial scholarship by demonstrating how practice-led, collaborative, and reflexive approaches can challenge epistemic hierarchies and reorient decoloniality towards meaningful, accessible, and transformative praxis.

Academic Knowledge Production, Positionality, and Decolonial Praxis from the European South (Mikal Woldu)

My contribution to this paper examines academia as a central yet deeply contradictory site of decolonial engagement. While decolonial and anti-racist frameworks have gained increasing visibility within European scholarly discourse, academic institutions remain structured by entrenched inequalities in access to resources, mobility, authorship, and recognition. These inequalities shape not only who is able to enter and remain within academia, but also whose knowledge is legitimised, circulated, and valorised. As such, academia functions simultaneously as a space of critique and as an elitist institution that reproduces colonial and racialised hierarchies.

Engaging in decolonial praxis within academia, therefore, requires navigating the tensions between institutional belonging and structural exclusion. As a Black Italian woman, born and raised in Italy and trained within British academia, my scholarly trajectory has unfolded across intersecting axes of marginalisation and privilege. This positionality, situated between racialised exclusion, institutional accreditation, and Global North affiliation, shapes both my access to academic spaces and the ethical responsibilities that accompany this access. These responsibilities become particularly acute when conducting research within one's own community, where the boundaries between researcher and researched are blurred and the risk of reproducing extractive practices is heightened.

Context: extractive knowledge production and positional responsibility

The email arrives with familiar language: urgent timelines, a request for 'Sudanese voices', promises to 'contribute to the evidence base.' What's missing? Any mention of Sudanese researchers designing questions, analysing data, or holding authorship." (Ahmed 2025)

The structural conditions shaping my work are well captured in Bashair Ahmed's (2025) reflection on research practices in academic and humanitarian contexts. As Ahmed notes, research is frequently commissioned under the guise of inclusion, seeking "voices" from marginalised communities while excluding those same communities from research design, analysis, and authorship. Expertise grounded in lived experience is thus rendered instrumental rather than epistemically authoritative, reinforcing hierarchical distinctions between those who "produce" knowledge and those who merely supply data.

For scholars who come from communities that are routinely positioned as the objects of research, this dynamic raises critical ethical questions. How does one engage in research without reproducing the very extractive logics embedded within academic institutions? How can scholars remain accountable to their communities while operating within systems that reward individual authorship, institutional prestige, and disciplinary conformity?

My doctoral research on Eritrean diasporic communities in London and Milan confronted these tensions directly (Woldu 2021). Conducting ethnographic research within my own community required sustained reflexivity around power, representation, and responsibility. While shared cultural and linguistic reference points facilitated trust and access, they also placed heightened expectations on how knowledge would be used, circulated, and returned. This necessitated a continual negotiation of my position as both an insider and an institutionalised researcher (Dwyer and Buckle 2009), benefitting from academic legitimacy while remaining accountable to the communities whose experiences shaped the research.

Who is the target audience and how do we engage them

A central commitment shaping my work has been the refusal to treat academic peers as the sole or even primary audience of research. From the outset of my doctoral project, I approached academia as a platform through which to better understand my own communities and to produce knowledge that could be meaningful beyond academic publication. This orientation informed both the methods I employed and the forms of engagement I prioritised.

In practical terms, this meant developing outputs and public engagement activities that were accessible, community-facing, and responsive to expressed needs. Rather than assuming that knowledge should flow unidirectionally from researcher to community, I sought to remain in dialogue with participants throughout the research process. This included facilitating talks, workshops, and community-based discussions, as well as remaining attentive to issues emerging from the field that demanded response beyond the scope of the original research design.

One such issue was the growing mental health crisis affecting Eritrean diasporic communities across Europe and beyond, particularly during the COVID-19 period. While this was not unique to Eritrean communities, it was a pressing concern within the specific contexts

in which I was conducting research. In response, I co-founded *Eriwellbeing*, an online platform aimed at dismantling the stigma around mental health within the Eritrean diaspora. Importantly, the platform was not conceived as a vehicle for disseminating expert knowledge from the outside, but as a space for conversation, stigma reduction, and collective reflection. By inviting mental health practitioners and experts from within the community, *Eriwellbeing* sought to situate mental health within culturally and historically grounded frameworks, foregrounding trauma-informed and context-sensitive approaches.

This example illustrates a broader commitment in my work: positioning research participants and community members not as peripheral stakeholders, but as central actors in shaping both process and outcomes. Knowledge production, in this sense, becomes a relational and co-produced endeavour, rather than a detached academic exercise.

Building ethical partnerships beyond research agendas

My engagement with *Da'aro Youth Project*, further exemplifies this approach. This relationship did not originate from a predefined research agenda, but from a recognition of need and a willingness to contribute skills where they were deemed useful. I initially engaged through volunteering, seeking to understand the organisation's work and the challenges faced by the young people it supports. Over time, this evolved into a trusting, long-term relationship, enabling deeper collaboration, including the co-design of research and impact projects.

Crucially, this work was not driven by academic timelines or output requirements. Entering the space without a predetermined agenda allowed the priorities, knowledge, and leadership of the organisation to guide the collaboration. This approach required time, humility, and care, resources that are often undervalued or unsupported within academic funding structures. Co-production, when taken seriously, is both time-intensive and resource-demanding, and it frequently sits in tension with the metrics-driven logic of academic research.

Navigating this tension requires continual negotiation. For me, the guiding principle has been a commitment to why this work matters, rather than how efficiently it can be translated into academic outputs. Academic expertise, in these collaborations, is positioned as one form of knowledge among many, rather than as an overarching authority.

Lessons learned and why this work matters

One of the most significant lessons emerging from this work is the recognition that community spaces are sites of deep, situated expertise that often exceed the explanatory power of abstract theoretical frameworks. This is not to dismiss the value of academic theory, but to challenge its assumed primacy. When research fails to engage ethically and reciprocally with communities, not only does it reproduce harm, but it also forecloses opportunities for richer, more grounded forms of knowledge production.

Despite increasing institutional emphasis on “impact” and “participation,” these elements are frequently treated as add-ons rather than as foundational principles. Ethical collaboration cannot be retrofitted onto extractive research designs; it must be embedded from the outset in how relationships are formed, maintained, and valued. Reciprocity, trust, and accountability are not methodological extras, they are central to decolonial praxis.

This work matters because academia continues to play a powerful role in shaping public discourse, policy, and collective understanding. Yet, there is a long-standing disconnect between academic knowledge production and the everyday realities of marginalised communities. When scholars extract knowledge without accountability, retreating into institutional spaces that remain inaccessible to those they study, academia risks further eroding its social relevance.

Decolonial praxis offers an opportunity to reimagine how academia interfaces with other sites of knowledge production, including activism, community organising, and cultural work. Interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches are not merely desirable, they are necessary if academic work is to contribute meaningfully to social transformation.

This paper itself emerges from such an ethos. By bringing together three authors who engage in decolonial praxis across different fields, the paper does not seek to offer a singular model or prescriptive solution. Instead, it aims to illustrate the multiplicity of ways in which decolonial commitments can be enacted across contexts and capacities. Writing collaboratively becomes, in this sense, both a methodological and political act, an opportunity to reflect, learn, and amplify each other’s work while challenging dominant hierarchies of expertise.

Italian colonial history through the voices of the Eritrean diasporas (Yodit Estifanos Afewerki)

I never imagined that Italians, or Italian history, had done such a thing in Eritrea, yet they really left behind a reality, a history that I can only describe as a dark one. But only we know about it, because unfortunately Italians either don’t want to know about it or simply don’t know. They don’t know and they don’t want to know. And I am sorry, because whether you like it or not, Italy also belongs to me. I am Eritrean, but I am also Italian. (Narrator from *passeggiate narrative*)

For *Tezeta* and for the Eritrean communities with whom we collaborate, decolonising Italian history means recounting it from the perspectives of the Eritrean diasporas— those who have inherited, lived, and negotiated the legacies of Italian colonialism across generations.

This work is necessary precisely because, in Italy, colonialism remains marginal in public discourse. School textbooks often devote less than a paragraph to Italian expansion in the Horn of Africa and Libya, and collective memory is shaped more by mythologies of “*Italiani brava gente*” than by historical accountability (Del Boca 2011). For Eritrean descendants raised

in Italy or arriving later in life, this erasure has produced a profound need to reclaim and reconstruct knowledge.

Tezeta (ተዘታ) which translates as nostalgia and memory, is an interdisciplinary youth association engaged in research, cultural dissemination and educational work on Italian colonialism and contemporary migration. The association's first project, *Harnet Streets* ("streets of liberation") evokes Asmara's Harnet Avenue (Tezeta 2026), whose renaming reveal layered colonial and postcolonial histories (Tzeggay 2011). The project highlights urban plurality and seeks to reinsert the historical ties between Italy and Eritrea into collective memory.

The project pursues a dual objective. Firstly, it seeks to bring to the fore the historical and political relationship between Italy and Eritrea, a relationship that has been systematically marginalized in public discourse. Secondly, it challenges dominant school curricula that continue to be shaped by Eurocentric language and perspectives. Active since February 2021, the initiative continues to grow, with plans for autobiographical workshops, collaborations with schools and the development of new urban routes in other areas of Rome.

Our Approach

The project unfolded through two interconnected methodological phases. The first phase, centred on participatory counter-mapping, aimed to collect, archive, and reinterpret the memories of Eritrean diasporic communities living in Rome. At the heart of this phase were *passeggiate narrative*, individual or small-group narrative walks in which colonial street names served as prompts, activating recollections of Asmara, childhood experiences, linguistic memories, migration trajectories, or significant political events. Approximately twenty narrators—differing in age, migration histories, and regions of origin—contributed testimonies that often moved beyond individual accounts to become collective conversations. Walks were recorded *in situ*, allowing the ambient sounds of the so-called *Quartiere Africano* to enter the archive and situate the narratives within an urban space still marked by colonial toponymy. The collected material was subsequently organized thematically—around education, language, colonialism, travel, experiences in Rome, and memories of Asmara—creating a layered corpus through which shared and divergent histories could emerge.

Many community members expressed the need for safe spaces to reflect on their migratory journeys, tools to preserve oral histories, and opportunities to connect personal memories with broader Eritrean and Italian historical narratives. The counter-mapping approach directly responds to these needs, allowing narrators to anchor memories in the urban environment and transform colonial odonymy into a shared archive of experience.

The second phase, termed *Restitu-Azione*, focused on public dissemination through the *Trekking UrbAfricani*, guided urban walks shaped by the counter-maps developed in the

previous phase. The treks, roughly three kilometres long with seven to eight principal stops—such as Piazza Annibaliano, Via Asmara, Via Senafè, Via Assab, Via Cheren, Villa Leopardi, and Piazza Gimma—integrate panels, maps, sound recordings, and narrative excerpts, enabling participants to encounter the city through alternative frames of meaning. In this way, the walks re-signify the urban landscape, making visible stories long overshadowed or erased within Rome’s public space.

The project intentionally addresses three diverse audiences. For the Eritrean community in Rome, the project offers a safe space to reflect on personal and collective histories. Students and young people are offered a chance to engage with Italy’s colonial past and its links to contemporary migration and citizenship debates, beyond the silences and omissions of school textbooks. Residents and the broader public are invited to confront the city’s colonial legacies, with reactions revealing the persistence of hegemonic narratives that continue to sanitize or marginalize Italy’s colonial past.

Participation in the narrative walks and in the treks is mobilized through a combination of grassroots and institutional channels, including social media outreach, word of mouth, collaborations with schools, and existing community networks built through long-standing relationships of trust with local associations and educators. Participants often express surprise at discovering the colonial origins of familiar street names. As one resident noted during a walk, “I’ve lived here for years and never wondered why these streets have Eritrean names.” In other cases, participants reproduce widespread narratives portraying Italian colonialism as relatively benign, remarking, for instance, that “Italian colonialism was different from other European empires.” Similar narratives sometimes also surface among Eritrean participants involved in the memory collection, where colonial experiences may be retrospectively softened through comparison with subsequent periods of political violence, producing statements such as “the Italians were not that bad, because something worse came after.” Through these processes, the project functions simultaneously as a pedagogical tool, a community-building practice, and a critical intervention in the city’s *memoryscape*, bridging personal and collective histories while fostering reflection, dialogue, and awareness.

Lessons from this work

The testimonies gathered throughout the project reveal a remarkable spectrum of emotional registers. Many contributors expressed nostalgia for the familiar sounds, foods and landscapes of their childhoods, while others recounted experiences marked by trauma, whether linked to war, displacement, identity formation or processes of racialisation in both Eritrea and Italy. The walks also generated moments of intergenerational discovery, as participants listened to and learned from one another’s stories, illuminating connections and divergences across different migratory and historical trajectories.

Several methodological insights emerged from this process. Memories were often activated in unexpected ways by sensory cues encountered during the walks: the name of a street, the smell emanating from a shop, a particular building, or even the resonance of a familiar language overheard by chance. Although certain stops gradually became fixed points along the treks, each walk remained unique, shaped by the emotional states and narrative choices of the participants. Over time, it became clear that collective memory does not simply arise from the aggregation of individual accounts but is formed through dialogue, as testimonies intertwine and become shared reflections rather than isolated recollections.

These insights directly informed the development of the public treks in the second phase, guiding the selection of themes highlighted along the routes. Among these were the history of the neighbourhood itself, the dynamics of colonial agriculture, the revolts of Eritrean farmers, examples of linguistic contamination such as the term “Calamadera,” as well as broader reflections on migration, *madamoto*⁷ and the segregated urbanisation of Asmara. Through these thematic threads, the project sought to illuminate the entanglements between personal memory, colonial history and contemporary urban space, offering participants new ways to read and inhabit the city.

Reflections on impact and positionality: why is this work important to us?

Our work challenges traditional academic boundaries by centring Eritrean voices not only as subjects but as producers and interpreters of history. This approach stems from the recognition that conventional archives have long erased or marginalised colonised populations, that diasporic communities hold crucial and embodied knowledge, and that any attempt at historical accountability in Italy must confront the deep silences that continue to structure its public memory.

Engaging with these narratives has profoundly reshaped my own positionality. As a researcher of Eritrean descent, I find myself reclaiming stories that belong to my family and my communities, stories that have often circulated privately but rarely entered public discourse. As someone working and living in Italy, I navigate a context where colonial amnesia is structurally embedded and reverberates through contemporary political debates and policy decisions. And as a facilitator, I carry the ethical responsibility of creating spaces where painful memories can surface without being sensationalised or exploited.

Italian colonialism has left a deep imprint in Eritrea, and its consequences continue to shape both societies today. Addressing these legacies through personal narratives is therefore more than an exercise in remembrance, it becomes a tool for social justice and a catalyst for public transformation. Only by sharing these stories, across generations, communities, and public spaces, can we begin to recognise historical injustices, repair harms, and imagine more equitable futures.

Bringing these stories to light transforms private memory into public knowledge, contributing to the creation of a counter-archive in which voices long suppressed—as for instance Eritrean and Italian—can finally encounter one another. When these narratives are placed side by side, across diasporic, national and intergenerational lines, they form the pieces of a history that has never been fully assembled. Only by acknowledging this composite picture can Italy begin to see itself with greater clarity and move toward a more mature and accountable understanding of its past.

Practicing Refusal, Building Futures: Intersectional Grassroots Organising Through Blackn[è]ss Fest (Ariam Tekle)

Resistance can't just be a reaction to a system that oppresses us, that doesn't recognize us, that wants us stuck. Resistance needs to be an alternative system. I don't want a seat at your table I've got my own table. And healing doesn't mean looking ahead for solutions we already have. Try to reconnect with your roots and recognize them for what they are not in their perfection, but in their humanity. Because if there's one thing the colonizer has still managed to convince us of, it's that we're not worthy of being defined by who we are. (Participant of *Blackn[è]ss Fest 2024*)

Working at the intersection of racial justice, cultural production, and community organising in Italy today means navigating a landscape marked by anti-Blackness, state violence, and the systematic marginalisation of racialised communities (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2024). Racial profiling remains a routine practice legitimised by law enforcement, while media narratives criminalise Black, Arab, and Muslim youth (Milazzo, Barretta and Faloppa 2025). Public institutions rarely reflect the realities of the country's diasporas, and cultural spaces continue to operate as elitist environments where access to resources, visibility, and influence is determined by proximity to whiteness and economic privilege.

Blackn[è]ss Fest was born precisely as a response to this landscape. Its roots lie in the work of *Blackcoffee_pdc*, a digital space and community that for years has created counter-narratives around Blackness in Italy by centring lived experience and refusing tokenisation. The festival also emerged through dialogues with *CambieRai* and the *Coordinamento Antirazzista Italiano*, two grassroots community networks that helped crystallise the political urgency of building autonomous spaces not simply by demanding inclusion but also by rewriting the terms of cultural and political participation altogether.

In the years leading up to the festival's creation, it became increasingly evident that many institutional and cultural entities were attempting to capitalise on the intellectual, artistic, and creative contributions of Afro-descendants. They offered “exclusive” platforms, visibility opportunities, and curated spaces that appeared progressive on the surface but were structurally extractive. Black and racialised people were invited to speak, perform, or “bring diversity” into spaces that remained controlled, shaped, and financially benefited by White

institutions. Participation came with conditions; often the expectation of gratitude, of moderation, of being inspirational without being political, or political only within the limits set by the institution.

Many of us began to recognise this dynamic for what it was: a colonial economy of legitimacy, where racialised creators gain access to visibility only through the approval of gatekeepers who hold institutional, cultural, and economic power. But this access is always precarious, revokable, and dependent on conformity. It reproduces the logic that Black and racialised people must be “chosen,” “validated,” or “included” rather than self-determined.

Blackness Fest was created as an explicit refusal of this dynamic. It emerged from a collective consciousness that: (i) it was necessary to build our own independent spaces, with our own rules, aesthetics, economic sensibilities and political agenda; (ii) that our goal was transformation and not partaking in exclusionary systems that relied on anti-Blackness, division and cultural extraction. And finally, (iii) that a different cultural economy is possible, one where Black and racialised knowledge is not volunteered, exploited, or appropriated, but valued, compensated, and stewarded within community-defined frameworks.

Blackness Fest situates itself within a long tradition of Black and diasporic organising that understands culture as a field of resistance, not as an entertainment industry, that sees refusal not as withdrawal but as construction, and that recognises that liberation cannot come from being accepted by the structures that oppress us. The festival reclaims space for racialised communities to create, learn, organise, and imagine collectively. It repositions anger, care, and resistance not as reactions to oppression, but as generative acts capable of producing new forms of knowledge, solidarity, and belonging.

Who we organise for: beyond the bubble

Although the festival speaks to a broad spectrum of racialised communities, its central focus is on those who are most affected by profiling, discrimination, and state violence, yet are least connected to formal activist spaces. Black and racialised youth, working-class diasporic communities, racialised artists and performers, and people navigating legal and economic precarity remain at the core of this work.

This focus is also rooted in my own positionality as the festival founder whose personal trajectory shaped by racialisation, economic precarity, and the experience of navigating elitist cultural and political environments made visible the structural barriers that regulate access to resources, language, and legitimacy.

Many of the people the festival engages with carry profound political experiences—encounters with the police, school racism, labour exploitation, and border violence—yet often lack access to the conceptual tools and collective spaces needed to situate these experiences within broader systemic structures. This is not a lack of political consciousness, but a

consequence of systematic exclusion (Freire 2017): those most affected by oppression are routinely denied access to the academic, activist, and institutional spaces where shared frameworks for understanding oppression are produced and circulated. The festival functions as a site where this gap is addressed not by importing theory from above, but by creating conditions in which people can name their own experiences, recognise them as structural rather than individual, and begin to develop a collective framework from within their own realities. For this reason, accessibility is a political commitment: the festival is free of charge, and everyone involved—including speakers, organisers, and performers—is fairly compensated, explicitly refusing the normalised exploitation of racialised labour within cultural production.

By integrating cultural practices such as dance, food, storytelling, and fashion alongside political conversations, *Blackn[è]ss Fest* meets people where they are. Youth may arrive for the dance contest and remain for discussions on racial profiling, community members drawn in by performances often find themselves engaging with reflections on refusal/resistance, state violence, and diasporic self-determination. Intellectual and theoretical frameworks remain present as shared tools, but they are never ends in themselves: they are continuously refined through practice and translated into concrete actions that are tested, adjusted, and deepened year after year.

Lessons learned: challenges, breakdowns, breakthroughs

Grassroots racial justice organising in Italy is both necessary and deeply challenging. Sustainability remains a major concern. Racialised organisers navigate the same structures they are dismantling, often while living their own experiences of discrimination. Ensuring fair compensation for all roles is both a political priority and a constant logistical struggle, given the limited funding opportunities for explicitly political, anti-racist initiatives.

Another challenge lies in reaching those who have been historically excluded from movement-building. Many racialised youth in Italy internalise the idea that activism is not for them, or that their experiences are individual rather than structural. Breaking this isolation requires long-term trust-building, culturally resonant programming, and a refusal to sanitise or depoliticise conversations to make them institutionally “acceptable.”

At the same time, the festival has generated significant breakthroughs. The decision to centre refusal—drawing inspiration from the *Practicing Refusal Collective*—has transformed our organising approach. Refusal becomes a tool of protection, imagination, and political clarity. It allows participants to articulate boundaries, to reject narratives imposed on their identities, and to envision new communal practices rooted in care and autonomy.

Youth engagement has expanded far beyond initial expectations. Collaborations with groups like *Blacksheep Community* have created new grounds for intergenerational dialogue

and political consciousness. Workshops exploring food as a political act, communal self-narration, and ancestral knowledge have opened doors for participants to connect their lived realities with broader histories of resistance.

A significant breakthrough came through direct material support. For the first time, thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign that exceeded the costs of the festival, *Blackn[è]ss Fest* was able to financially support people facing legal struggles resulting from police violence. This capacity to provide concrete solidarity, not just symbolic awareness, marks a critical evolution in our work.

Impact and positionality: why this work matters

The impact of *Blackn[è]ss Fest* is not only measured in attendance numbers or media visibility, but in the subtle, transformative shifts participants carry with them. Young people tell us they leave the festival being able to articulate experiences they previously carried in silence. Community members express feeling seen and understood in a country that rarely acknowledges their realities. Networks emerge between people facing legal vulnerability and organisers able to support them. Artists find audiences who value their work without tokenisation. Contributions shared during *Blackn[è]ss Fest 2022* made visible how cultural and artistic spaces such as the ballroom emerge from layered experiences of discrimination, particularly at the intersections of race, sexuality, and community exclusion, and function as sites of collective care, safety, and self-expression.

The festival operates through a dual logic. Each edition functions as a maieutic moment, a structured encounter that helps participants surface and articulate what they already know from lived experience but have rarely had the space or tools to name collectively. Each festival is in this sense necessarily ephemeral, a catalytic event that opens something rather than delivering a finished product. At the same time, these moments are embedded within a longer-term, bottom-up process of trust-building and political formation that unfolds between editions through ongoing collaborations, returning participants, and the slow accumulation of shared references, frameworks, and commitments. The festival does not choose between these two logics, rather, it holds them together, treating the temporary as generative of the durable, and recognising that transformation requires both the spark of encounter and the patience of sustained practice.

Conclusion

Taken together, the three contributions in this paper advance a practice-led understanding of decolonial praxis that foregrounds situated knowledge, collective care, and ethical accountability across academic, cultural, and community-based spaces. Rather than offering decoloniality as an abstract framework, the authors demonstrate how it is enacted through

everyday struggles over voice, resources, and legitimacy within contexts shaped by Italy's unresolved colonial legacies and contemporary racial hierarchies.

The work carried out by *Tezeta* illustrates the value of participatory and community-based approaches to addressing colonial histories, particularly through practices that reverse dominant epistemic lenses and centre the agency of those historically silenced. At the same time, the experience highlights the fragility of such initiatives in the absence of stable funding and institutional support, underscoring the necessity of networking and coalition-building when working with fragmented communities and marginalised histories. When research is rooted in personal and situated experiences, it gains added ethical and epistemic value, strengthening participation, trust, and impact.

Similarly, *Blackn[è]ss Fest* affirms independent cultural organising as a form of political resistance, where racialised communities reclaim anger, trauma, and lived experience as sources of knowledge and self-determination. By centring refusal, free access, and fair compensation, the festival actively disrupts extractive cultural economies that normalise unpaid racialised labour and conditional inclusion within elitist systems. Artistic, embodied, and communal practices emerge as radical tools of politicisation, particularly for younger and working-class racialised people whose experiences are routinely depoliticised or erased.

The academic contribution complements these interventions by interrogating the institutional conditions under which knowledge is produced and circulated. Across all three cases, the paper reveals a shared tension between the transformative potential of decolonial praxis and the structural precarity that sustains it. Without long-term, non-instrumental funding and meaningful redistribution of resources and authority, the labour of resistance continues to fall disproportionately on those already most affected by systemic violence.

Note

¹ The term referred to a colonial quasi-marital arrangement in which Italian male settlers, soldiers, or officials cohabited with local African women, often treating them as temporary wives ("madame"). These unions were typically informal and unequal: the women had limited legal protection, and relationships could be ended at the discretion of the Italian partner.

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Echi da ደግዳሊ/Dogali. Tessere memorie, intrecciare storie. Co-progettare per ri-significare e depotenziare un monumento coloniale

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ABSTRACT

This article explores *Echoes from ደግዳሊ/Dogali. Weaving Memories, Intertwining Stories*, a collaborative and decolonial intervention carried out in Rome in 2025 alongside the restoration of the colonial monument dedicated to the Battle of Dogali (1887). Grounded in critical heritage, memory studies, and theories of haunting, the paper conceptualizes Italian colonial monuments as material and symbolic survivals of colonial power that continue to shape public space, historical knowledge, and collective perception. The Dogali monument, originally designed to convert a colonial defeat into a narrative of sacrifice and national destiny, is examined as a narrative apparatus that sustains asymmetrical memory through silence, erasure, and aesthetic normalization. Rejecting both celebratory preservation and erasure, the project advances re-signification as a methodological and political practice. Through a process of co-design, the monument is approached as a site of dialogue and debate.

A site-specific podcast constitutes the core of the intervention, offering a plurality of situated perspectives by historians, artists, activists, and members of the Eritrean diaspora and Afro-descendant communities. These conversations articulate suppressed histories of anti-colonial resistance, diasporic presence, and intergenerational trauma, while addressing the ongoing consequences of colonial violence in contemporary Italy. The article further analyses artistic and spatial actions developed in parallel, including the critical reworking of archival images and the renaming of the surrounding garden in honour of Zerai Deres, an Eritrean figure of anti-colonial resistance. Together, these practices disrupt the monument's canonical visual regime and challenge processes of depoliticization embedded in institutional conservation. The Dogali case demonstrates how participatory, multivocal approaches can transform colonial monuments into spaces of critical engagement, fostering historical accountability, ethical remembrance, and forms of symbolic repair within European public memory.

Keywords

decolonization, monument, podcast, reparation, dialogue, Rome

1. Tracce coloniali: fantasmi nascosti in piena vista

L'haunting è un modo molto particolare di conoscere [...] Una condizione un po' matta, che continua a ripetere 'c'è qualcosa con noi nella stanza'.
(Gordon 2022, 33 e 47)

C'è qualcosa con noi nelle 'stanze' apparentemente ordinate dei nostri musei, nelle città con la loro odonomastica, i monumenti, le architetture, in quello che definiamo patrimonio, nelle norme e nelle procedure che lo tutelano, organizzano, mostrano, così come nelle parole che usiamo, nelle "predisposizioni affettive" (Connerton 1999, 108) che strutturano le nostre abitudini, norme culturali e conoscenze apprese: il fantasma di una colonialità incarnata praticamente in ogni ambito del nostro vivere quotidiano, che traduce e aggiorna nel contemporaneo assetti strutturali di potere/sapere storicamente prodotti (Kilomba 2021).

La sua qualità fantasmatica è legata principalmente a due effetti. Il primo è che non tutti riescono a "vederla." La riconosce immediatamente solo chi ne subisce le conseguenze sulla propria pelle, in termini di invisibilizzazione, discriminazione, razzismo, e chi l'ha ereditata suo malgrado dal lato del privilegio, ne ha acquisito consapevolezza e si assume la responsabilità di renderla intellegibile, contestabile, di disimpararla. Ma per tutte le altre persone, per la maggioranza delle persone, il fantasma coloniale è poco più di un riflesso ai margini del proprio campo visivo, il punto cieco dei loro occhi, che guardano senza riuscire a vedere.

Il secondo effetto di questa forma di "colonial hauntology" (Gregos e Meessen 2015, 10) è che, pur essendoci una mole ormai notevole di studi accademici sulla storia del colonialismo italiano e sulla cultura che ha prodotto, le sue eredità nel contemporaneo continuano ad essere raramente presenti nel discorso pubblico, assenti o poco analizzate nei curricula scolastici e nei programmi accademici, pressoché ignorate o largamente sottostimate dalle istituzioni culturali. Eppure sono lì, nascoste in piena vista.

La città di Roma ha più di duecento tracce coloniali, disseminate tra la fine dell'800 e il Fascismo per costruire quella sorta di specchio allucinatorio fra gli spazi metropolitani e quelli colonizzati, allo scopo di "domesticare" questi ultimi, radicandoli nell'immaginario dei cittadini e delle cittadine italiane in forma di odonimi, monumenti, elementi architettonici, caratterizzati da una visione celebrativa del colonialismo e esotizzante, inferiorizzante o invisibilizzante delle culture e delle persone colonizzate (Deplano e Pes 2025; Falocco 2022). Una di queste è il Monumento ai Caduti di Dogali. La storia è nota. Il 26 gennaio 1887 a Dogali l'esercito italiano fu sconfitto dalla resistenza anticoloniale. Siamo nella primissima fase del colonialismo italiano, in epoca liberale. La necessità di trasfigurare la sconfitta portò pochissimo tempo dopo, il 5 giugno 1887, all'erezione di un monumento dedicato ai circa 500 soldati italiani caduti durante la battaglia, nella piazza antistante la stazione ferroviaria, luogo fortemente simbolico, anch'esso a loro intitolato (tuttora si chiama Piazzale dei Cinquecento). La realtà della sconfitta venne manipolata in gesto eroico e anticipazione di una futura vittoria, attraverso la retorica

del monumento e la contemporanea narrazione *ad hoc* costruita tramite stampa, illustrazioni, arte (con dipinti come quello di Michele Cammarano, 1891-96, tuttora esposto presso la Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna) (Belmonte 2021). Si tratta quindi di un monumento rivolto non tanto al passato, quanto al presente e al futuro, e cioè all'esercizio di due competenze culturali fondamentali: l'immaginazione (la proiezione delle "magnifiche sorti progressive" della futura nazione coloniale) e la memorabilità (quello che in futuro dovrà essere ricordato e in che modo).

Nazionalismo e colonialismo si intrecciano nella retorica del monumento, con l'obelisco egizio come sineddoche dell'intera "Africa," simbolo della conquista romana dell'Egitto e della presunta continuità tra l'Impero Romano e la Roma coloniale moderna, anticipando una narrazione che sarebbe poi diventata fondamentale anche per l'imperialismo fascista. Nel 1937, dopo l'occupazione dell'Etiopia, l'esercito fascista sottrasse la statua del Leone di Giuda, simbolo del paese, e la collocò ai piedi del Monumento ai Caduti di Dogali, a vendicare le sconfitte coloniali subite alla fine del XIX secolo. Nel 1970 il Leone di Giuda fu restituito all'Etiopia con enorme ritardo e ricollocato nella sua posizione originaria davanti alla stazione ferroviaria di Addis Abeba, dove si trova ancora oggi.

Tutto questo non viene raccontato in alcun apparato descrittivo collaterale nella sede del monumento: per 138 anni il Monumento ai Caduti di Dogali ha continuato a raccontare la stessa "unica storia" (Adichie, TED Talk 2009), dallo stesso punto di vista: quello di una nazione che, come altre, si apprestava alla colonizzazione di interi territori e alla costruzione di forme di legittimazione istituzionale di quel crimine.

Nel 2025 la Soprintendenza Speciale di Roma del Ministero della Cultura si è occupata del restauro del monumento, con un progetto conservativo che non ha previsto neanche una targa storico-artistica o una didascalia.¹ Eppure non ci si può non chiedere (facendo eco a Ruth Ben-Ghiat che nel 2017 sulle pagine del *New Yorker* si pose una questione simile) perché in Italia ci siano ancora così tanti monumenti coloniali (non solo fascisti, come in questo caso) e quale significato possa avere oggi restaurare un monumento così problematico. La domanda richiede una riflessione critica profonda che coinvolga anche le persone storicamente invisibilizzate dalla sua retorica, *in primis* nominando tutte le vittime di quella battaglia e la resistenza anticoloniale che sconfisse l'esercito italiano, ma anche ascoltando le persone eritree-italiane, afro-discendenti, con background culturali complessi che oggi si trovano a dover affrontare quotidianamente le sopravvivenze materiali e simboliche della violenza coloniale nelle loro città, così come le persone euro-discendenti che riconoscono come quella stessa violenza riguardi tutte e tutti, e debba essere contrastata.

Il processo paradossale e apparentemente inarrestabile di estetizzazione e depoliticizzazione dell'architettura e dei monumenti coloniali e fascisti in Italia (Belmonte 2023), ha portato in molti casi a restauri acritici (come nel caso dell'ex Gil, sempre a Roma) il cui esito

è stato quello di normalizzare le rappresentazioni coloniali e fasciste (Grechi 2023). Di fronte alla consapevolezza storica del fatto che il colonialismo è stato un crimine, sembrerebbe scontata la necessità di intervenire, senza pacificare né autoassolvere, criticizzando la retorica coloniale ancora presente nei nostri spazi pubblici. I monumenti di questo passato sono certamente dei documenti storici, da preservare come testimonianza, ma se è vero quanto affermava Walter Benjamin in un celebre passaggio delle tesi *Sul concetto di storia* (1950), che non c'è documento di cultura che non sia anche documento di barbarie, forse è necessario riflettere sul senso di conservare e restaurare una tale narrazione di barbarie nello spazio pubblico oggi. Ci sono molteplici possibilità di intervento intorno a monumenti celebrativi di un crimine nei nostri spazi pubblici (Albanese & Ceci 2022): dal dislocamento (spostare certi monumenti da uno spazio fortemente simbolico ad altri luoghi dove sia possibile considerarli come documenti storici) alla ri-significazione (come nel caso del progetto *Echi da ጆግጋሊ/Dogali*) a processi di ri-mediazione critica (come per l'intervento sul fregio fascista dei palazzi finanziari a Bolzano²). In questi casi, i monumenti coloniali e/o fascisti sono considerati non solo come documenti o oggetti artistici da tutelare, ma come dispositivi culturali, serbatoi narrativi e oggetti simbolici, che in quanto tali possono diventare strumenti maieutici e stimolare il racconto di punti di vista e geografie affettive molteplici, porgendo un racconto storico multivocale. Al cuore di questi processi sta la consapevolezza di come la violenza coloniale sia un tratto strutturale della costruzione della nostra identità nazionale, e non un suo effetto collaterale, e di come continui a riprodursi nel presente (Chambers 2025). Il Monumento ai Caduti di Dogali, riportato al suo originale 'splendore', è il segno spettrale di quella violenza che continua a raccontarsi come legittima. Come scrive l'antropologa Stefania Consigliere, il dominio crea spettralità ovunque si presenti, e il fantasma è il segno della repressione di quella violenza, ma anche della sua continuazione: "appare nel punto dove rammemorazione e repressione si oppongono a testimoniare che i travolti da quella violenza siamo anche noi" (Consigliere 2020, 42).

Cosa vuol dire avere a che fare con questi fantasmi? Come possiamo ascoltarli, restituire loro corpo e voce, perché possano esprimere le loro ragioni? Dobbiamo provare a "stare nell'haunting," come suggerisce Avery Gordon, seguire quei fantasmi, non (semplicemente) commemorarli, ma lasciare che ci aiutino a immaginare e riportare alla luce quello che è stato invisibilizzato, "percorrere la direzione che indicano, nel presente, con lo sguardo rivolto allo stesso tempo indietro e avanti" (Gordon 2022, 88).

Per questo una semplice didascalia sotto il Monumento ai Caduti di Dogali non sarebbe stata comunque sufficiente. Era necessario innescare un processo più profondo e complesso, di co-progettazione e di ri-significazione, come quello che ha portato a *Echi da ጆግጋሊ/Dogali*, che ha coinvolto diverse soggettività e che si è assunto la responsabilità di una politica del

ricordo orientata al recupero di una forma di giustizia, di “un’etica della rappresentazione storica” (Hartman 2008).



Targa relativa al progetto *Echi da ደግዳለ/Dogali*, apposta davanti al Monumento ai caduti di Dogali a luglio 2025

2. Il podcast: conversazioni verso una riparazione

L’idea del podcast è legata al restauro dell’opera nel 2025: un intervento manutentivo che appare pensato unicamente in una logica conservativa, mirata a restituire l’aspetto originario del monumento senza mettere in discussione il modo in cui esso trasmette il passato coloniale italiano, con il rischio di celebrarlo acriticamente. Per evitare una problematica operazione di puro ripristino dell’obelisco e del suo significato, abbiamo pensato un intervento parallelo al restauro che potesse raccontarne la storia in prospettive diverse da quella ufficiale ottocentesca.

Proponiamo un racconto aperto e partecipato, coerente con la presenza stessa dell’opera in un contesto permeabile e plurale, quale lo spazio pubblico, attraversato da una collettività polifonica e mobile. Ad essa è rivolto il podcast, con il proposito di fornire sguardi attuali, narrazioni inclusive e riparatrici volte a problematizzare la retorica celebrativa dell’esercito coloniale. In fase di progettazione, tale obiettivo ha condotto alla selezione di voci diversificate: membra della diaspora eritrea, attiviste e ricercatori e ricercatrici di ambiti, generazioni e provenienze vari, accomunate da un’appartenenza o un interesse verso il

complesso frammento di storia restituito nel giardino adiacente alla stazione Termini. Proprio qui sono stati registrati i cinque episodi, per trasmetterne le suggestioni in forma diretta e spontanea. Nello stesso punto, alla base del monumento, è stata esposta una targa che presenta il progetto ed invita i passanti all'ascolto, scansionando un QR code. Una pratica che incoraggia il dialogo come forma necessaria di confronto, per giungere ad una comprensione collettiva (hooks 2023, 71-75). Il confronto è al centro delle conversazioni fra gli speakers degli episodi e con le comunità che attraversano lo spazio della città, invitate all'ascolto ma anche ad offrire attivamente il proprio contributo per la rilettura della storia coloniale, promossa dalla *Rete Yekatit 12-19 febbraio*.

La Rete è composta da rappresentanti della società civile attivi in diverse città d'Italia ed agisce con l'obiettivo di mettere in luce e decostruire la complessa, e spesso rimossa, eredità coloniale italiana. Il nome evoca un evento poco noto in Italia: il massacro di Addis Abeba avvenuto il 19 febbraio 1937, *Yekatit 12* nel calendario *ge'ez* ancora in uso in Etiopia. In questa data Rodolfo Graziani, proclamato da Mussolini Viceré d'Etiopia nel 1936, diede ordine ai coloni italiani di uccidere indistintamente ogni civile etiopie per circa tre giorni: un'azione di rappresaglia a seguito di un fallito attentato ai suoi danni organizzato dalla resistenza etiopica. La stima è di circa 19.000 vittime (Campbell 2017). L'atrocità commessa condusse nel 1948 all'accusa a Graziani di crimini contro l'Umanità da parte delle Nazioni Unite – condanna che di fatto non ebbe conseguenze e favorì la continuità strutturale del pensiero coloniale nell'Italia e nell'Europa del Dopoguerra (Pankhurst 1999).



Targa relativa al progetto *Echi da ጸግግል/Dogali*, apposta davanti al Monumento ai caduti di Dogali a luglio 2025

L'operazione di restauro e la parallela risignificazione del monumento sono state rese possibili grazie al contributo del PNRR – CAPUT MUNDI 143, in collaborazione con la Soprintendenza Speciale Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio di Roma del Ministero della Cultura, la Sovrintendenza capitolina e l'Assessorato alla Cultura del Comune, che hanno accettato la proposta della *Rete Yekatit 12-19 Febbraio* di partecipare attivamente al progetto attraverso due associazioni presenti sul territorio romano, Attitudes_spazio alle arti e Tezeta.

Attitudes_spazio alle arti³ è una realtà multidisciplinare, dalla struttura orizzontale e antigerarchica, con sede fisica a Bologna ma attiva in tutta Italia, composta da professionisti provenienti da campi diversi, con particolare attenzione al mondo delle arti. Propone progetti di ricerca-azione e pratiche curatoriali, pedagogiche e artistiche che creino connessioni tra la società civile e il mondo accademico con un approccio decoloniale, queer ed ecologista. Lo scopo è quello di combattere attivamente razzismo e discriminazioni nello spazio pubblico e in tutti i luoghi della cultura e del sapere come università e musei, contrastare visioni e approcci eurocentrici ancora piuttosto radicate nei nostri corpi e pensieri, prestare attenzione agli spazi del margine come luoghi creativi, di sperimentazione e di negoziazione, avendo cura di aprire spazi abitabili, dove possano emergere punti di vista marginalizzati o conflittuali, dove immaginare e sperimentare orizzonti di riparazione e giustizia.

L'associazione Tezeta⁴ nasce a Roma nel 2020, dalla necessità di raccontare il colonialismo italiano, ancora oggi poco conosciuto fuori dalle aule universitarie, con una modalità corale e inclusiva. La parola Tezeta è stata presa in prestito dal tigrino, una delle lingue parlate in Eritrea, e significa memoria, ricordo o nostalgia. Tra i progetti proposti dall'associazione, *Harnet Streets – Contro mappe dell'Eritrea*: si tratta di passeggiate aperte a tutti e tutte per le strade del quartiere Trieste, meglio noto come “quartiere africano” per la sua toponomastica celebrativa del colonialismo italiano. Il percorso è scandito dall'ascolto di testimonianze di esponenti della comunità eritrea romana, persone con età e storie molto differenti tra loro, voci escluse dalla ricostruzione ufficiale e accademica del colonialismo italiano.

Proprio per la natura collettiva che contraddistingue Tezeta e Attitudes, il podcast si è rivelato il mezzo ideale per poter offrire alla cittadinanza una rilettura alternativa, sfaccettata e senza gerarchie. Il titolo scelto è *Echi da ደግግሊ /Dogali. Tessere memorie, intrecciare storie*, con il toponimo che compare sia in italiano che in tigrino. Il sostantivo “echi” e i verbi “tessere” ed “intrecciare” suggeriscono una modalità partecipata, una mescolanza di suoni e voci diverse, in accordo con lo spirito di Attitudes e Tezeta. Il podcast si sviluppa in cinque capitoli della durata di 15/20 minuti ciascuno, che raccontano il monumento da diversi punti di vista, ognuno indipendente dagli altri, per consentire a chi ascolta di scegliere autonomamente quale aspetto della vicenda esplorare. L'episodio 0 – teaser funge da introduzione all'argomento: l'urbanista eritreo Gabriel Tzeggai offre un cordiale benvenuto con un caffè virtuale – bevanda

non casuale poiché spesso i chicchi di caffè tostati e macinati nelle nostre torrefazioni provengono dalle ex colonie africane – creando fin da subito un’atmosfera informale e distesa. Le voci sono state registrate di fronte all’obelisco durante i lavori di restauro; i rumori di sottofondo sono quelli della strada e della stazione Termini, davanti alla quale era originariamente collocato il monumento, volutamente lasciati udibili per restituire la dimensione caotica cittadina anche a chi ascolta il podcast da casa.



QR code per accedere al podcast *Echi da ፪፻፳፯/Dogali, 2025*

Il filo rosso che lega tutti gli episodi è il rumore di passi: l’azione del camminare in questo caso diventa atto politico, simboleggia la riappropriazione dello spazio pubblico attraversato con lentezza, unico modo per captare le simbologie di potere e diseguaglianza che segnano ancora le nostre città. Il primo episodio offre una panoramica storica della battaglia di Dogali e del significato che ha avuto nell’Italia appena unificata, illustrata dallo storico Emanuele Ertola ed arricchita da testimonianze di persone afrodiscendenti tra cui Luigi Manganelli, Mehret Tewelde e Kwanza Musi Dos Santos, le quali riflettono sulla sua rimozione dalla memoria collettiva del colonialismo. Queste ultime raccontano inoltre come l’obelisco negli anni abbia acquisito una funzione completamente diversa: da commemorazione dei caduti a luogo di ritrovo, condividendo alcuni ricordi personali legati alla zona tra Piazza della Repubblica e Piazza dei Cinquecento, oggi purtroppo invasa da automobili e autobus che hanno sottratto spazio prezioso alla socialità. L’approfondimento storico del primo capitolo viene integrato nel quarto episodio con il punto di vista dell’antropologa Giulia Grechi e delle storiche dell’arte Carmen Belmonte e Gioia Toscani De Col; in questa sezione si affronta il ruolo fondamentale dell’arte nella propaganda coloniale in Italia, con uno sguardo alla nuova lettura proposta dall’Etiopia, e ci si interroga sul significato e sulla problematicità di un restauro puramente conservativo di questo monumento.

Nel secondo episodio lo storico Uoldelul Chelati Dirar racconta la drammatica vicenda di Zerai Deres, figura simbolo della resistenza anticoloniale. La sua storia accende i riflettori sulle tante persone africane arrivate in Italia dalle ex colonie, la cui presenza, dimenticata o volutamente ignorata, smonta il mito dell’Italia bianca e ariana tanto caro alla retorica fascista. Queste persone spesso hanno vissuto in una zona d’ombra burocratica poiché mai

riconosciute dallo Stato italiano, dovendo convivere con un'eterna spaccatura identitaria e psicologica.

Il trauma irrisolto che il colonialismo ha lasciato nella vita privata e familiare di chi lo ha subito è il tema del terzo capitolo, presentato dalla psicologa afrodiscendente Patrizia De Bonis. Gli stati colonizzatori hanno annientato i paesi colonizzati non solo a livello militare ed economico, ma anche sul piano socioculturale, recidendo violentemente i legami familiari e comunitari e imponendo alla popolazione locale la loro lingua e cultura; questo aspetto, finora poco considerato, ha lasciato cicatrici profonde nella psiche delle persone colonizzate, private della propria identità culturale, delle radici con il passato, e allo stesso tempo impossibilitate a crearsi un futuro. La fine di questo capitolo si lega al quinto ed ultimo capitolo che propone una serie di soluzioni su cui lavorare insieme come società civile per recuperare la memoria del colonialismo in un modo più giusto ed equo, dando spazio a chi finora non lo ha avuto e considerando anche varie modalità di riparazione delle ingiustizie inferte, tra cui la restituzione delle opere d'arte e dei manufatti sottratti con violenza.

Fra queste ultime si ricorda la già citata scultura del Leone di Giuda, trafugata ad Addis Abeba dalle truppe fasciste e simbolicamente collocata ai piedi del Monumento ai caduti di Dogali nel 1937. Essa si lega ad un significativo episodio, al centro di un secondo atto di risignificazione da parte della *Rete Yekatit 12-19 febbraio*: l'intitolazione del giardino dove sorge il monumento a Zerai Deres (Hamasiem 1915 circa – Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto 1945), proposta dalla Rete alla commissione toponomastica del Comune di Roma, e approvata a settembre 2025.⁵

Nel giardino che porta il suo nome, nel 1938 Zerai si oppose alla derisione e al divieto da parte di due guardie fasciste di omaggiare la scultura del Leone di Giuda, emblema dell'antica dinastia salomonide e, per il giovane eritreo in Italia, forte simbolo di appartenenza. A seguito dell'episodio venne arrestato, processato ed infine internato in un manicomio in Sicilia, dove morì anni dopo. Le fonti sono contraddittorie su quanto accadde, poiché dagli italiani venne documentato nella stampa come un gesto folle – in linea con una strategia di patologizzazione del dissenso, ricorrente nei regimi dittatoriali – mentre per le comunità eritree ed etiopi fu un coraggioso atto di coscienza nazionale, segno tangibile che era possibile protestare contro l'ingiustizia dell'occupazione del colonialismo. Nella memoria del suo popolo Zerai Deres è ricordato come un martire della libertà e la sua opposizione è considerata come il primo atto di resistenza eritrea sul suolo europeo. Nella tradizione orale il racconto assume toni epici: Zerai non è più solo un individuo, diventa il simbolo di un intero popolo che, pur soggiogato, trova nella dignità personale un terreno di protesta. L'immagine del suo inchino davanti al Leone di Giuda è letta come gesto politico ed il rifiuto al divieto di onorare il simbolo del suo paese è un atto di fede e coraggio, un gesto di resistenza fisica contro la profanazione coloniale.

La scelta di dedicare alla sua memoria il giardino vuole configurarsi come segno concreto di una storia problematica e complessa, che torna visibile nello spazio ed invita la città a confrontarsi con il suo passato coloniale, coerente con i propositi del progetto *Echi da ደግዳሊ Dogali. Tessere memorie, intrecciare storie* di cui è parte.

La giornata simbolicamente scelta per inaugurare il giardino è stata il 19 febbraio 2026: ottantanovesimo anniversario del già citato massacro di Addis Abeba e data particolarmente sentita dalle comunità eritree ed etiopiche, così come dalla rete anticoloniale *Yekatit 12-19 febbraio*, che prende il suo nome proprio da questo evento, come già ricordato.

La *Rete Yekatit 12-19 febbraio* ha promosso per questa giornata, dopo il primo atto istituzionale di inaugurazione della targa dedicata a Zerai Deres gestito dal Comune di Roma, un momento di incontro nel giardino fra le istituzioni, le persone della Rete che si sono unite a questa giornata da varie città, le persone della diaspora e la cittadinanza. Un momento di mediazione, in cui abbiamo guardato insieme al passato con occhi più consapevoli ed aperto la via per l'immaginazione di un futuro diverso per la città di Roma e per l'Italia, in cui le istituzioni ed i movimenti, in un dialogo attivo e rispettoso anche del conflitto, possano attivare processi di cura verso le tante ferite coloniali che ancora lacerano gli spazi pubblici e una parte della cittadinanza.

La mattina le partecipanti alla cerimonia si sono radunate attorno alla targa. Hanno preso parola Giulia Silvia Ghia, Assessora alla Cultura, Scuola, Sport, Politiche Giovanili del Municipio Roma I; l'ambasciata Eritrea a Roma; Massimiliano Smeriglio, Assessore alla Cultura del Comune di Roma; e Yodit Estifanos Afewerki dell'associazione Tezeta. Insieme hanno svelato la targa che intitola il giardino a Zerai Deres. Un momento estremamente emozionante per tutte le persone presenti: forse per la prima volta la capitale ha scelto di raccontare la propria storia da una prospettiva diversa, superando il protagonismo delle narrazioni dell'Impero Romano o della gloria vaticana solitamente proposte a chi attraversa la città. In uno spazio di grande transito e valore simbolico, le istituzioni hanno raccolto le sollecitazioni della rete anticoloniale e si sono fatte carico della responsabilità di recuperare una dimensione di giustizia nella narrazione storica e contemporanea della città.



L'inaugurazione della targa che intitola il giardino intorno al Monumento ai caduti di Dogali a Zerai Deres, 19 febbraio 2026. Foto di *Rete Yekatit12-19 febbraio*

La giornata è proseguita con Giulia Grechi (Attitudes_spazio alle arti) e Federica Piron (associazione Tezeta) che hanno presentato il progetto di risignificazione del monumento,

aprendo lo spazio agli interventi di alcuni speakers del podcast, dell'artista Gea Casolaro (che ha realizzato l'immagine del progetto) e delle persone della *Rete Yekatit 12-19 febbraio* giunte da Bologna, Milano e Padova.

Nel pomeriggio sono state organizzate attività volte alla risignificazione attiva dello spazio. Durante l'azione *Noi tutte siamo i monumenti*, ispirata alla dinamica della *Human Library*,⁶ le persone con una storia personale o familiare legata al colonialismo italiano si sono prestate a raccontare a studenti appositamente invitatə, passanti e qualsiasi orecchio curioso il modo in cui la *Storia* coloniale ha tracciato echi e ferite nella propria *storia*. In seguito, Olivier Malcor (compagnia PartecipArte) ha animato piccole pratiche teatrali di gruppo con le persone presenti, ispirate al Teatro dell'Oppresso di Augusto Boal (Boal 2011).

Nel giardino Zerai Deres, durante questa giornata, i corpi delle persone presenti si sono fatti storie e pratiche di cura collettiva. Fra loro, anche gli stessi corpi che in Italia sono ancora quotidianamente al centro di processi razzisti di marginalizzazione e oppressione. A questa violenza la *Rete Yekatit 12-19 febbraio* si oppone con un lavoro capillare e costante, del quale l'iniziativa qui raccontata ci auspichiamo possa essere momento aurorale, affinché le istituzioni continuino a mettersi in ascolto e dialogare, promuovendo processi di consapevolezza, condivisione e trasformazione delle eredità materiali e immateriali del colonialismo italiano.

3. Ri-significare, de-canonizzare, ri-mediare

“Un altro patrimonio è possibile. Anzi, è inevitabile.”
(Guermandi 2021, 139)

Non possiamo cambiare il passato, ma possiamo cambiare la nostra cecità nei confronti del passato, ha dichiarato Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie nel suo discorso per l'inaugurazione del contestatissimo Humboldt Forum di Berlino nel 2021.⁷ Soprattutto se abbiamo a che fare con un passato criminale, che getta ancora le sue ombre sul presente, e che non è stato mai davvero riconosciuto in forma pubblica e istituzionale, ma solo nel mondo accademico e in gruppi collettivi, associazioni che da anni in tutta Italia cercano di sollecitare una riflessione sulle eredità coloniali, come la *Rete Yekatit 12-19 febbraio* e le persone che ne fanno parte. Questo è il senso con il quale abbiamo lavorato a *Echi da ደግዳላ/Dogali*: attraverso una metodologia partecipativa e di co-progettazione, abbiamo costruito con pazienza mediazioni e, laddove possibile, alleanze, tra persone della diaspora, gruppi di attivisti, mondo accademico e istituzioni, non solo per portare alla luce la storia del colonialismo italiano come crimine, ma perché questa conoscenza diventasse trasformativa, perché operasse un atto di cura nei confronti delle storie, dei punti di vista e delle memorie silenziate negli archivi pubblici della Storia.

Un elemento fondamentale nella progettazione ha riguardato la necessità di contrastare la retorica visiva del monumento e i processi di canonizzazione delle estetiche coloniali – “le forme estetiche del rispetto per l’ordine costituito” (Fanon 2007, 5). Nella fase di studio, ci siamo imbattute in due fotografie. Una risalente al 1937, in bianco e nero, conservata negli archivi del MITAG – Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra di Rovereto⁸, ritrae un gruppo di soldati fascisti nell’atto di farsi fotografare di fronte al Leone di Giuda. La seconda foto a colori, dell’archivio privato della famiglia Estifanos⁹, ritrae un gruppo di Eritrei che a metà anni Settanta si fotografano davanti al monumento in un viaggio a Roma. Entrambe sono scattate dalla medesima angolazione, al punto da essere quasi perfettamente sovrapponibili. Questo monumento (come la maggior parte dei monumenti classici, in quanto dispositivi culturali) sollecita una sorta di ergonomia dello sguardo: oltre ad esse fatto per essere ben visibile, innesca una specifica modalità di percezione, costruendo cioè insieme alla retorica del racconto anche una retorica dello sguardo, definendo al tempo stesso quello che c’è da sapere e come essere guardato (Gaglianò 2016). Questo processo, sostenuto e replicato nella riproduzione del discorso e delle estetiche coloniali attraverso la stampa, l’illustrazione e la produzione artistica, costruisce una sorta di canone estetico egemonico incistato non solo nel discorso visivo, ma assimilato profondamente anche da chi guarda, che letteralmente lo incorpora e lo normalizza, saturando così ogni potenziale immaginativo altro.

Abbiamo affidato le due fotografie a Gea Casolaro, artista che ha lavorato molto sulle stratificazioni di memorie e sguardi a partire da fotografie di archivi pubblici e privati, come nel suo lavoro *Visioni dell’Eur* realizzato fra il 2002 e il 2006 (Casolaro 2007), in cui scorci del quartiere Eur di Roma, resi iconici in alcuni film molto noti degli anni Sessanta, si sovrappongono a fotografie private degli stessi luoghi contenute in album di famiglia di chi in quello scenario ha vissuto e costruito i propri ricordi intimi in quello stesso decennio.



Gea Casolaro
Visioni dell’EUR_Bianca,
Fernando, Paolo e L’eclisse,
 2002-2006. Stampa lamda
 montata su alluminio cm
 100x100x2, collezione privata.
 Courtesy l’artista

La sovrapposizione è apparentemente letterale, i contorni di palazzi e marciapiedi sembrano collimare perfettamente, generando tuttavia, nel montaggio delle due foto operato dall'artista, un'immagine sincrona dello stesso luogo in tempi, modi, affetti del tutto differenti: un'immagine impossibile, se non nella temporalità ricorsiva della memoria o del sogno. Chi guarda rimane in bilico fra riconoscimento e estraneità: è davvero lo stesso luogo? Di chi è la memoria di questo luogo?



Gea Casolaro 2025
Echi da ሩግግ/Dogali
2025

Questa oscillazione fra risonanza e disturbo, fra la performance pubblica della Storia, dello spazio/tempo monumentale/eterno, e l'esperienza umana che lo de-sacralizza attraversandolo e ridefinendolo con il proprio corpo e con le proprie storie, è una tensione presente anche nell'immagine elaborata dall'artista a partire dalle due fotografie davanti al Monumento ai Caduti di Dogali. Qui diverse temporalità e identità conflaiono nel montaggio: quella (implicita) relativa all'Italia liberale della "grande proletaria," che ha pensato e progettato il corpo originale del monumento a fine Ottocento; quella fascista, dai toni freddi e in bianco e nero, con il Leone di Giuda come macabro trofeo, suggellato dalla rigidità dei corpi dei soldati, dei quali tuttavia restano visibili solo gli stivali; quella dai toni più caldi degli anni Settanta, con i corpi delle persone eritree in primo piano, che in qualche modo sembrano riappropriarsi di uno spazio e di una narrazione nella quale la loro voce e il loro corpo non erano previsti. L'immagine di Gea Casolaro restituisce la complessità e la stratificazione di memorie e posizionamenti intorno alla storia coloniale italiana (portate alla luce anche nelle storie raccontate nel podcast), con una particolare attenzione a quelle invisibilizzate per 138 anni dal

monumento e dunque rimaste inascoltate. L'immagine restituisce un posizionamento radicalmente anticoloniale, e sollecita chi guarda a una riflessione più profonda. Rovesciando il rapporto originale fra visibile e invisibile costruito e normalizzato dal monumento, restituisce centralità al punto di vista delle persone colonizzate e dei loro discendenti, mostrando i loro corpi in primo piano. Sotto di loro rimangono visibili i corpi fascisti solo per la punta degli stivali, perché le violenze di cui si sono macchiati non si possono e non si devono dimenticare. Allo stesso modo la scelta, nel montaggio finale, di lasciare visibile il Leone di Giuda della prima foto, sembra un richiamo a chi guarda perché noti la sua assenza oggi, e rifletta sul valore delle restituzioni dei patrimoni sottratti, sulla necessità di processi di riparazione e di riconoscimento dei crimini coloniali.

Guardando le tracce contenute nell'immagine siamo in grado di accedere a differenti storie, visioni, che ci interpellano molto direttamente. Noi, oggi, dal nostro punto di vista incarnato, come guardiamo questo monumento? Come ci posizioniamo di fronte alla sua retorica, alla storia che racconta e alle storie che tace? Riusciamo a riconoscerne la violenza?

L'aspirazione di *Echi da ደግዳለ/Dogali* è quella di innescare processi di coscientizzazione, che portino a disimparare “la scrittura imperialista della storia, che è stata uno dei meccanismi più potenti della sua riproduzione” (Verges 2025, 68), a decostruire le estetiche e i discorsi coloniali, a depotenziare i canoni attraverso i quali la cultura coloniale ha continuato a riprodursi, a riconoscere i meccanismi di potere che legano il passato al presente, e a rifiutare una rappresentazione del colonialismo unicamente come evento del passato, perché “il passato diventa passato in funzione del presente [...] Il passato, o più precisamente la *pastness*, è una posizione” (Trouillot, in Verges 2025, 80).

Forse è anche attraverso processi di ri-significazione delle tracce coloniali nei nostri spazi pubblici che possiamo fortificare quella tensione fra “immaginazione politica” e “immaginazione civile” (Azoulay 2018, 16), che può aiutarci a riconoscere la violenza con la quale quel passato continua a determinare il nostro presente, e a disconnettere il nostro sguardo dalle abitudini percettive costruite da uno spazio pubblico ancora saturo di mitologie ed estetiche coloniali.

Note

¹ Qui i dati tecnici del progetto: <https://openpnrr.it/progetti/58100/>.

² <https://www.bassorilievomonumentale-bolzano.com/>.

³ <https://www.attitudesbologna.com/>. L'associazione è attiva da più di quindici anni, fino al 2022 con il nome di Routes Agency.

⁴ <https://tezeta.it/>.

⁵ <https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/notizia/toponomastica-nuove-intitolazioni-roma-2025.page>.

⁶ La Human Library è stata ideata per creare un contesto positivo per conversazioni che possano sfidare stereotipi e pregiudizi attraverso il dialogo. È un luogo in cui persone reali vengono messe a disposizione dei lettori. Un luogo in cui domande difficili sono previste, apprezzate e ricevono risposta. La Human Library è un'idea danese del 2000 ed è ora disponibile in più di 80 paesi. <https://humanlibrary.org/>

⁷ Il discorso di Adichie per l'inaugurazione del contestatissimo Humboldt Forum di Berlino nel 2021 è disponibile qui: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMRv5xhMCo4>.

⁸ La foto (pubblicata in Belmonte 2021), conservata nel fondo Emilio De Pilati, unità 3.11.2, e datata 1937, riporta come didascalia: ROMA, IL LEONE DI GIUDA DA ADDIS ABEBA. Il Museo ha acconsentito con generosità all'utilizzo della fotografia per il nostro progetto, una sensibilità su questo tema confermata dalla mostra inaugurata il 24/05/2025, frutto di un lungo lavoro di rilettura critica dei propri patrimoni coloniali: *E noi che ne sappiamo? Riflessioni sul colonialismo italiano*.

⁹ Che ringraziamo per aver gentilmente acconsentito all'uso dell'immagine.

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The Right to Appear: Sexual Dissidence and Postcolonial Visibility in Revathi's *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*

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ABSTRACT

The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story (2010) is the autobiography of Indian writer and activist A. Revathi, which recounts her experiences as a hijra facing psychological trauma, physical violence, and social exclusion, while seeking to understand her sexual and personal identity. This contribution analyses Revathi's work through Jonathan Dollimore's notion of "sexual dissidence" (1991), challenging heteronormative sexuality, caste hierarchy and colonial legacies. It first outlines how sexual dissidence intertwines the individual and public spheres, highlights deviations from the social body, and actively reconfigures it by revealing the exclusions upon which it relies. Then, it examines how Revathi reinterprets the experience of shame as a potent form of resistance and emancipation, articulating an aesthetic of liberation that asserts the inherent political and resistant nature of precarious lives. These lives, as performative embodiments of marginality (Butler 2015), expose the very fabric of the social order through their visibility and vulnerability.

Keywords

Postcolonialism, hijra, non-fiction, sexual dissidence, India

Hijras and the persistence of colonialism in contemporary India

A. Revathi is a prominent transgender activist and writer based in Bangalore, India, closely associated with Sangama, an NGO advocating for LGBTQI and sexual minority rights. She has played a key role in amplifying transgender voices, particularly within the hijra/aravani communities. Her debut book, *Unarvum Uruvamum*, was initially written in Tamil in 2004 and later translated into English as *Our Lives Our Words: Telling Aravani Lifestories* (2011). Here, Revathi chronicles the lives of many transgender people by paying special attention to the *aravanis*, male-to-female transgender individuals, especially in Tamil Nadu, recounting their stories of abuse and marginalisation in order to "refuse silence" (Revathi 2011, viii).¹

Similarly, her autobiography, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010), was originally written in Tamil and later translated into English and published by Penguin. Like *aravani*, the word *hijra* vaguely designates male-to-female transgenders, especially in North and Central India. As Revathi explains in an interview, the decision to publish the work in English was

influenced by her family's inability to read English (Prabu 2014). However, following the book's success, Revathi decided to republish her autobiography in Tamil, seeking to share the primary themes with local audiences, so that "larger changes can be achieved" (Revathi 2010, v).

The Truth About Me is the first account in English from a hijra perspective, which came to inspire other transgender writers in a country where advancements in law coexist with stigma, marginalisation and abuse. On January 4, 2015, for instance, Madhu Kinnar made history as the first transgender person elected mayor in a small town in the central state of Chhattisgarh. Kinnar's election followed a landmark decision by India's Supreme Court, which had recognised transgender individuals as legally gender-neutral or part of a third gender just nine months earlier. Four years after Kinnar's election, on September 6, 2019, the Supreme Court decriminalised homosexuality by abolishing Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which was modelled on the Buggery Act (1533) and had historically been used to target marginalised groups, including hijras.² Furthermore, ensuring rights for hijras has become a prominent part of political discourse. In the 2024 general elections, the BJP proposed health insurance, while the Congress Party committed to recognising same-sex unions.

However, despite these changes, hijras continue to experience multiple forms of discrimination. Legal frameworks frequently homogenise transgender identities, overlooking the differences in terms of class and cultural backgrounds that shape hijras' realities. Many hijras depend on alternative professions, such as performing blessings or engaging in sex work, which do not align with the binary legal frameworks established by recent transgender legislation. Consequently, these legal measures often fail to recognise hijras' distinct social status or to address their specific experiences of exclusion. As Anne Hardgrove observes, by "aligning transgender rights with norms that implicitly demand assimilation into middle-class respectability" (2024, 253), the law risks reinforcing hijras' marginalisation rather than alleviating it.

The multifaceted world of the hijras is also illustrated by its broad meaning. According to Jennifer Ung Loh, the word "hijra" includes individuals "who embody a wide variety of anatomical forms and perform a diverse number of gender and sexual practices and orientations" (2014, 23). Before British colonisation, hijras were afforded considerable respect in India for their role as "performers on auspicious occasions" (Nanda 1999, xix). Even today, hijras offer blessings to newborn male children by dancing and singing. Additionally, they are often invited to weddings to bless the couple as a symbol of fertility. As Serena Nanda argues in *Neither Man Nor Woman*, these cultural expressions may differ based on local customs, but, generally, the hijras "must be emasculated or intersexed, and the hijra dancers must be dressed in women's clothing" (1999, 5).

The importance of hijras is also tied to religious beliefs and mythological narratives. From a religious perspective, their physical ambiguity positions them as both physical and spiritual

intermediaries between the divine and humanity. In this respect, hijras are often associated with Bahuchara Mata, a Hindu goddess revered for her fertility.³ Moreover, their cultural relevance is also reflected in literary works, particularly in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, where androgynous beings play crucial roles.⁴ In the *Ramayana*, when the legendary hero Rama is exiled, he prohibits men and women from accompanying him into the forest. Upon his return, he discovers that the hijras, being neither men nor women, had remained where he had delivered his address, demonstrating their unwavering devotion to their prince. As a result, Rama bestowed upon the hijras the power to confer blessings on childbirths and marriages. Similarly, the *Mahabharata* features recurrent transgender characters. The character of Shikhandi, for instance, undergoes a transition from woman to transgender that enhances the hero's strength and establishes him as a valiant warrior. In more recent times, a notable representation of hijras can be found in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), where Anjum draws inspiration from the epic tradition of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In Roy's latest novel, Anjum becomes the leader of a community that exists outside legal boundaries, creating "an alternative magic world dwelling in a surreal location" (Monaco 2018, 61). By combining the myth of Mother India (*Bharat Mata*), with its rich set of stories, traditions and legends, and fantasy tones based on Hindu epics, the novel evokes the genre of Bharati Fantasy "through retellings, interpretation and inspired versions of the ideas and characters present in the 'original' material" (Varughese 2017, 32).

These observations show how Revathi's autobiography is a pioneering work in a country grappling with contradictions. Moreover, in terms of generic conventions, while literary representations portray the symbolic significance of hijras, memoirs and autobiographies provide firsthand accounts of transgender experiences, encompassing themes of self-affirmation, discrimination, and identity challenges. As Jessica Hinchy puts it, autobiographies "not only illuminate broader social structures, power relations and sociocultural meanings, they can also force a rethinking of these broader patterns" (2019, 139). By narrating their life stories, authors disclose how broader structures, such as class, race, gender, colonial legacies, and systemic oppression, have influenced their lives. Thus, autobiographical accounts delineate the interplay between the personal and the political, illustrating how individual experiences intersect with broader systems of power, while affirming the right to visibility. For example, *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* (2007), written by transgender actress Living Smile Vidya, portrays the protagonist's daily challenges amid her physical and mental transformations. In other cases, recollections of sexual discrimination are closely related to diasporic issues. This is the case of *Hijra* (2024), the autobiography by Italo-Pakistani activist Saif ur Rehman Raja. Written in Italian, the autobiography explores Rehman Raja's experiences of dual marginalisation as a South Asian migrant in Italy and as a homosexual, as he navigates his search for identity across socio-cultural and sexual boundaries. On the whole, these

autobiographical texts bring the relationship between the personal and the political to the fore, illustrating how individual narratives play a role in wider struggles for recognition and visibility.

Starting from these premises, in this article, I argue that *The Truth About Me* challenges the right to appear in a world marked by a sense of ambivalence rooted in colonial legacies. Revathi's work operates "at the juncture of autobiographic, ethnographic, and testimonial modes of truth telling" (Sequeira 2022, 452), thus articulating practices of civil resistance beyond the chronicle of marginalisation and exclusion. Drawing on Jonathan Dollimore's concept of "sexual dissidence" (1991), I explore how the memoir interrogates heteronormative sexuality, caste hierarchies, and colonial legacies. First, I argue that sexual dissidence links the individual and public spheres by foregrounding deviations from the normative social body and exposing the exclusions on which it depends. I then consider how Revathi reclaims shame as a site of resistance and emancipation. By narrating both personal grief and the collective experiences of abuse endured by hijras, *The Truth About Me* asserts the political force of precarious lives, whose embodied visibility (Butler 2015) reveals the vulnerabilities of the social order itself.

Sexual dissidence: a postcolonial perspective

Researchers in queer theory and postcolonial studies often investigate how the socio-cultural legacies of empires influence discussions about sexuality. As already discussed, the abolition of Section 377 in the Indian Penal Code illustrates that laws against homosexuality are part of the British colonial legacy. In *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality* (2020), Rahul Rao argues that British society has historically displayed significant anxiety regarding the colonial ambitions of local males in relation to Western masculinity. Rao notes that colonial discourse "frequently imagined the colonies as opening up non-normative sexual possibilities for desiring white male subjects" (Rao 2020, 8). Furthermore, the criminalisation of sodomy contributed to a wider "biopolitical apparatus of colonial regulation" (8), motivated by concerns such as prostitution, concubinage, the containment of venereal diseases, proper child-rearing and household management, as well as population enhancement strategies, including eugenics and selective sterilisation.⁵ In this respect, sexuality became a major concern in postcolonial studies due to its connections with "categories of gender, race and class, through which it is constituted," shaping "identities and meanings [that] are subject to material and ideological change" (Meghani and Saeed 2019, 293).

In his seminal book, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (1991), British philosopher Jonathan Dollimore traces the history of sexual dissidence and perversion. Perversion literally means to change direction, thus pointing to a deviation from the norm. In Dollimore's own words, perversion "takes us to the heart of a fierce dialectic between

domination and deviation, law and desire, transgression and conformity (1991, 103). Dissidence includes a wide range of deviations from the norm, including homosexuality. Based on Freud's idea that homosexuality is "the most important perversion of all" (174) for the concerns it raises in various societies, Dollimore employs the concept of sexual dissidence as both a political and critical instrument that destabilises unified and coherent identities. Sexual dissidence functions as a challenge to normative structures by revealing the contingent nature of what is considered natural or acceptable. By disrupting established assumptions regarding sexuality, it concurrently questions entrenched hierarchies of gender, race, and class, thus complicating and reconfiguring the conventional sexual order.

As previously noted, the roots of the hijra identity are linked to Hindu mythology. During the British colonial era, the community emerged as a powerful force, contesting conventional understandings of sexual orientations, while also disrupting the foundational concepts of gender expression and social class affiliation. Before the first half of the 19th century, hijras were tolerated; however, following the Indian Mutiny of 1857, when the British Crown took direct control of the Indian subcontinent and dismantled the East India Company, hijras began to face widespread criminalisation. Their presence became a social threat to Indian society itself. In the aftermath of the Partition, the Criminal Tribes Act (1917) established the classification of eunuchs to include a diverse spectrum of non-binary individuals, who were subsequently registered by local authorities. As Hinchy remarks in *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India* (2019), Western conceptualisations of the hijra menace were framed "through a language of pollution and contagion—as a sort of disease" (Hinchy 2019, 46). Child abduction, forced castrations, prostitution and a broader sense of filth and diseases permeated the description of hijras. In this respect, local newspapers portrayed hijras as beggars and unproductive members of society, often depicting them as vagrants who lingered near residences and in marketplaces. Consequently, fears of contagion and moral disorder became synonymous with anxieties surrounding sexual practices. Hijras were accused of showing their bodies in public spaces and corrupting young men. For all these reasons, anti-hijra campaigns developed in the country and a project of elimination was set forth. Castration was prohibited, and the inheritance of property within these communities was disallowed, thereby depriving hijras from lower socioeconomic backgrounds of viable means of survival.

Without a traditional family unit, hijras usually reside in communities, leading to the creation of alternative kinship models that resist categorisation within a non-Indian framework of representation. Their lived experiences illustrate what Dollimore describes as "the complex dialectic between centres and margins, dominant and subordinate cultures, conformity and deviance" (1991, 27). As Revathi herself underlines, sexual labels are constructs "from the West, written by people sitting in air-conditioned rooms and typing on computers" (Prabu 2014). Read through this lens, *The Truth About Me* can be read as an archive of colonial

resistance to forms of oppression and categorisation that exposes how sexuality is regulated not only at the level of individual behaviour but also as a mechanism for organising collective life. Revathi's autobiography lends itself to a postcolonial realist reading, which combines the individual and the public sphere. As Eli Park Sorensen asserts in *Postcolonial Realism and the Concept of the Political*, postcolonial literatures uncover the collective imagination, or “social body,” including those who have been “excluded, silenced, forgotten, or misrepresented” (2021, 35). This interface between the individual and the social body—understood as the ensemble of social relations, institutions, norms, and power structures through which a society acknowledges, governs, and categorises its members—underscores the political role of literary realism and prompts a reconsideration of the social body itself. In this light, Revathi's autobiography foregrounds the interplay between the private and the public, expanding our understanding of hijra identities within the postcolonial social body.

A woman “trapped in a man's body”

In the preface to *The Truth About Me*, Revathi asks herself in what respect marginalised individuals have access to rights “in the name of sex, sexuality, caste and religion” (2010, v). To this end, Revathi's autobiography contextualises her life within wider systems of exclusion that govern notions of belonging and citizenship in India. By introducing the reader to “the lives of hijras, their distinct culture, and their dreams and desires” (v), Revathi's memoir intertwines personal experiences with a broader narrative of what it means to be a hijra in contemporary India.

The autobiography is narrated in the first person and divided into twenty-nine chapters. Although specific historical dates are absent, the narrative suggests that the events commenced in the early 1980s during the narrator's childhood. Né Doraisamy, the youngest son in a lower-middle-class family of four children from a village in Namakkal taluk (Tamil Nadu, south-east India), Revathi recounts her preference for playing with girls instead of boys and her inclination to wear her mother's clothing, feeling like a “woman trapped in a man's body” (15). As a child, Doraisamy used to work with his father and eldest brothers, who owned two lorries for milk distribution, yet already displayed interests that diverged from typical masculine behaviour, such as an appreciation for girls' jewellery and hairstyles. During his adolescence, Doraisamy meets a group of hijra and, subsequently, the guru assigns him the name Revathi, based on perceived physical similarities to the Indian actress Revathi. After fleeing from her family, Revathi integrates into the hijra community in Delhi, where she is adopted as a *chela*, or elected daughter, by her guru, and becomes acquainted with the community's customs. She learns the typical salutation, *paampaduthi*, which involves bending and touching the feet of the other hijras. She takes part in the *jamaat*, meetings where the elders of the community make

important decisions. She is taught how to pray to Pothiraja Mata, another guise of Bahuchara Mata, by breaking a coconut and lighting incense sticks. Furthermore, she begins begging in the streets, becomes aware of the cultural meaning of hijras or *pottais*, as they are called in Tamil. In one conversation, she reflects on the historical transformation of hijra roles:

we hijras are meant to do this and not other things. We ask money from shops, collect badaai... In the old days, hijras waited upon queens and princesses. But today there are no queens; the rule of kings and queens has given way to the rule of ministers. But this government has not given us other work to do. In Indira Gandhi's time—God bless her memory—they built houses for hijras and other poor people. (43)

This passage outlines the various changes that have occurred over time. Initially, hijras provided blessings, participated in ceremonies, and took part in social rituals. Subsequently, with the decline of monarchies and the rise of modern governments, these traditional roles have diminished, indicating a systemic failure to integrate hijras into societies. The practices of receiving *badaai* (ceremonial gifts, typically given during weddings or births) and soliciting money in public spaces are viewed not solely as cultural traditions but as necessities stemming from the lack of viable alternatives. Additionally, the references to Indira Gandhi's governments (1966–1977; 1980–1984) evoke a sense of nostalgia for a time when governmental initiatives aimed to provide housing and dignity to marginalised groups, including hijras. These allusions subtly critique the current administration for overlooking marginalised communities.

These observations illustrate the political dimension of *The Truth About Me* as Revathi's own self-quest is intertwined with socio-political transformations. In a country marked by contradictions, significant socio-economic disparities and severe forms of discrimination, the hijra communities act as a counterbalance to these inequalities. As Revathi gradually learns, there are differences even within hijra communities across Indian states. However, on the whole, the communities serve as places where differences of various sorts are erased:

Marginalized by mainstream society, denied a legal existence and dispossessed of their rights, hijras turn to their community and its culture for comfort and for nurture. In the hijra community there is no high or low—hijras do not observe caste or religious differences and there are hijras from both poor and rich homes. (62)

Revathi's realistic style combines her personal journey and the rituals that characterise hijra communities. Her narrative highlights the historical social exclusion, legal invisibility, and discrimination faced by hijras, which contributed to their limited access to essential rights, including housing, employment, and healthcare. The primary means of sustenance for many hijras often involves collecting money from businesses, passengers on trains, and individuals at traffic signals, or engaging in sex work. In light of systemic exclusion, hijras seek safety, identity, and affirmation within their own communities, which act as a chosen family and provide social support, including emotional, cultural, and sometimes economic stability. Interestingly,

the hijra community operates beyond the deeply rooted social stratifications of caste and religion that still permeate India.

Hijras encounter not only social discrimination but also experience physical and psychological abuse from their families. This is well illustrated in Revathi's autobiography. Whenever she has problems with the various communities she enters, she often returns to her home village seeking solidarity and understanding, only to be met with hostility. During her initial return to her parents, her family compels her to shave and wear male clothing. Following her *nirvanam* (sex change operation), she is instructed to stay at home, and when she begins to befriend a young man, she faces public harassment from her brothers. These acts are motivated by concerns over *izzat*, a concept denoting honour and social reputation that is deeply embedded in South Asian patriarchal cultures. Closely tied to gender norms, *izzat* is often mobilised to discipline non-normative bodies and desires, leading Revathi to meditate upon the emotional impact of her family's reactions:

If society scorns us, then we turn to our families, if we have a family. But if family scorns us, who do we turn to? Is this why people like me do not stay in touch with their families? Could not God have created me as a man or a woman? Why did He make me this way? Why is He savouring this spectacle that He created? In a rage, hitting my head against the wall, I began to cry. (186)

In postcolonial cultures, shame is frequently utilised to enforce conformity, particularly in relation to caste, gender, religion, and family. Shame is also a tool of discipline for women, especially in matters about sexuality, dress, behaviour, or independence, and a mechanism to silence dissent or non-normative expressions, including LGBTQ+ identities. From a literary perspective, shame can also have "a powerful reconstructive or repairing effect" (Attwell et al. 2019, 26). In this respect, postcolonial literature, and especially autobiographic accounts, can offer an opportunity for "deep reflection, re-orientation, and change" (21). As we shall see in the following section, Revathi turns shame into a catalyst for self-definition, serving as a response to marginalisation and cultural dislocation that facilitates a reaffirmation of the hijra identity within the postcolonial social body.

From sexual dissidence to liberation

If feelings of shame and *izzat* pervade Revathi's initial journey, a turning point in her story occurs when she undergoes surgery and becomes a sex worker. Once she moves to Mumbai, she enters a new community. In the Indian megalopolis, Revathi discovers her increasing desire for a sexual relationship with a man, which ultimately leads her to engage with *danda* (sex trade). First, she enters a *danda kantra* (houses devoted to sex workers) located near one of Mumbai's train stations. Then, she moves to Bangalore, where she joins a *hamam* (bath house) and continues doing sex work in the streets, experiencing theft by rowdies and harassment by policemen.

By narrating her engagement with sex work in a country that criminalises non-normative sexuality, Revathi shows the conditions under which some forms of precarious agency must be negotiated. Her account exposes a structural ambiguity: sex labour is publicly disavowed, with policemen beating hijras or extorting bribes to avoid arrest. At the same time, sex services are sought after, even by the same policemen who torture hijras once they arrest them. In this context, the body becomes a physical site of contestation: while hijras are socially recognised for their blessings, which bring forth fertility and prosperity, they are prey to surveillance, criminalisation and abuse. Violence and humiliation serve as illegal tools through which to re-establish the hierarchy that the sexual encounter temporarily blurs. And yet, sex work remains the main form of income for hijras, who are systematically excluded from other employments that grant visibility within the social body of the nation, lacking what Revathi calls “a life of dignity” (2010, 219). This implies that certain bodies, like the hijras’, are denied access to visibility and are instead framed as a threat to the stability of the nation, while simultaneously exploited. The broader political implications of this ambiguity suggest the existence of a shadow economy that nourishes the visible social body, allowing authorities to maintain a sense of moral superiority without dismantling exploitation. In an extensive monologue that closes Chapter 20, Revathi reflects on the socio-political factors that shape her life and the lives of hijras in contemporary India:

This world that exploits my youth and beauty does not know how to bring out the talent there is in me. If I have to live in this world, I’ve got to adjust to its demands. So I live as I do. The situation is such that I can only make a living thus. As far as I am concerned, it is society and law—indifferent as they are to me—that have brought me to where I am today, where many of us are today. It is not so much that we are abducted into sex work, rather we are the reasons for the very existence of sex work and that is no exaggeration. Society and law not only think we are doing wrong, but are violent towards us. For the sake of money, I have put aside my honour and have taken to the roads. I’m called a hooker. What should the police be called then, they who use us and snatch money from us? (Revathi 2010, 220–221)

These words encapsulate the political meaning of Revathi’s personal journey, illustrating the economic objectification of her body, since her occupation as a sex worker represents a form of negotiation rather than genuine consent. This decision is influenced not by personal desire but by socio-economic coercion. Additionally, Revathi challenges the prevailing narrative that positions hijras and trans women as separate from the sex trade. She contends that systemic marginalisation creates the conditions that perpetuate this phenomenon. Her concluding question discloses the ethical inconsistency inherent in the national order: while the state criminalises sex work under the guise of morality, it concurrently exploits the labour of the very individuals it seeks to condemn. Thus, the law reinforces the boundaries of the social body by rendering certain lives invisible.

And yet, Revathi’s words also highlight the contradictions within the hijra community. Although hijras operate beyond dominant gender binaries, their communities present a

hierarchical organisation based on seniority and norms of respectability that mirror the heteronormative and patriarchal models imposed by the state. This mimicry perpetuates internal divisions, simultaneously reinforcing the exclusions that hijras face externally. This imitative mechanism is also evident in Revathi's life as she seeks acceptance in Indian society, with her family and in her home village, by presenting herself as a respectable middle-class woman (Hinchy 2019, Hardgrove 2024). Her unfamiliarity with other labels, such as "gay" and "homosexuality" (Revathi 2010, 239), which she dismisses since they do not align with her cultural perspective, underscores a view based on heteronormative boundaries that rejects non-hijra queer possibilities. Revathi encounters these words when she accidentally finds herself in Sangama, an HIV/AIDS-related NGO in Bangalore. This new role enables her to conduct interviews, deliver lessons at educational institutions, and publish articles in newspapers. In essence, she is engaged in a collaborative initiative aimed at integrating various forms of precarious existence, including "male and female homosexuals, dalit women, child workers; and those working against dowry-related violence and communal violence" (Revathi 2010, 244), as well as "Hindu-Muslim differences and conflicts" (242).

This collaborative work that brings together precarious lives across sexual, social and religious spheres situates hijra struggles within wider forms of oppression, evoking what Judith Butler calls "the right to appear as a coalitional framework" (Butler 2015, 27). In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler expands Hannah Arendt's notion of the "right to appear" (50) within the public sphere. While Arendt posits that political life commences when individuals convene and become visible to each other, Butler lays bare the unequal distribution of visibility, particularly for individuals whose identities do not conform to conventional gender, racial, or sexual classifications. Certain individuals, such as transgender people, are rendered more precarious due to their invisibility, lack of recognition as grievable, or unintelligibility within prevailing social structures. In this respect, Butler adds, public demonstrations and other forms of public engagement embody "a minor performative disruption enacted by a kind of motion that is at once a movement in that double sense, bodily and political" (138–139).

Revathi's activism assumes a performative significance. The gathering of marginalised groups constitutes a claim to recognition. Moreover, the presence of hijras in public spaces through sex work challenges the notion that such spaces are exclusively reserved for the state or for individuals who conform to normative gender identities. These embodied presences disrupt the regulation of visibility, revealing that public space is also organised by exclusion.

Revathi's collaboration with Sangama fosters new dimensions of collective awareness. As Butler claims, bodies assembled in public serve as "a resource" and "links of solidarity" (153) with political implications.⁶ This political orientation also reminds us that some texts gesture towards "collective questions or questions about the collective" (Sorensen 2021, 17), seeking to disclose "the complex relations between individual and collective levels within the

social body, the performative-representative ‘we’—precisely because this social body is *not* (as yet) immersed within the frames of a consolidated normative reality” (17). Revathi’s autobiography illustrates this interplay. Her account does not frame her struggle solely as an individual experience; instead, it illuminates the instability inherent in what Sorensen calls the collective “we.” By rendering her life visible through her involvement in activism, community initiatives, and the precarious visibility of sexual dissidence, she uncovers a social structure that both marginalises her and relies on her work. In this process, the narrative signals the possibility of a redefined collective, where the notion of belonging is not static but instead subject to change.

Conclusion

In *The Truth About Me*, Revathi offers more than a personal narrative. She articulates a deeply political form of life writing that challenges the systems of gender, caste, and social exclusion, which seek to render hijra lives invisible. Her autobiography becomes an act of resistance in a world that attempts to silence and erase hijra subjectivities. This insistence on being seen, heard, and recognised is a direct assertion of what Butler calls the right to appear, a demand for visibility not only in public space, but within the sphere of human legibility and political belonging.

Moreover, Revathi’s self-narration also reveals how sexual dissidence is enacted not only through identity but through physical exposure. Her rejection of imposed masculinity by law and family customs, her embrace of her hijra identity, and her demand for dignity all operate as forms of disruption of gender binaries and heteronormative state structures. As she recalls, “[e]ach time I was called by my male name, it was like being slapped” (Revathi 2010, 32). This demonstrates that sexual dissidence operates both as a form of resistance and as a critique of societal norms, thereby challenging established understandings of the social body that depend on fixed classifications of gender, sexuality, and respectability. Revathi’s narrative serves not only as a call for inclusion but also as a critique of a postcolonial nation-state that has inadequately addressed the realities of gender nonconforming individuals within its conventional frameworks of modernity and development. The colonial legacy of criminalising hijras under laws like Section 377 finds continuity in modern systems of caste, class, and gender exclusion that Revathi’s autobiography directly interrogates.

To conclude, *The Truth About Me* invites readers to examine the limitations of recognition within the postcolonial nation-state, asserting that the experiences of hijras are not marginal but integral to the considerations of modernity. Revathi converts her autobiographical narrative into a significant political statement, revealing how systems of caste, gender, and legality intersect to enforce the boundaries of humanity. By recounting her life in her own terms, she not only reclaims agency over a body and an identity historically subjected to regulation but

also disrupts the normative frameworks that dictate which lives are considered grievable, visible, and deserving of belonging. Consequently, her work calls for a reimagining of social and political communities that recognises sexual dissidence as a crucial site for critique, resistance, and transformative potential.

Notes

¹ Aravanis have a connection to both Mohini and Prince Aravan. Aravan, a warrior and a secondary character in the *Mahabharata*, requested to be married to Lord Krishna before his mortal sacrifice. Krishna, in his female incarnation as Mohini, granted this request, marrying Aravan, who died the following day. In recognition of this sacrifice, transgender women commemorate this event, and the Koovagam festival, celebrated annually in Tamil Nadu, honours this legend.

² Passed during Henry VIII's government, the Buggery Act was the first law to criminalise homosexuality. The first man to be executed was Walter Hungerford, an attendant in Henry VIII's household, who was beheaded for the accusation of sodomy. In India, the law was introduced in 1864.

³ According to legends from Gujarat, where her worship began in the 14th century, the goddess was threatened with assault by a bandit. In defiance, she severed her own breasts and cursed the man with impotence, decreeing that he would live as a eunuch for seven lifetimes.

⁴ The *Ramayana*, as the title suggests, narrates the life of Rama, a divine prince who fights against the demon king Ravana to rescue his wife. The poem, which contains about 24,000 verses, is considered the oldest Hindu epic text, dating back to the 6th century B.C. Together with the *Mahabharata*, 4th century B.C., it forms the core of the so-called *Itihasa*, the two major epic works of Hinduism written in Sanskrit. The *Mahabharata*, comprising nearly 200,000 verses, has a complex plot that combines wars, adventures, and philosophical meditations.

⁵ Mass sterilisation was one of the policies implemented during the Emergency period, which was the state of emergency declared by then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi from 1975 to 1977.

⁶ This collaborative political project is reflected in Revathi's second autobiography, *A Life in Trans Activism* (2016). As Sequeira claims, this work is "less a sexual confession than a platform from which she recounts the multiple life stories of Dalit and/or disabled transgender men" (2022, 471).

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Translating Black Lives Matter (and celebrating FES)

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ABSTRACT

This contribution results from a translation seminar for postgraduate students focusing on the many facets of the Black Lives Matter movement. After the topic was contextualized, the group examined the main translation problems posed by the four selected poems and finally produced an Italian translation of them.

Keywords

poetry, translation, Black Lives Matter, Windrush scandal, Ambrose Musiyiwa, Panja Banyoko, Julian Colton, Joel Scarfe, Paul Francis

*And it's funny that over-apologising is seen as a national trait
cos half of history is still waiting*
(Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan, "British Values")

In spring 2017 I tutored a translation seminar group of postgraduate students at the University of Torino, involving them in Ambrose Musiyiwa's international project *Journeys in Translation*. They worked together on six poems from the collection *Over Land, Over Sea* (Five Leaves Publications 2015)—a volume where various poets dealt with the so-called 'refugee crisis'. This represented the initial step of a wider project that was to culminate in my translation of the whole collection *Per terra e per mare: Poesie per chi è in cerca di rifugio* (Civic Leicester 2020).

In the interim, I translated and commented on the same six poems in an article I authored for *FES* no. 3 (2018): at the time, I was proud to contribute to *From the European South*, a 'young' journal which had already won my interest and appreciation for the manifold perspectives that it offered on the many souths and forms of oppression in contemporary Europe. I was still prouder to participate in the *FES* project with a cross-disciplinary approach fusing refugee and translation studies.

How, then, to celebrate the journal's first ten years? I thought of developing the article further, relying again on the stimulating initiatives coming from Ambrose Musiyiwa. In 2020 he edited *Black Lives Matter: Poems for a New World* (Civic Leicester), a collection of 107 poems by various authors who reflect—and respond to—the murder of George Floyd and the ensuing

forms of protest against the oppression of racialized communities worldwide, “disproportionately killing people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds,” as Musiyiwa writes in his Introduction. “The UK Is not Innocent,” states the title of Arun Jetoo’s poem, while Lily Silverman’s lines narrate the case of another racialized victim “struggling to breathe. / A member of the public entitled to sit on him. / The policeman with his fingers in Rashan’s mouth.” Burning issues of our times, on which I wished my students had a chance to ponder through both textual analysis and translation.

Four poems sharing a focus on Britain were therefore selected. In the translations which follow here, Panja Banyoko’s “Streets Paved with Gold” presents a common story of migration where the reality beneath ‘dream-England’ (to use Salman Rushdie’s words) is marked by stifling humiliations and suffering; unrhymed lines in free verse, where attention had to be paid to phonetic patterns.

Julian Colton’s “Statue Outrage” connects the anti-racist movements sparked by Floyd’s murder with the toppling of the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston (1636-1721) in Bristol; this is a concrete poem in the shape of a human body (Floyd’s corpse? A policeman in the act of shooting? Colston’s statue?), and demanded special attention to the length and position of the lines in our collective translation.

Colton’s poem hints at the degrees of outrage that a destroyed statue on one hand, and the racist killing of people on the other, should trigger. Joel Scarfe’s “Bad Sail” concentrates on the same statue-toppling to remark how traces of slavery are still present in our current complicit silence; translation-wise, the poem opens on a pun on “cast” which challenged the students’ creativity.

Finally, Paul Francis’s “The Ballad of Paulette Wilson” is a narrative poem recounting the emblematic story of one of the victims of the infamous 2018 ‘Windrush Scandal’, when some post-WWII migrants to the UK were declared ‘illegal’, detained, and in some cases deported. The long lines of this poem became even longer in translation, since Italian has far fewer monosyllabic words than English. Consequently, my proposal was to break every line in two, turning rhyming couplets into the ABCB rhyme typical of ballads—an attempt to depart from the letter of the original in order to safeguard the spirit of the source text.

This is my gift to *FES*, and my hope for many more birthdays to come. But this is not from me only. It comes too from Ambrose Musiyiwa, Panya Banjoko, Julian Colton, Joel Scarfe and Paul Francis, who generously permitted the re-publication and translation of their works. And it comes from the forty-one students in literary translation who, during a seminar in spring 2025, engaged in lively discussions on how best to translate every single line: Francesca Alborghetti, Aurora Amoroso, Alex Ancarani, Antonio Assisa, Erika Bondesan, Alessia Brafa Misicaro, Elena Canu, Arianna Cavallaro, Alessia Anna Colla, Martina Colomba, Alessandro De Bonis, Elena Dominici, Emily Falcioni, Clarissa Maria Farruggio, Elena Fiorelli, Laura

Gaiano Cappelli, Alice Garelo, Alice Goria, Sara Grassini, Eligio Langella, Carlo Lopresti, Chiara Lorenzato, Monica Macaluso, Sara Merlino, Martina Molsitti, Silvia Monterosso, Davide Morazzoni, Chiara Novo, Luca Orlando, Milena Peretto, Egle Pertile, Matilde Sacconi, Agnese Sampaolo, Maria Sapone, Sara Sheikhi, Elena Silvestri, Simone Spano, Matilda Spanu, Federica Tarantini, Carlotta Tiddia, Chiara Wasowski, Raffaella Zunino.

Streets Paved with Gold

She lived in the same flat
for forty years
until she cracked spilling
to the four walls

of a splintered house that
echoed.
She wanted to spit
back in their faces.

Sometime in the future she
may be remembered for
more than a moment, as
more than just a stack

of untold narratives
boxed and shelved.
She spent her time worn to a glob.
Trying to make the dream work

filling family back home
with Mother Country's promise of
building sprawling manors. After
that, she used her days

learning how to swallow tears
until they streamed inside her
pushed against her innards.
She couldn't find a valve.

I heard she once girted her neck so tight,
to keep it all from spilling out,
that she split her gut.
She has never been the same.

Panya Banjoko

Strade lastricate d'oro

Visse nello stesso appartamento
per quarant'anni
finché si spezzò
riversandosi sulle quattro mura

d'una casa in frantumi
che faceva eco.
Voleva sputare sulle facce
che le avevano sputato addosso.

Magari in un futuro
potrà essere ricordata
per più di un momento,
come più di un semplice cumulo

di storie non dette
riposte in scatole e scaffali.
Passava il tempo ridotta a un grumo.
Cercando di far funzionare il sogno

riempiendo la famiglia giù a casa
della promessa della Madrepatria
di costruire vaste magioni.
Dopodiché, usò i suoi giorni

imparando a inghiottire le lacrime
finché non le scorrevano dentro
schiacciate contro le viscere.
Non riusciva a trovare una valvola.

Una volta, pare, si cinse il collo così stretto,
per non far riversare tutto,
tanto da rivoltarsi le budella.
Non è mai più stata la stessa.

Panya Banjoko

Statue Outrage (*9 June 2020*)

Some
people seem
more outraged
by a bronze
statue
which
doesn't breathe
being dragged
to the ground,
than the
transportation
of 84,000 enslaved
people,
or a black man,
George Floyd,
dying,
choked
on the
street
at the
knees
of
the
Police.

Julian Colton

Oltraggio per una statua (*9 giugno 2020*)

Certa
gente pare
più oltraggiata
da una statua
di bronzo
che
nemmeno respira
e viene trascinata
giù per terra,
che non
dalla tratta di
quelle 84000 persone
schiave,
o da un nero,
George Floyd,
morente,
soffocato
per la
strada
sotto il
ginocchio
di
un
poliziotto.

Julian Colton

Bad Sail

Another tyrant cast in bronze is
cast into the harbour,
while far-off in Atlantic's bed still
lie the twenty-thousand branded by
his iron—jettisoned for the crime of
being dead.

Its wake is wide,
this Royal African Company ship which
forges on
against the good will of the tide.
Its bad sail is our silence—blocking out the
wisdom of the sun.

Joel Scarfe

Vela crudele

Hanno colato a picco nel
porto un altro tiranno in
bronzo colato,
mentre lontano nel letto dell'Atlantico
ancora giacciono i ventimila
marchiati col suo ferro — scaricati in
mare per il crimine di essere morti.

Ha una scia ampia,
questa nave della Royal African
Company che va ancora avanti
contro la benevolenza della marea.
La sua vela crudele è il nostro silenzio —
che oscura
la saggezza del sole.

Joel Scarfe

The Ballad of Paulette Wilson

The UK has a cancer that is gnawing at its heart—
the cancer's name is Brexit and it's tearing us apart.
More money for the NHS? No, that was just a laugh;
they're breaking up the service as they terrorise the staff.
Home Office gets the message. The verdict's all too clear:
if you weren't born in Britain, then they don't want you
here.
They're not planning for the future with a rational
campaign;
they're rounding up the foreigners to put them on a plane.

They pick on Paulette Wilson, down Wolverhampton way,
who gets the dreaded letter that says she cannot stay.
She came here from Jamaica when she was ten years old.
She's 61, a granny, but they've put her life on hold.
Hostile Environment's the plan. It's magic: "Just like that!"
She's always paid her taxes but—shazam!—she's lost her
flat.
She spends a week at Yarl's Wood. They send her to
Heathrow.
They don't care what she says to them, they mean to make
her go.

Her daughter works her socks off, her MP fights the case.
The Home Office is clinging on, they're scared of losing
face.
The Guardian writes her story, their readers send support;
solicitors are sure this case will not stand up in court.
She gets a gala evening and a cheque for half a grand
from a load of local poets and a ukulele band.
Eventually the pressure tells, the scandal is a stain
and Paulette gets good news at last—permission to remain.

La ballata di Paulette Wilson

Il Regno Unito ha un cancro
che gli sta rodendo il cuore —
il suo nome è Brexit
ed è un cancro distruttore.
Più fondi alla Sanità?
No, era solo uno scherzo.
Terrorizzano lo staff
e fanno a pezzi il servizio.
Agli Interni colgono il messaggio.
Il verdetto è sin troppo chiaro:
se non sei nato in Gran Bretagna,
non ti vogliono qui in giro.
Non progettano il futuro
con una campagna razionale;
rastrellano stranieri
per metterli su un volo.

Chi prendono di mira,
su verso Wolverhampton?
La temuta lettera dice
non puoi star qui, Paulette Wilson.
È arrivata dalla Giamaica
quando aveva dieci anni.
Oggi ne ha 61 e una vita sospesa,
adesso che è nonna.
Il piano è l'Hostile Environment.
"Et voilà!", è una magia.
Ha sempre pagato le tasse
ma — shazam! — ha perso casa sua.
Passa una settimana a Yarl's Wood.
Quel che dice non importa.
Spedita a Heathrow,
vogliono solo che parta.

Sua figlia ci si danna,
il deputato di zona lotta sul caso.
Agli Interni han paura di perder la faccia,
e non mollano la presa.
Il *Guardian* scrive la sua storia,
lettori inviano aiuti;
gli avvocati sono certi che il caso
non reggerà coi magistrati.
Per lei un assegno di 500 sterline
e una serata di gala
da una band di ukulele
e un sacco di poeti locali.
Lo scandalo è un'onta,
alla fine la pressione fa effetto
e finalmente buone notizie —
un permesso di soggiorno per Paulette.

She wasn't looking for revenge. What mattered to Paulette was that they say they're sorry that they viewed this with regret.
Now that this scandal's in the news, they'll want the slate wiped clean.
She used to work in parliament with staff from the canteen but suddenly she's back there, on Tuesday, first of May, where Caroline Nokes, Home Office, has stuff she needs to say:
"To Mrs. Wilson, specially..."—she looks her in the eyes—
"You suffered from our policies. I must apologise."

Recommendations were ignored. So many people wait for compensation that is due; for Paulette it's too late.
She was bright and energetic but they tore her life apart and now, at 64, she's died. The battle broke her heart.
She gets a Covid funeral, just twenty folk inside but there's hundreds in the car park, they're applauding her with pride.
When governments abuse their power, we have to set them right
and she's the Windrush champion who has taught us how to fight.

Paul Francis

Non cercava una vendetta.
Per Paulette quello che conta è che dicessero ci spiace, che avessero il rimpianto.
Ora lo scandalo fa notizia, vorranno far tabula rasa.
Lei lavorava in Parlamento con lo staff della mensa ma ecco che un martedì, primo di maggio, torna lì all'improvviso, dove Caroline Nokes degli Interni ha da dire qualcosa e la guarda negli occhi:
"Alla Signora Wilson, in particolare...
Le nostre politiche l'han fatta soffrire.
Mi devo scusare."

Le raccomandazioni ignorate.
Più di uno aspetta il risarcimento dovuto; è troppo tardi per Paulette.
Era vivace e piena di energia ma le hanno distrutto la vita e adesso, a 64 anni, è morta.
Il cuore spezzato dalla lotta.
Le fanno un funerale da Covid, solo in venti nella chiesa ma in centinaia nel parcheggio,

con l'orgoglio di un applauso.
Dobbiamo rimetterli a posto i governi, quando abusano del loro potere e lei è la paladina dei Windrush che ci ha insegnato come lottare.

Paul Francis

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REVIEWS

Attraversare le Americhe: compresenze forzate, nuove epistemologie e flussi culturali transnazionali

Donatella Marcatajo

Independent scholar

Maria A. Fontes, Emanuele Leonardi, Renata Morresi e Anna Scacchi, a cura di. *Attraversamenti. Traiettorie del postcoloniale e degli studi sulle migrazioni nelle Americhe*, Roma: Lithos editrice, 2025 (412 pp.)

ABSTRACT

This contribution introduces the collection of essays *Attraversamenti. Traiettorie del postcoloniale e degli studi sulle migrazioni nelle Americhe* edited by Maria A. Fontes, Emanuele Leonardi, Renata Morresi and Anna Scacchi. The review highlights some of the most relevant topics addressed in the individual essays, tracing a set of “crossings” that resonates with the volume’s keyword *Attraversamenti*. The volume stands out in the contemporary field of Transnational American Studies in Italy as a constantly evolving map for navigating the complexity of the Americas, based on deep-seated contradictions, violent postcolonial legacies, and cultural hybridity.

Keywords

transnational studies, postcolonial studies, migration, America, contact zone

Il termine *attraversare* racchiude in sé molteplici declinazioni che rimandano all’idea di un movimento, sia esso spaziale, temporale, esperienziale o testuale. Può indicare, ad esempio, un’azione concreta che comporta lo spostamento fisico di corpi, oppure l’esplorazione di un testo mediante la lettura critica o la traduzione. Sul piano etimologico, *attraversare* conserva anche l’idea di un ostacolo che si interpone in modo obliquo, producendo intersezioni. Così anche *l’essere attraversati/e*, nella sua apparente passività, rivela una potente valenza trasformativa, che origina proprio in quell’innesto di percorsi, esperienze, voci e forze che alterano, violentano, contaminano, ibridano.

La raccolta collettiva di saggi *Attraversamenti. Traiettorie del postcoloniale e degli studi sulle migrazioni nelle Americhe* parte consapevolmente proprio da questa polisemia, assunta come principio organizzatore, e adotta una prospettiva transnazionale e transdisciplinare per leggere le Americhe – significativamente declinate al plurale – come bacini migratori e luoghi di contatto, dove quest’ultimo si configura simultaneamente in termini contraddittori di conflitto, (ri)negoziazione e mescolanza. In un momento storico in cui discorsi su confini, colonialismo

e migrazione sono insistentemente presenti nel dibattito pubblico, polarizzati spesso dalla propaganda, *Attraversamenti* sembra suggerire che si possa interpretare la realtà mantenendo complessità e antinomie, vedendola in continuità con delle logiche sistemiche radicate in secoli di storia, e contemporaneamente con uno sguardo altro, capace di rileggere il passato con una postura che travalichi barriere geo-politiche, ideologiche, linguistiche, culturali e disciplinari.

Nato da due giornate di studi tenutesi all'Università di Padova nel dicembre 2023, il volume costruisce una cartografia critica delle Americhe intese come territori diasporici, segnati da pratiche artistiche relazionali, da processi di riscrittura e appropriazione di canoni e modelli egemonici, e da tensioni costanti tra memoria traumatica, oblio, resistenza, negoziazione e ibridazione identitaria. La raccolta, articolata nelle tre macro-aree geografiche di Stati Uniti, Caraibi e Brasile, accoglie una varietà di tematiche, discipline e approcci. A tenere insieme questa eterogeneità è l'intento di mettere in discussione l'epistemologia eurocentrica, indagando testi letterari, esperienze migratorie, archivi coloniali e scritti autobiografici, e varie forme di pratiche artistiche, traduttive, urbane e performative, in cui le Americhe si rivelano come una vasta e stratificata "zona di contatto" (Pratt 1991) attraversata da flussi culturali, conflitti storici e processi di creolizzazione culturale e identitaria.

Nella prima parte dedicata agli Stati Uniti, Nicola Lo Calzo illustra il rapporto tra la pratica fotografica e la memoria del passato schiavista coloniale. La fotografia è presentata come un dispositivo di rappresentazione che costruisce messaggi immediati e pervasivi: lo sguardo di chi fotografa seleziona, pone all'attenzione, rende visibile e, così facendo, crea una determinata prospettiva. In *Kam*, il suo progetto fotografico transnazionale in continua evoluzione, l'autore vuole trasmettere un paradigma visivo che partecipi alla costruzione di una contro-narrazione delle comunità afro-discendenti, passando attraverso l'esperienza estetica del corpo in movimento, che è, al contempo, strumento di trasmissione memoriale nella pratica artistica e archivio vivente, portatore delle tracce lasciate dai regimi di potere coloniali, schiavisti e patriarcali.

Nel suo intervento, Giorgio Mariani riflette sulla svolta transnazionale/internazionale degli Studi Americani, sottolineando come essa abbia contribuito a decentrare l'idea di America intesa come identità, cultura e letteratura nazionale monolitica, spesso, tra l'altro, nell'errata associazione sinonimica con gli Stati Uniti. L'autore ricorre al concetto di *ideoscape* (Appadurai 1996), applicandolo a una figura ipercanonica della cultura statunitense come Ralph Waldo Emerson. Il suo noto saggio *War* (1838), che anticipa l'idea di disobbedienza civile messa in atto dal Mahatma Gandhi e da Martin Luther King, viene riletto come parte di una circolazione transnazionale di idee, inserendosi in un flusso culturale globale, che prende parte a un patrimonio umanitario condiviso.

Il saggio di Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh riconsidera la figura dell'attore hollywoodiano Rodolfo Valentino come corpo *queer* razzializzato nel contesto statunitense degli anni Venti, sullo sfondo della costruzione della "bianchezza" italiana. In un momento storico in cui italiani

e italoamericani occupavano una posizione ambigua nella “linea del colore” – più prossima agli afro-discendenti che ai *WASP* – la figura del divo dialoga con l’orientalismo dell’epoca e con forme di fluidità razziale e sessuale, destabilizzando i codici della maschilità, dell’eteronormatività e del binarismo di genere, ed evidenziando l’instabilità della bianchezza e dell’appartenenza nazionale. L’autrice analizza la dimensione transnazionale del fenomeno, mostrando come l’identità di Valentino, anche dopo la morte, fosse diventata terreno di scontro per la sua “appropriazione,” contesa tra Italia e Stati Uniti.

Renata Morresi esplora il confine tra Messico e Stati Uniti come dispositivo “necropolitico,” che sentenzia chi può vivere e chi può morire, riflettendo sulla traduzione come una pratica di attraversamento linguistica, culturale ma anche identitaria. Attraverso vari esempi letterari e performativi, l’autrice mette in evidenza come il confine si incarni nei corpi e nel vissuto di chi vive in queste zone liminali o decide di attraversarle. Fra i testi indagati, l’esperienza traumatica risulta particolarmente evidente in quello di Valeria Luiselli (*Tell Me How It Ends* 2016), che raccoglie le testimonianze, spesso frammentate e confuse, di bambine e bambini migranti sudamericani, arrivati in migliaia, tra il 2014 e il 2015, negli Stati Uniti. La trasposizione linguistica assume in quel caso una funzione quasi poetica: è il tentativo di ricomporre “materiale esistenziale,” tradotto nella fredda lingua burocratica, necessaria a garantire loro il diritto all’asilo, che al contempo genera uno spazio di riflessione critica e di profonda autoanalisi.

L’ultimo contributo della prima sezione di Valentina Rapetti affronta la drammaturgia afroamericana in prospettiva transnazionale, concentrandosi in particolare sul contesto italiano, dove la presunta normatività bianca nazionale continua a orientare i meccanismi di rappresentazione e a marginalizzare i soggetti razzializzati. Attraverso un progetto di ricerca che ha incluso laboratori, messe in scena e traduzione di opere di autrici afroamericane come Lorraine Hansberry, Suzan-Lori Parks e Lynn Nottage, il saggio evidenzia una particolare linea del colore tutta italiana, che si manifesta nel campo d’indagine del teatro istituzionale.

Daniel Graziadei inaugura la seconda area dedicata ai Caraibi, proponendo una riflessione sul tropo dell’isola all’interno dell’arcipelago come paradigma relazionale del pensiero caraibico. L’isola “che si ripete” nel “meta-arcipelago” dei Caraibi (Benítez Rojo 1989, v) si presenta come una figura dinamica e caotica, sospesa tra isolamento e connessione, tra processi di creolizzazione e forme di acculturazione violenta, tra forze distruttive e creative come gli agenti atmosferici che segnano queste aree. Interagendo con il pensiero di Antonio Benítez Rojo, Édouard Glissant e Edward Kamau Brathwaite, l’autore ragiona sulla complessità caraibica, che impone una revisione delle categorie interpretative occidentali e un discorso epistemologico alternativo, fluido e relazionale.

Anche Andrea Gazzoni riprende il pensiero di Glissant nella sua indagine sull’epica caraibica, che mette in discussione il modello occidentale fondato sul mito di un’origine unica e totalizzante. Glissant parlava di culture ataviche, caratterizzate da una genealogia stabile e

storicizzata, tipica dell'Occidente, e di culture composite con una genesi diffratta, multipla e interrotta. È quest'ultima la condizione dell'epica dei Caraibi, i cui frammenti convergono nelle viscere di una nave schiavista utilizzata per la tratta atlantica: punto di snodo dell'annientamento traumatico e del sincretismo delle tradizioni, caratterizzate per l'appunto da forme ibride, spesso fondate sull'oralità.

Il contributo di Giuseppe Sofo si focalizza sulla traduzione spagnola di *The Joker of Seville* (1978), la riscrittura con cui Derek Walcott rielabora l'opera di Tirso de Molina, *El burlador de Sevilla* (1630). Al centro dell'analisi vi è il "doppio passaggio," che si produce quando un testo, già trasformato in lingua inglese e in chiave caraibica, ritorna nella lingua dell'opera originale, producendo un percorso circolare. La ri-traduzione rende visibile la negoziazione tra fedeltà, appropriazione e ritorno all'originale, con alcuni casi in cui il traduttore tende a riavvicinare il suo testo all'originale spagnolo, attenuando le torsioni operate da Walcott, e altri in cui, invece, valorizza la riscrittura caraibica, mettendo in primo piano le sue innovazioni.

Emanuele Leonardi propone una contro-narrazione epistemologica caraibica, a partire da testi di Benítez Rojo e Gabriel García Márquez. Come già accennato, la cultura arcipelagica non è terrestre, ma fluviale e marina: è una cultura che sfugge e fluisce, che si fa volontariamente inafferrabile e cangiante come l'acqua e il vento. Concetti chiave quali *ritmo-palabra* e la "doppia seduzione" *de cierta manera* fra un testo e un lettore caraibico (Benítez Rojo 1998, 204; xxvi) indicano modalità conoscitive alternative alla sistematicità ontologica ed ermeneutica occidentale: il testo caraibico si presenta come uno spazio opaco, ritmico, ciclico e interconnesso, che resiste alle chiarificazioni interpretative e mette in evidenza le specificità dei cosiddetti "Popoli del Mare" (Benítez Rojo 1998, xxi).

L'ultima sezione del volume, dedicata al Brasile, si apre con il saggio di Maria A. Fontes incentrato sull'immigrazione italiana nei primi anni del Novecento e la rappresentazione dello spazio urbano nel testo. Sullo sfondo, vi sono le politiche del periodo che guardano all'immigrazione in modo ambivalente: da un lato, considerandola una fonte propulsiva di progresso, volta a sostituire la manodopera dello schiavismo dopo l'abolizione e a promuovere un progetto di "sbiancamento" della popolazione; dall'altro, come la causa del crescente disordine sociale e della criminalità. I quartieri operai in cui si insediò la comunità italiana a São Paulo diventano *borderlands* interni, che riflettono le dinamiche di disuguaglianza e la subalternità sociale, nonché le diverse forme di oppressione ed esclusione insite nei micro-eventi quotidiani. In questa prospettiva, lo spazio urbano, raccontato soprattutto attraverso il vissuto personale e la memoria collettiva, diventa archivio delle tensioni migratorie e laboratorio di identità in trasformazione, come emerge dai testi di Antônio de Alcântara Machado e Zélia Gattai.

Sempre a São Paulo si sviluppa il contributo di Massimo Canevacci, che si muove, nella distorsione e nello smarrimento provocato dalla metropoli tentacolare brasiliana, come un

flâneur benjaminiano deciso ad abbandonarsi ad essa. Così facendo, si scopre una città polifonica e poli-ritmica, con una sovrapposizione inframmezzata di melodie armoniche e rumori irregolari, un alternarsi di contrasti tra vita diurna e notturna e contraddizioni storico-culturali irrisolte. Tra simboli del progresso e altri di una storia coloniale mai davvero elaborata, sincretismi architettonici, inaspettate dissonanze e scorci tropicali, si delinea un paesaggio urbano stupefacente, che si fa spazio di dialogo tra identità multiple.

Nel penultimo intervento, Tamara Quírico esplora l'opera del pittore italiano Aldo Locatelli, emigrato in Brasile nel 1948. L'artista dimostra un'"ostinazione" all'accademismo italiano nel contesto modernista brasiliano: il suo capolavoro, il soffitto della Chiesa di San Pellegrino, a Caxias do Sul, mostra infatti una continuità con modelli rinascimentali come Masaccio e soprattutto Michelangelo Buonarroti, esercitando a sua volta una profonda influenza sulla successiva produzione di murali in Brasile.

Infine, Alberto Sismondini chiude la raccolta con uno studio sulla migrazione dagli attuali Siria e Libano verso il Brasile a partire dall'ultimo ventennio dell'Ottocento. Attraverso l'analisi di opere di scrittori come Salim Miguel, Raduan Nassar e Milton Assi Hatoum, l'autore evidenzia come il vissuto della diaspora araba, la memoria di una cultura tramandata nel solo ambiente familiare e la rievocazione di miti e tradizioni arabe mantengano vivo il legame con la terra d'origine. Per la maggior parte di questi autori, infatti, la scrittura diventa uno strumento per esorcizzare una dolorosa nostalgia nata da un "doppio esilio," sentimentale e linguistico.

Nel suo insieme, *Attraversamenti* costruisce un quadro policromatico delle Americhe, che accetta la frizione e la pluralità come condizioni strutturali, leggendole come spazi storicamente plasmati da mobilità forzate, violenza epistemica e gerarchie imperialiste, ma anche da sinergie e scambi transculturali. L'eterogeneità degli approcci e delle tematiche affrontate nei saggi costituisce la forza del progetto, mostrando come esperienze, testi e pratiche provenienti da contesti geografici e temporali differenti compartecipino a un flusso culturale continuo. Il volume si distingue così come un contributo estremamente rilevante nel panorama degli Studi Postcoloniali e Transnazionali, sia per la capacità di volgere lo sguardo a oggetti e soggetti ancora marginalizzati, sia per la volontà di gettare una nuova luce su figure e canoni consolidati. Attraversare significa allora dislocare il punto di osservazione, assumendo una visione periferica e una posizione mobile, capace di inserirsi negli interstizi delle narrazioni dominanti e simultaneamente di aprire varchi ulteriori, invitando a proseguire il movimento critico oltre le frontiere disciplinari o geopolitiche.

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A New World Italian Discourse in Brazil

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Giulia Riccò, *The Italian Colony of São Paulo. Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Brazil*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2025 (pp. 240)

ABSTRACT

The Italian Colony of São Paulo: Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Brazil by Giulia Riccò explores the history and social construction of the Italian community in São Paulo, Brazil, between the late nineteenth century and the course of the twentieth century. The book focuses on the ways in which Italian immigrants were racialized as “white” within a multiracial society. Unlike in the United States, where Italians often faced xenophobia and racial ambiguity, in São Paulo they were associated with ideas of modernization, civilization, and cultural superiority due to specific social, economic, and cultural factors. Riccò’s approach is based on cultural and literary analysis rather than purely sociological approaches and draws on a wide range of textual materials – including travel writing, short stories, newspaper columns, political essays, and memoirs – to trace what she defines as a ‘New World Italian discourse’. In her view, this discourse legitimizes and maintains the status of Italians as a ‘modern’ minority and focuses on culture as the production of political identities. This discursive framework not only challenges traditional interpretations of Italian migration to the Americas but also contributes to our understanding of the origins of both racial nationalism in Italy and contemporary tensions surrounding national identity.

Keywords

racialization of whiteness, whiteness studies, cultural capital, social class, Italian diaspora in Brazil

Giulia Riccò’s book, *The Italian Colony of São Paulo. Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Brazil*, lies at the intersection of Italian migration studies, race studies and cultural studies. In five chapters, it offers an original and theoretically rigorous reinterpretation of the experience of Italian immigrants – the most populous national foreign group in Brazil – in the city of São Paulo between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and revises the role they played in Brazil’s racial dynamics and in the racialization of Italians as white, in a sort of transatlantic exchange between the two nations.

The author’s stated goal is not so much to reconstruct a history of Italian migration to Brazil in the traditional sense, but rather to examine the discursive and cultural processes through which Italian immigrants in the city of São Paulo gradually rose, between the end of the 19th and the course of the 20th century, to become racially white, culturally legitimized and

socially integrated into the post-abolitionist Brazilian context. Analyzing and understanding this process, which led to the affirmation of Italianness in the city considered the New York of South America and which Riccò calls “New World Italian discourse,” becomes the critical reading for a broader reflection. The narrative proposed by the author, which in many respects differs from that widely accepted in the United States and often considered paradigmatic, shows how discursive practices on race, modernization and civilization that determine the image of Italians as models of whiteness in Brazil also play a decisive role in the construction and mediation of the very notions of racial, economic and cultural superiority of whites both in Italy, afflicted by what Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh defines as the “racial double status,” and in Brazil itself, obsessed with the policy of *branqueamento*.

From the very first pages, the book stands out for its departure from two established narratives. On the one hand, there is the victimizing view of Italians as migrants who were systematically marginalized in the Americas and, on the other, the falsehood, particularly rooted in Brazilian historiography, of Brazil’s exceptional racial inclusiveness and harmonious integration based on the ideology of racial democracy. Riccò powerfully and convincingly shows that the inclusion of Italians in the urban and symbolic fabric of São Paulo is instead the result of selective racialization operations, deeply intertwined with class hierarchies, migration policies and discourses on modernity and progress.

One of the central theoretical assumptions of the volume is that race is not a stable or universal category, but rather a historical construct shaped by specific national contexts and contingent ideological needs. According to this interpretation, the experience of Italians in São Paulo is therefore a paradigmatic case of “acquired whiteness,” which contrasts significantly with what was happening during the same period in the United States, where Italians were often placed in an ambiguous zone between whiteness and otherness. In Brazil, on the contrary, Riccò demonstrates how Italians were quickly incorporated into the *brancos* category, thanks in part to their exploitation as a ‘civilizing’ workforce in a society that, after the abolition of slavery, was seeking a new racial and economic equilibrium.

From a methodological point of view, in order to construct what the author defines as a true “New World Italian discourse,” *The Italian Colony of São Paulo* adopts a transnational, transracial and translinguistic approach that is characterized by being predominantly discursive and textual. Riccò focuses on the analysis of literary, journalistic and essayistic sources to identify not only the literary forms that Italian and Brazilian authors use to (re)construct Italian identity in Brazil and to (re)present the multifaceted relationship between Italians and the city of São Paulo, but also to verify how these authors’ works reflect the Brazilian racial hierarchy that associates being Italian with being white, as well as to ascertain how their discursive practices contribute to maintaining or subverting Italians’ claims of racial, economic and cultural superiority in the city of São Paulo. Giulia Riccò’s book therefore uses a methodological model that shows how literary and discursive texts can be used not simply as testimonies, but as

places of active production of race and class, contributing to a more complex and layered understanding of migratory phenomena. For this reason, among others, the volume is set to become a point of reference that will have a lasting influence on the debate on the relationship between the concepts of migration, race, culture and power. Through a heterogeneous corpus – ranging from Gina Lombroso Ferrero’s travel writings *Nell’America Meridionale* (1908) to the short stories *Brás, Bexiga, Barra Funda* (1927) by Antônio de Alcântara Machado and the columns of the black Brazilian political activist José Correia Leite, to the autobiography (1987) and political essays of the Brazilian nationalist of Italian origin Miguel Reale, and finally to the memoirs *Anarquistas, graças a Deus* (1979) by Zélia Gattai – Riccò demonstrates how Italianness is narrated, represented and progressively invested with symbolic capital that makes it compatible with the São Paulo modernization project.

The focus on cultural capital is one of the most fruitful interpretative axes of the book. Without explicitly relying on a systematic Bourdieusian apparatus, Riccò shows how cultural practices, lifestyles, forms of literacy and intellectual self-representations function as devices of distinction and social legitimization. Italians emerge not only as agricultural or urban workers, but as bearers of a presumed European cultural superiority that makes them particularly functional to the modernizing aspirations of the Brazilian elite. In this sense, Italianness becomes a vector of respectability and symbolic *branqueamento*, capable of placing the migrant group in an intermediate but privileged position within the racial hierarchy.

Another significant merit of the book lies in its ability to avoid a monolithic representation of the Italian community. Riccò insists on its internal class divisions, showing how access to whiteness and social recognition is neither automatic nor uniform. While some sectors of the Italian-Brazilian intellectual elite actively contribute to the construction of a hegemonic discourse on Italianness, other segments – particularly poor workers – remain exposed to forms of exploitation and marginalization. However, what interests the author is not so much the material dimension of these inequalities as the way in which they are mediated and sometimes concealed by dominant cultural discourses. Particularly convincing is her analysis of the relationship between Italianness and the ideology of racial democracy. Riccò suggests that the valorization of Italian immigrants as “desirable” whites contributes to reinforcing a national narrative that naturalizes racial inequalities, presenting them as the result of cultural differences or merit rather than as the product of historical structures of exclusion. In this context, the inclusion of Italians does not represent a refutation of Brazilian racism, but rather its reorganization: Italianness functions as a mediating element that makes the persistent marginalization of the Afro-Brazilian population less visible.

From a theoretical point of view, the book is part of an interdisciplinary and transnational landscape and implicitly dialogues with whiteness studies, postcolonial criticism and transnational studies on migration. The comparison, albeit not systematic, with the US case is particularly effective in highlighting the historical contingency of whiteness and its dependence

on specific discursive regimes. At the same time, the volume, which fits squarely within the author's main research interests (Italian identity in transnational contexts, racialization, class and migration, transnationalism and cultural mobility, contemporary racial representation), contributes to renewing studies on Italian emigration, shifting the focus from the long-dominant North American experience to the South American context, often treated as entirely peripheral.

Although the strongly textual and discursive orientation of the analysis involves a relative marginalization of archival sources and subordinate voices – with the daily experiences of Italian workers and concrete interactions with other racialized groups emerging mainly through literary or intellectual mediations – risking to privilege an elitist perspective that could have been further problematized; and although the centrality attributed to the category of whiteness, while productive, has not led to a more explicit dialogue with approaches that could have highlighted its fragmentation and instability in order to shed more light on its internal contradictions and failures, *The Italian Colony of São Paulo* represents a highly significant contribution, capable of profoundly renewing the field of studies on Italian migration and the construction of the concept of race in Latin America, thanks to its dense but clear writing, solid and well-articulated argumentation, and rigorously applied theoretical framework. By virtue of these characteristics, the book is intended not only for specialists in Italian or Brazilian studies, but for anyone interested in the processes of racialization, the dynamics of cultural capital, and the historical forms of colonial and postcolonial modernity.

The cover chosen for the book deserves special mention because it is the element that immediately and decisively guides the reader's critical gaze. The Prédio Martinelli, which stands out prominently, is not only a topographical reference point or a recognizable icon of the city of São Paulo, but a true visual synthesis of the book's critical project. The choice of this building, Brazil's first skyscraper and for a long time the tallest in Latin America, built on the initiative of Italian entrepreneur Giuseppe Martinelli, immediately highlights the central theme of Giulia Riccò's investigation: the way in which Italian immigration has become part of the urban, symbolic and racial space of Brazilian modernity. The Martinelli is a building that speaks of verticality, ambition and visibility. In a rapidly changing city such as São Paulo in the early 20th century, the skyscraper represents not only technical progress, but also a new social and perceptual hierarchy: looking at the city from above also means placing oneself in a position of power, control and prestige. It is precisely this position that Riccò shows to have been progressively occupied by Italians in São Paulo society, through a process that intertwines class mobility, cultural production and racialization. The cover therefore summarizes one of the book's strongest theses: Italians in Brazil are not simply assimilated, but actively "re-signified" as bearers of modernity and civilization, in a national context which, after the abolition of slavery, reorganizes itself around policies of *branqueamento* and a flexible but deeply-structuring racial hierarchy. Martinelli thus also becomes a material emblem of the cultural capital attributed to Italians: an architecture that not only occupies urban space but

also symbolically reorganizes it, inscribing Italianness within the narrative of the modern city. Riccò shows how this urban visibility is accompanied by discursive visibility. Literature, press, autobiographies and public representations contribute to constructing the image of a cultured, hard-working and civilizing “Italian colony.” The skyscraper on the cover therefore acts as a condensed metaphor for this process: solid, monumental, apparently neutral, but in reality deeply charged with social and racial meanings. It is no coincidence that for years the building has also been the subject of ambivalent narratives – a place of luxury and decadence, success and crisis, reflecting the internal tensions within the Italian community itself and its class positioning. From this perspective, the cover does not simply illustrate the context of the book, but anticipates its method: reading space – urban, architectural, symbolic – as text, and text as a space for negotiating identity. Martinelli thus becomes an interpretative threshold: it invites the reader to think of immigration not only as a movement of bodies, but as the production of forms, both material and cultural, through which race, belonging and social value are redefined. Ultimately, starting from the cover means immediately entering into the heart of Riccò’s argument: the idea that the “Italian colony” of São Paulo is not a marginal entity, but a central agent in the construction of Brazilian modernity. A modernity that rises, literally and symbolically, like the Prédio Martinelli in the city skyline.

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Not an elsewhere but a deep entanglement

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Maureen Murphy, *L'art de la décolonisation. Paris-Dakar, 1950-1970*, Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2023 (278 pp.)

Abstract

In *L'art de la décolonisation. Paris–Dakar 1950–1970*, Maureen Murphy examines the cultural, political, and institutional relations between France and Senegal during the central decades of decolonization. Adopting a transnational perspective, Murphy 'synchronizes' Paris and Dakar in order to reconstruct the constellation of actors, discourses, and events that shaped the decolonization process in the field of art. Her analysis develops a multi-sited narrative foregrounding both the artistic exchanges between the two capitals and the asymmetries that structured the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial. The result is a study that critically examines the uses of 'history' in the writing of global art history.

Keywords

Global Art History, Contemporary Art, Decolonization, FESMAN

In *L'art de la décolonisation. Paris–Dakar 1950–1970*, Maureen Murphy ricostruisce il ruolo dell'arte nelle trasformazioni politiche che segnarono i decenni centrali della decolonizzazione, assumendo l'asse Parigi-Dakar come campo di osservazione storico-artistico. Informato da una prospettiva teorica postcoloniale, il volume di Murphy si colloca all'interno di una linea di contributi che riflette il rinnovamento delle ricerche sul 'contemporaneo' avvenuto in Francia negli ultimi quindici anni nel quadro della *global art history*. Un cambiamento i cui effetti si estendono ormai anche al piano espositivo, come mostra l'esposizione *Paris Noir 1950-2000. Circulations Artistiques et Lutttes Anticoloniales*, organizzata lo scorso anno dal Centre Georges Pompidou (19 marzo-30 giugno 2025).

Il punto di partenza del volume consiste nella messa in discussione di una periodizzazione che, a partire dal *global turn*, ha inscritto l'arte africana prodotta tra il 1950 e il 1970 in una fase 'transitoria,' collocata, con le parole di Murphy, tra "un *après* la guerre et un *avant* la mondialisation" (Murphy 2023, 23). Tale inquadramento avrebbe contribuito a marginalizzare queste esperienze e a legittimare una lettura storiografica che le ha escluse tanto dal modernismo quanto dal contemporaneo. Murphy prende le distanze da questo

modello e, in circa 250 pagine, ridefinisce le premesse, riorienta il discorso sulla globalizzazione e mostra, attraverso una serie di casi studio tra loro connessi, l'intreccio tra arte e decolonizzazione. Ne emerge un quadro storiografico in cui le vicende artistiche di questa fase appaiono già caratterizzate da dinamiche globali e transnazionali e, al tempo stesso, inscindibili dai processi storico-politici in atto: è il caso di FESMAN (*Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres*, Dakar 1966), primo festival panafricano promosso in chiave anti-coloniale dal presidente della Repubblica del Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, e presentato come una coproduzione franco-senegalese. In questa prospettiva, Murphy esamina le politiche culturali promosse da Senghor come parte integrante di un programma destinato, da un lato, a rigenerare l'identità panafricana e, dall'altro, a sostenere una cooperazione pacifica con l'ex potenza coloniale, nel contesto di quella che l'autrice definisce "une indépendance contrainte" (Murphy 2023, 13). Entro questo scenario, l'arte si configura come oggetto di negoziazioni volte a ridefinire i rapporti politici e culturali tra i diversi attori in campo, in direzione di un cambiamento degli assetti ereditati dal passato o, al contrario, in direzione del prolungamento del precedente *statu quo*. È in questa direzione che l'autrice propone, come primo caso d'analisi, il protocollo di scambio di opere d'arte tra Francia e Senegal, firmato nel maggio del 1967 da Senghor e dall'allora ministro della Cultura francese André Malraux. Un accordo che rispondeva, da un lato, all'obiettivo francese di acquisire opere per il futuro *musée des Arts africains et océaniens* e, dall'altro, alla scelta di Senghor di assicurare la sua controparte in un momento in cui diversi stati africani di recente indipendenza iniziavano a reclamare la restituzione degli oggetti sottratti durante la fase del colonialismo. Parigi e Dakar diventano così l'oggetto di una ricostruzione che, superando l'approccio degli *area studies*, mette in evidenza l'articolarsi di dinamiche transnazionali tra le due capitali, lungo un arco temporale di tre decenni.

Nei cinque capitoli che compongono *L'art de la décolonisation*, Murphy prende in esame una pluralità di oggetti d'indagine, che va dalle istituzioni museali alle scuole d'arte sino ad eventi espositivi, per rendere visibili le modalità attraverso cui la Francia continuò a esercitare il proprio controllo sul piano culturale, mentre il Senegal, allo stesso tempo, cercava di negoziare i margini della propria autonomia. L'autrice evidenzia così la presenza di un sistema di relazioni asimmetrico che, nel passaggio dal colonialismo alla decolonizzazione, e dal linguaggio della 'missione civilizzatrice' a quello della 'cooperazione tra paesi,' non scomparve ma si riconfigurò in nuove forme. È alla luce di questa asimmetria che due nuclei tematici ricorrenti nel volume acquistano valore paradigmatico nel loro intreccio. Il primo di questi nuclei si focalizza sulla rigenerazione dell'arte 'decorativa' e dell'artigianato africano incentivata, a partire da premesse radicalmente differenti tra loro, dalle istituzioni francesi, che dagli anni Trenta avevano istituito nelle colonie *le maisons artisanales*; e da Senghor che, nel 1966 inaugurava a Thiès le *Manufactures des arts décoratifs*, il cui primo direttore fu Papa Ibra Tall.

Nel primo caso si trattava, scrive Murphy, di aiutare gli africani a “rimanere sé stessi,” dissuadendo gli artisti locali dal ricorrere a modelli europei e sostenendo il recupero di tecniche e motivi che proprio la colonizzazione aveva contribuito a cancellare (Murphy 2023, 93). Nel secondo, invece, l’obiettivo perseguito da Senghor era quello di incoraggiare gli artisti a rinnovare la loro creatività in accordo a quella che definì “l’Afrique-mère” (Murphy 2023, 58), promuovendo così un’arte nazionale coerente - concepita cioè come condizione essenziale dello sviluppo della nazione - ma aperta ad una pluralità di riferimenti, compreso quello all’arte europea. Murphy non manca di evidenziare come il programma culturale di Senghor, considerato nella sua relazione con le politiche di cooperazione franco-senegalesi, generò anche violente reazioni di dissenso, e ricorda l’incendio che interessò il *centre culturel français* di Dakar alla vigilia dell’esposizione di Marc Chagall promossa al *musée dynamique* (Dakar) nel 1971.

L’altro nucleo tematico si concentra, invece, sulla questione dell’arte contemporanea africana e della diaspora, esaminata attraverso due esposizioni: *Tendances et confrontations*, promossa a Dakar come uno degli eventi centrali nell’ambito di FESMAN (1966), e *Art sénégalais d’aujourd’hui*, presentata al Grand Palais di Parigi nel 1974. Il confronto tra questi eventi serve a Murphy per inquadrare l’atteggiamento degli attori francesi nei confronti di un’arte diversa da quella ‘tradizionale’ africana. Un’arte che, come testimonia il titolo della mostra promossa a Parigi, non venne definita come ‘contemporanea,’ termine che indica un posizionamento nella storia dell’arte, preferendo invece quello di ‘oggi,’ che evoca piuttosto un semplice rapporto con il tempo. Una scelta rivelatrice, scrive l’autrice, della difficoltà di comprendere la creazione contemporanea senegalese (e, per estensione, africana) su un piano di parità con quella europea, in un’epoca in cui prevaleva ancora l’idea del ‘primitivo’ (Murphy 2023, 232). Tale difficoltà, però, non rimase circoscritta a questo momento espositivo, ma continuò a incidere sulla ricezione dell’arte africana negli anni successivi. Il volume si conclude, infatti, alle soglie degli anni Ottanta quando le opere di artisti come Iba Ndiaye e Papa Ibra Tall scomparvero dal circuito espositivo parigino, per essere sostituite da opere associate, nell’immaginario occidentale, a un passato pre-coloniale e a un’identità del Sud globale voluta come autentica, ossia priva di relazioni con l’Europa e il colonialismo.

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From Arcadia to the “Boulevard of Broken Dreams”: The Return of *Ruinenlust* and the Rise of Eco-Gothic Anxiety in the Anthropocene

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Marco Malvestio. *Ruin Ecology: An Exercise in Environmental Imagination. Elements in Environmental Humanities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025 (80 pp.)

ABSTRACT

Ruin Ecology provides a theoretical investigation into the cultural, ecological and political significance of ruins in the Anthropocene. Malvestio conceptualises ruins as processual formations originating from the interaction of human and non-human agencies, rather than static remnants of past civilisations. Tracing a genealogy from Romantic *Ruinenlust* and coeval theories of the sublime to contemporary representations of decay, abandonment, and environmental slow violence, the author identifies a decisive shift in affective orientation: from distanced aesthetic contemplation to intimate confrontation with ecological instability. Drawing on material ecocriticism, posthumanist theory and ecogothic studies, ruination is framed as a redistribution of agency across biological, geological, chemical and atmospheric forces, while simultaneously emphasising historically situated human responsibility. Ruins emerge as diagnostic sites of ecological precarity, environmental injustice and temporal dislocation through which contemporary culture simultaneously mourns and imagines futures shaped by climate change and uneven exposure to environmental harm.

Keywords

ecocriticism, ruins, comparative literature, Gothic, environmental humanities

“I’ll be back in Detroit and all the fun’s over. Big chimneys, black smoke, hammering, noise and work and more work.” – (Borzage 1936, 1:05:41)

From the actual abandoned factories of Detroit and the very real dead malls of late capitalism to the radioactive deserts of contemporary science fiction, ruins have increasingly become a ubiquitous feature of the cultural landscape of the Anthropocene. Whilst their centrality to contemporary environmental imagination is now unmistakable, the modes of temporality, affect and political thought that they enable are still far less clear.

Ruin Ecology is Malvestio’s attempt to address these uncharted territories by mapping the “semantic instability” of ruins from Romantic *Ruinenlust* to present-day portrayals of decay, abandonment and environmental violence. Within this framework, ruins are conceptualised as

intrinsically processual sites in which human and non-human agencies intersect and collide in a constant unravelling of the dominant narratives surrounding futurity and ecological control.

In the first chapter, a genealogy of contemporary *Ruinenlust* is traced in close relation with Romantic theories of the sublime; simultaneously, however, Malvestio highlights the decisive shift in affective orientation that has occurred diachronically. If Romantic ruins provided a sanitised, safely distant encounter with decay which ultimately reaffirmed human spectatorship and superiority, contemporary ruins are far more intimate in the implied threat they bear. The erosion of ordinary spaces that are recognisably ‘ours,’ such as homes, malls, factories and cities, plays a pivotal role in the undermining of the comforting distance that once informed ruin aesthetics and “the poetics of ruins” (Dillon 2011, 22).

In a time of growing awareness of climate instability, ruin imagery no longer engenders mere contemplative melancholy thanks to its ‘otherness’, but urgently challenges viewers to come to terms with the concrete destruction of the world around us. Modern-day ruins are uncanny in their ordinariness; their affective charge does not quite derive from a kind of nostalgic contemplation experienced at a safe chrono-geographical distance. Instead, it is partially borne out of the inescapable confrontation with ecological instability and human-made catastrophe, coupled with the ultimate insufficiency of human mastery over nature’s non-human agency.

Drawing on material ecocriticism and posthumanism, Malvestio frames ruins as sites where agency is redistributed across human and non-human actors. In ruined spaces, non-human agencies like plants, fungi, animals, minerals, chemicals and atmospheric forces become newly visible as the disruptors of those anthropocentric hierarchies which regularly betray the generative dynamism of matter itself. It is important to note, however, that Malvestio does seek to decentre the human without erasing human responsibility entirely. The author does not portray ruins as neutral outcomes of “nature reclaiming culture,” but as the results of historically specific human actions whose consequences vastly exceed both human intentions and temporal horizons.

Throughout the second chapter, the analysis of ruins and their cultural import is deepened by foregrounding the notions of temporality and scales. Specifically, the author argues that, in works such as Alan Weisman’s *The World Without Us* and the television series *The Last of Us*, contemporary ruins act as speculative devices depicting a world beyond humanity. The anxiety of “reverse colonization” is arguably both palpable and pervasive in these narratives of futures to come, with “what has been represented as the ‘civilized’ world” being “colonized by ‘primitive forces’” in a terrifying role reversal where “the exploiter becomes exploited [...] and sees its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous forms” (Arata 1990, 623). Human chronologies are deeply unsettled as a result, with the persistence of infrastructures long after their social functions have vanished further shattering any human delusion of ontological centrality.

Crucial to *Ruin Ecology* in this regard is the discussion of Detroit as a paradigmatic case study in post-industrial ruination, with its abandoned ruins being shown to operate within a distinctly ecogothic register in films such as *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013), *It Follows* (2014), *Don't Breathe* (2016) and *Barbarian* (2022). Derelict houses and neighbourhoods of the Motor City become sites of spectral menace; the contemporary Gothic no longer resides in medieval castles but in ordinary, quintessentially American spaces. The relocation of Gothic affect from the distant past to the contemporary present reinforces Malvestio's central argument that the Anthropocene is Gothic in structure itself, particularly in the breakdown of boundaries between nature and culture, which results in non-human agencies uncannily overpowering and subjugating human vulnerability.

Environmental justice stands at the forefront of this discourse, as ruination is not at all distributed evenly; rather, it maps onto existing racial and socioeconomic inequalities. Ecological harm intersects with histories of segregation, deindustrialisation, infrastructural neglect, and, conversely, gentrification (Semi 2015, 52), drawing a clear distinction between those who 'can' abandon ruined landscapes and those who are forced to remain (Zukin 1991, 106). The choice to situate Detroit both within its cultural representation and its material conditions is therefore profoundly political in its dual endeavour to avoid purely aesthetic readings of ruins and to instead encourage their framing as substantial symptoms of systemic injustice resulting in uneven exposure and vulnerability.

The third chapter then goes on to further explore the Gothic framework by focusing on the notion of "ecophobia," intended as the deep-seated, antagonistic human fear of non-human agency and of frustrated control. Additionally, given that ruination is not a static end-state but an ongoing tug-of-war between the constant human labour that is required to maintain human infrastructures and entropy, Malvestio infers that only human exceptionalism could lead us to believe that ruination is anything but the 'default' condition of human artefacts in a world saturated with non-human agencies.

Indeed, if the Gothic is generally understood as "the return of the removed and the repressed [...] from public life and from the space of the speakable" and as "a negative aesthetic" defining itself "in opposition to the rationality of the Enlightenment" (Malvestio 2025, 36), ruins are then intrinsically Gothic by both definitions: as eloquent present reminders of an undead past and as uncanny chimeras of non-human agencies superimposed on human-made anatomies. Hence, the reflection on ruins simultaneously requires a "negative ecology" and an anti-anthropocentric "ecology of negativity," with the former indicating the kind of "ecological thought that values the discarded and the marginal, the uncanny and the spectral, the disturbing and the terrifying" (Malvestio 2025, 63), and the latter representing a functional resemantisation of "things that hold a negative value in our system of thought" (Malvestio 2025, 36). Within this framework, ecophobia is embodied by ruins insofar as they stage the apparent triumph of "nature" over "spirit," all the while betraying the fundamental inadequacy of such a

stark binary. Malvestio contends that ruined environments are defined by entanglements of both cultural and natural agencies; this allows him to challenge simplistic narratives of rewilding and ecological redemption that treat ruins as sites of potentially harmonious coexistence once humans retreat, rather than ambiguous spaces where new forms of life proliferate amidst persistent toxicity and generalised decay.

In the fourth chapter, the author turns to expand upon the political and temporal ambivalence of ruins, which may admittedly function as symbols of openness and ecological possibility, but also anchor reactionary nostalgia for a pre-modern idealised world if employed in nationalist or populist discourse. Much like contemporary culture and its obsession with nostalgia-inducing remakes, our notion of ruins, too, hinges upon Derrida's concept of hauntology, due to their inherent capability to address past, present and future alike. Where eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ruins staged destruction as a terrible spectacle that could be observed from afar, contemporary ruin imagery dwells on the decay of intimate, inhabited spaces, particularly in urbex photography, in disaster reportage and in so-called "dark tourism." This shift mirrors the condition of ecological precarity, in which environmental crisis is no longer an abstract future threat but an inescapable lived reality. Thus, ruins morph into affective conduits for eco-anxiety, staging the collapse of familiar worlds rather than of distant civilisations.

Retail ruins, specifically, become the semiotic ghosts populating our cultural and material landscapes, opening and foreclosing environmental futures, and materialising desolate futurescapes before our eyes. These non-spaces of circulation and consumption acquire historical depth through ruination, all the while becoming haunted by the unkept promises of futures of economic prosperity and progress that never came to be. As previously suggested, Detroit's ruins are not mere relics of an ancient past; in full post-industrial Gothic fashion, they are the tangible manifestations of a future that failed to materialise in the present, instead.

Overall, *Ruin Ecology* proves highly effective in diagnosing the affective and representational power of ruins, yet remains ultimately ambivalent about their political efficacy. Ruins unsettle anthropocentrism and expose ecological precarity, but whether (and, if so, how) such unsettling translates into collective action or alternative modes of engaging with and inhabiting the planet remains mostly unclear. *Ruin Ecology* reads as a clever thought experiment in environmental imagination, mobilising ruins as a cultural lens to provide a nuanced account of how the ongoing ecological crisis is being imagined, narrated and 'felt' in the present. While Malvestio does not set out to offer solutions or consolatory remarks, he does refine the questions we are called to ask ourselves about coexistence, responsibility and the "possible worlds" that remain imaginable amid the debris of modernity. Like the ruins it studies, *Ruin Ecology* assembles fragments shored against a collapsing world, encouraging readers to dwell at the threshold between fear and understanding, as well as loss and

possibility. A negative ecology, after all, is not supposed to promise us environmental harmony reminiscent of Arcadia; it simply demands attention be given to what is breaking.

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Struggling with the Postcolonial Bildungsroman: Formation in an Age of Crisis

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Roy, Arnab Dutta and Paul Ugor. *The Postcolonial Bildungsroman: Narratives of Youth, Representational Politics, and Aesthetic Reinventions*. Alberta: Alberta University Press, 2025 (517 pp.)

ABSTRACT

This review examines *The Postcolonial Bildungsroman*, a volume edited by Arnab Dutta Roy and Paul Ugor, as a timely and conceptually expansive intervention in the contemporary literary debate on the *Bildungsroman*, especially in its connection to postcolonial literature. Tracing the volume's introduction, five thematic sections and afterword, the review highlights the productive tension at the core of the debate, balancing both the genre's broad anti-colonial critique and its theoretical exhaustion as an aesthetic device.

Keywords

Postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, youth, futurity, genre, anti-colonial critique

Arnab Dutta Roy and Paul Ugor's volume on the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* is the first, full-length edited collection to comprehensively account for the tension embedded in its very title: the uneasy coupling of the '*Bildungsroman*', a much-discussed late eighteenth-century literary label rooted in European humanism, and the political, cultural and epistemological propositions of the 'postcolonial' field. Building on the renewed critical interest in the forms and politics of the *Bildungsroman*, Roy and Ugor's volume intervenes moving beyond the question of the genre's postcolonial accommodation. Rather, treating the genre's global presence as a point of departure, *The Postcolonial Bildungsroman* asks how, and to what end, the genre's inherited formal structures are hybridized and transformed by the pressures of colonial contact and uneven development.

Roy and Ugor's volume questions, in accordance with recent scholarship, a rigid understanding of the periodization of the *Bildungsroman*, a framework largely based on Franco Moretti's *The Way of The World* (1987), which viewed the genre as exclusively representative of European modernity. Works such as Sarah Graham's *A History of the Bildungsroman* (2018)

or the special issue of *Textual Practice* on “The Bildungsroman: form and transformations” (2020), edited by John Frow, Melissa Hardie and Vanessa Smith, shift the critical discourse on the *Bildungsroman* from periodization to theme and form. Roy and Ugor’s volume expands on this approach with a collection of essays that intervenes in specific dialogue with postcolonial theory.

In their introduction, Roy and Ugor both make note of the genre’s undeniable popularity among writers across the five continents but also acknowledge the genre’s eighteenth-century origins in “local European concerns around childhood development” (xv). In short, the editors locate their inquiry at “the intersection of traditional forms with modern questions of social disruption and identity” (Roy and Ugor 2025, xv). Building on this intersection, Roy and Ugor’s collection suggests that reading contemporary coming-of-age texts and themes through the frame of “Bildungsroman generic explications” allows us to gain deeper insight into the “voices reacting to colonial pasts and their unrelenting grip on the present” (Roy and Ugor 2025, xv). Specifically, their introduction proposes that exactly because the *Bildungsroman* started out as “a narrative of acculturation or gradual absorption into a dominant political and socio-cultural system,” the critical reappropriation of the genre within postcolonial contexts is so much more effective in “calling attention to its intrinsic inequities, contradictions, and abuses” (Roy and Ugor 2025, xix). Roy and Ugor’s volume, then, enters in the *Bildungsroman* discourse incisively by contending that the *Bildungsroman*, as an aesthetic device, can respond to contemporary challenges because it is fundamentally inseparable from the historical afterlives of the Empire.

The essays collected in *The Postcolonial Bildungsroman* give structure to this insight by highlighting how, in the multiple cultural contexts explored by its various contributors, coming-of-age can no longer imply seamless synthesis of the individual with society. When read through *Bildungsroman* critical frameworks, the very impossibility, for the postcolonial *Bildungsheld*, of finding compromise or resolution most clearly becomes “a site of critique, protest, and cultural disaggregation” (Roy and Ugor 2025, xvii). From the essays included in the volume emerges the notion that the journey of self-determination depicted in postcolonial *Bildungsromane* implies both a recognition and rejection of the Euro-American, white social order that oppresses the protagonists, allowing them to become, as Roy and Ugor propose citing Pramod Nayar, “knowing subalterns” (Roy and Ugor 2025, xiv). In this sense, the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* “advances a strong motif of anti-colonialism,” and this is a theme that emerges at length throughout the works in Roy and Ugor’s collection (2025, xxv).

The editors’ conceptualization of anti-colonialism as a theoretical framework for the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* is particularly compelling. In addition to the already highlighted re-envisioning of the conventional coming-of-age plot, the editors register an anti-colonialist motif in the readily apparent, but nonetheless key re-envisioning of identity politics enacted in these novels, which decisively displace the white male hero of the classic *Bildungsroman*. By

foregrounding “voices from the diverse subject positions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, histories, and cultural backgrounds,” the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* renews the genre with alternative journeys and perspectives (Roy and Ugor 2025, xxvi). Finally, the editors also highlight an anti-colonialist re-envisioning of the protagonists’ ties to their community of origin, both in a thematic and, importantly, formal sense. Because a unitary sense of self and nation is no longer achievable the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* tradition becomes “multiple,” acquiring “local flavours and qualities distinctive of their regions/cultures of emergence” (Roy and Ugor 2025, xxviii), while exploring both “the postcolonial experiences of cultural dislocation” but also the “more bounded frameworks of national, regional, and familial history” (Roy and Ugor 2025, xxix).

The interest in tracing how the postcolonial restructures themes and forms of the *Bildungsroman* shapes the volume as a whole: organized into five chapters composed of a varying number of essays, the work opens with a valuable turn to the historicization of the genre. In the first chapter, José-Santiago Fernández-Vázquez’s note-worthy contribution traces a detailed account of the adjacency of “the major narrative conventions of the male classical *Bildungsroman*” and “the ideological and epistemological background that characterizes Western modernity and gave rise to colonialism” (2025, 4). The first chapter composes a genealogy of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* both in content and academic legacy, by coupling the contribution by José-Santiago Fernández-Vázquez, whose 2002 essay in *Literature, Critique, and Empire Today* on Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991) had laid some of the most compelling theoretical foundations for the discussion of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, with an essay by Ericka A. Hoagland, who had penned the chapter on the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* in Graham’s 2018 collection.

The second chapter on “Coloniality, Postcoloniality, Cosmopolitanism, and the *Bildungsroman*” traces how the genre was both produced by and responds to the conditions of colonialism and neocolonialism. Simone Maria Puleo’s essay on Igiaba Scego’s *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010) may be of particular interest to those working on the legacies of Italian colonialism. Tracing the contours of a diaspora *Bildungsroman* that stages formation in the unstable space of displacement and transculturation across nations, Puleo’s analysis is well paired with Feroza Juasswalla’s work, which instead reads post-independence Indian and African *Bildungsromane* as allegories of the search for new national identities. When read together these works confirm the impossibility of defining a fixed meaning for the coming-of-age trajectories of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*.

The third chapter explores how contemporary postcolonial *Bildungsromane* question the links between childhood, nation and narration in both theme and form. Deena Dinat’s contribution is particularly eloquent on the topic, connecting the *Bildungsroman* form with the truth-seeking character of South Africa’s TRC process. Through a comparative analysis of K.

Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000) and Nadia Davids's *An Imperfect Blessing* (2014), Dinat argues that the *Bildungsroman* form was best able to capture both the promise, regulated by the TRC process, of a different future for the nation but also the necropolitical power of the leftover apartheid state, which continues to shape the experience of young racialized people in South Africa. The essays included in this chapter confirm that youth in the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* continues to serve as a tool for the conceptualization of the nation, though the nation's meanings are always unstable and often transgressed.

The fourth chapter looks to the *Bildungsroman* form in connection with an array of contemporary global issues, such as Craig Smith's work on the Nigerian carceral state in Elon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) and Alain Mabanckou's *Black Moses* (2017), or Prathim-Maya Dora-Laskey's reflection on Asian *Bildungsromane* and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). David Babcock's work on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's corpus is particularly noteworthy because it traces the development of the author's thought through *Bildungsroman* generic expectations. Moving from *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), to *Half of A Yellow Sun* (2006) and *Americanah* (2013), Babcock traces Adichie's evolving vision of *Bildung* as representative neither of postcolonial national identities nor of a purely individual experience but rather as a process that can "bridge the gap between personal and collective experience without collapsing either sphere into the other" (Babcock 2025, 319).

The essays in the final chapter address identity politics explicitly, questioning how race, gender, sexuality and historical memory fracture the teleological trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*. In her contribution, Julia Wurr interestingly explores childlessness in Nigerian, female, postcolonial *Bildungsromane*, noting how these novels enact a reversal of the expected focus on motherhood in subject formation, and instead move the spotlight on the pressure exerted by gendered expectation of motherhood in the development from childhood to adulthood. Rachel Ann Walsh's work on Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), instead, explores the role of animals in the novel as a reappropriation of animality, understood as a negatively connoted state often associated with colonized, racialized and queer subjects. In Vuong's novel animality rather redefines the protagonist of the journey of formation by recentering "the porosity and dependency of human-animals" (Walsh 2025, 421). The works included in this section at large convincingly reaffirm the *Bildungsroman* form's adaptability to postcolonial concerns, especially in their continuous refusals to provide closure.

Finally, Sarah Brouillette's afterword closes the collection as a deliberate counterpoint to the editors' rather more *Bildungsroman*-inclined introduction. While, from Roy and Ugor's introduction, the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* emerges as a critical tool capable of exposing the inequities of the contact zone, Brouillette reads the term's "conceptually-rich and complicated" literary inheritance as already saturated, its meanings overdetermined by its entanglement with colonial history (2025, 465). Citing anthropologist Alcinda Howana's conceptualization of

'waitthood', a status of permanent suspension experienced by young people navigating the informal economies of the postcolony, Brouillette argues that the *Bildungsroman*'s most compelling promise, futurity, is no longer sustainable in the ultra-contemporary. In a present marked by ecological devastation, political uncertainty and widening economic and social inequality, the *Bildungsroman*, a genre espousing the possibility of an eventual coherent development, becomes "a residual form—an almost purely historical imaginary, whose contemporary relevance is precisely as something definitively behind us" (Brouillette 2025, 466). Even if we have now entered an era where the most representative literary form is, rather, the picaresque, there is something positive to be read, Brouillette maintains, in the final overcoming of the *Bildungsroman*: the conditions that had made it a representative literary form are no longer in place, and "how obscene it would be to lament this fact" (2025, 466).

While the depth and extension of the works collected by Roy and Ugor is remarkable, in my view the lingering tension between introduction and afterword is, finally, the volume's most productive contribution. It underscores, rather than seeking to solve, the ambivalence of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, calibrating both its undeniable literary weight and the limits of its application.

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Chi ha paura di decostruire il proprio razzismo?

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Marilena Umuhoza Delli, *Chi ha paura del lupo bianco? C'era una volta il razzismo inconsapevole*. Trento: Erickson, 2025 (156 pp.)

ABSTRACT

In her sixth book, Italian-Rwandan author Marilena Umuhoza Delli examines the multiple ways in which racism manifests in contemporary Italy, ranging from microaggressions to forms of colorblind racism, which she conceptualizes as *neoracism*. Conceived both as a resource for educational settings and as a tool for individual reflection, *Chi ha paura del lupo bianco?* (Who's Afraid of the White Wolf?) adopts an accessible style and a candid narrative voice aimed at maintaining the engagement of a white Italian readership and encouraging critical awareness of racism in everyday life. The volume incorporates an intersectional perspective and includes interactive questions and group exercises, alongside reading recommendations and an extensive bibliography. These elements highlight both the scope of the research underpinning the work and the author's capacity to address a broad audience. The article concludes with an overview of Delli's oeuvre and an invitation to engage with her first novel in its forthcoming English translation.

Keywords

Neorazzismo, discriminazione, scuola italiana, antirazzismo, paradigma bianco

Il sesto libro di Marilena Umuhoza Delli, *Chi ha paura del lupo bianco?*, funziona sia come manuale scolastico che come testimonianza personale contro il razzismo, non solo per l'esperienza pluriennale e lo stile informale e diretto dell'autrice, ma soprattutto per la sua aperta onestà. Delli non si limita a raccontare episodi di razzismo sperimentati sulla propria pelle, che variano dalle microaggressioni al neorazzismo, ma possiede capacità di autoriflessione: "Anche io ho fatto più volte scivoloni che hanno rivelato tutto il razzismo interiorizzato che era in me, ieri come oggi" (Delli 2025, 145). In tal modo l'autrice invita chi legge a confrontarsi con il razzismo – che sia esso interiorizzato, inconscio o subdolo – senza ricorrere a tattiche autodifensive dovute alla sensazione di vergogna. Come Delli mostra con chiarezza la *white guilt* – il senso di colpa della persona bianca di fronte al razzismo – rappresenta una delle forme in cui il neorazzismo continua a manifestarsi: chi lo sperimenta tende a concentrarsi sul proprio disagio anziché su quello della persona razzializzata che tenta

di spiegare un problema che è sì, personale, ma soprattutto sistemico. Già nelle prime pagine l'autrice si concentra sulla *white guilt*, producendo una formulazione che funge anche da epigrafe al volume: “È con questo che finisco di scontrarmi, ogni volta che parlo di antirazzismo: con il privilegio di chi crede di essere la vittima e non il carnefice” (Delli 2025, 17). Sono parole che potrebbero suonare come un'accusa, invece, grazie allo stile diretto dell'autrice, aprono uno spazio di dialogo tra il lettore bianco e un'autrice che non vuole puntare il dito bensì educare e spogliarsi di qualsiasi senso di superiorità. Mettersi in gioco, ammettere le proprie imperfezioni, raccontare aneddoti personali sulle esperienze nelle scuole, nelle università e in famiglia sono tutti approcci che favoriscono la comprensione da parte di un pubblico – insegnanti, giovani studenti, famiglie e bambini – spesso poco consapevole delle esperienze negative vissute dalle persone nere in Italia dovute alla razzializzazione.

Volgere lo sguardo non solo al razzismo antinero ma anche all'intersezionalità caratterizza da sempre il lavoro di Delli e *Chi ha paura del lupo bianco?* non fa eccezione. Una singola persona può essere discriminata in quanto nera, ma anche in quanto donna e disabile, creando un intreccio di discriminazioni multiple che si manifesta in modi diversi a seconda dei contesti e colpisce i soggetti più vulnerabili della nostra società. Delli cita l'esempio di sua madre, donna nera con disabilità al cento per cento – già fonte di ispirazione per il personaggio di Chantal nei suoi romanzi *Negretta*, *Baci razzisti* e *Pizza Mussolini* – costretta a salire le scale fino alla platea di un teatro senza alcun tipo di assistenza. Durante la visita successiva, le dinamiche di potere vengono completamente alterate dalla presenza del genero, un uomo bianco, che interviene alla mancata accoglienza della richiesta di aiuto, provocando un cambiamento immediato nell'atteggiamento dei dipendenti che si attivano per fornirle assistenza (Delli 2025, 127-29). L'episodio mostra come piccoli atti all'apparenza insignificanti per chi beneficia del privilegio possano incidere concretamente e immediatamente sul vissuto di una persona razzializzata e discriminata, mostrando la dimensione pratica e relazionale di una alleanza antirazzista. Le persone bianche possono, anzi devono, riconoscere il proprio privilegio e usarlo per cambiare le condizioni che impediscono uguaglianza e inclusione e per sostenere coloro che non ne beneficiano. Come nell'esempio qui riportato, si tratta a volte di dire solo alcune parole per ribaltare totalmente la situazione.

Altro punto cruciale del libro sono le domande e gli esercizi interattivi proposti alla fine di quasi ogni capitolo. Alcuni sono fatti per stimolare la riflessione individuale mentre altri sono veri e propri esercizi da proporre in classe o in contesti di formazione degli adulti, che siano un corso di aggiornamento per docenti, un club del libro o un seminario decoloniale. Tali esercizi, e tutto il libro nel suo insieme, risultano molto accessibili grazie all'uso di un linguaggio comune e non specialistico: Delli vuole essere compresa da un pubblico più ampio possibile e non limitare il discorso antirazzista alla sola sfera accademica. Proverò dunque a rispondere ad alcune delle domande proposte da Delli, come verifica dell'esistenza del “paradigma bianco,” termine coniato da Joe R. Feagin nel 2009, che “descrive il modo in cui le persone

bianche disseminano i messaggi razziali che rafforzano il loro privilegio”; non si tratta solo di dimostrazioni evidenti come insulti e stereotipi ma anche di interpretazioni limitate e narrazioni parziali della società (Delli 2025, 24). Vediamo dunque, il punto di vista del sottoscritto, un uomo bianco cresciuto nella periferia di Boston, USA: “Quand’è stata la prima volta che ho visto un insegnante di un gruppo razziale diverso dal mio?” e “I miei libri di studio rappresentavano persone di gruppi razziali diversi dal mio?” (Delli 2025, 26). Penso che il mio sia stato un caso eccezionale perché la mia prima maestra, all’asilo nido, si chiamava Ms. Caines ed era una donna nera, l’unica insegnante nera di tutta la scuola. Dopo di lei ho incontrato solo insegnanti bianchi fino alla terza media, quando ho avuto una professoressa di origine cinese. Tra le superiori e l’università fino alla fine del dottorato – tra gli Stati Uniti e l’Italia – ho avuto altri due docenti di origine cinese ma mai un’altra professoressa nera o di altra etnia. Come *visiting scholar* a UCLA, ho avuto il piacere di studiare con la prof.ssa Yogita Goyal, studiosa indiana di letteratura afroamericana e della diaspora africana, che ha gentilmente accettato la mia personale richiesta di monitorare il mio progetto di ricerca che rispondeva ai suoi specifici interessi accademici. Per quanto riguarda i libri, fino al diploma di scuola superiore essi rispecchiavano principalmente la mia esperienza: in dodici anni di studio ho incontrato quasi soltanto autori bianchi, con la sola eccezione di Maya Angelou. I personaggi neri nei miei libri scolastici erano o schiavi (quasi sempre senza nome e *agency*) o attivisti quali Martin Luther King, Jr. e Rosa Parks, sempre raffigurati come mediatori pacifici amati indiscriminatamente dal pubblico, in una versione semplificata e distorta della storia americana. Da studente detestavo la storia perché il percorso appariva sempre identico e puramente americo- ed eurocentrico: rinascimento e problemi in Europa, arrivo degli europei in America, inizio degli Stati Uniti, ogni anno del mio percorso. Soltanto alla magistrale all’Università di Padova ho studiato per la prima volta la storia del colonialismo italiano e quindi la storia africana, trovando così gli intrecci della storia occidentale con quella del Sud globale che mi erano stati negati durante la formazione scolastica. Queste risposte evidenziano la necessità di diversificare non solo il background e la formazione del personale docente ma anche lo stesso curriculum, troppo incentrato su un punto di vista eurocentrico, dannoso per tutti gli alunni e le alunne perché parziale e irresponsabile.

Il lupo bianco del titolo non è altro che un modo dell’autrice di decostruire questo paradigma bianco. Se nelle favole e filastrocche il cattivo è sempre nero, che sia uomo o lupo, perché temere il lupo bianco, quello che porta sicurezza, salvezza e bontà? Proprio in questa figura apparentemente positiva si annida il razzismo implicito delle nostre società, di cui non possiamo liberarci se non ci rendiamo conto che è appunto il lupo bianco travestito da buono a generare conseguenze nefaste, anche mortali, per le persone razzializzate, italiane e non.

Alla fine dei capitoli 3, 4, 6 e 10 Delli propone una serie di letture, oltre a film e podcast, seguite da una dettagliata bibliografia dei testi citati nel libro per chi vuole approfondire le questioni toccate dall’autrice in maniera più intensa. Utilissima anche la bibliografia già

presente alla fine di *Lettera di una madre afrodiscendente alla scuola italiana* (2023) che offriva spunti ai lettori per informarsi da soli. In entrambi i casi la scrittrice non solo cita le sue esperienze personali e professionali, ma fonda la sua scrittura su di un solido dialogo con la ricerca, la storia italiana e una prospettiva transnazionale. Alla luce di questa analisi e di tutto il percorso dell'autrice, dagli esordi fino al 2025, risulta difficile per chi è attento e disposto all'ascolto negare le esperienze raccontate con tanta cura; eppure perdura una resistenza alle pratiche antirazziste proposte da Delli durante i suoi workshop, come testimoniano alcune delle reazioni: "Io non sono per niente d'accordo con lei. Tutto questo razzismo che lei descrive, non lo vedo da nessuna parte, nemmeno fra i miei bambini" (Delli 2025, 146). Ecco il perché della necessità di questo libro. Servono tanti strumenti e tanta pazienza per decostruire il proprio razzismo e per aiutare gli altri a farlo. È un lavoro di cui dovrebbero farsi carico coloro che beneficiano del razzismo, cioè del privilegio bianco, in questo caso gli italiani bianchi. Ma senza l'aiuto delle persone che sperimentano il razzismo su sé stesse ogni giorno, il percorso risulta strutturalmente incompiuto. In questo senso il lavoro di Delli, ed altri e altre attiviste, può essere un punto d'incontro tra esperienza vissuta ed educazione all'antirazzismo. Come diceva già Angela Davis, "in una società razzista non basta non essere razzisti, bisogna essere antirazzisti."

Chi ha paura del lupo bianco? arriva a quasi dieci anni dalla pubblicazione del primo libro di Delli, l'autobiografia *Razzismo all'italiana* (Aracne 2016), a cui sono seguiti due romanzi che costituiscono la prima saga familiare afrodiscendente italiana – *Negretta. Baci razzisti* (2020) e *Pizza Mussolini* (2023), entrambi per Red Star Press – e tre manuali per le scuole, *Lettera di una madre afrodiscendente alla scuola italiana* (People 2023), *Storia vera dell'Italia nera* (Piemme 2024) e il libro qui recensito. Marilena Umuhoza Delli è una scrittrice italo-ruandese, nata a L'Aquila, cresciuta a Bergamo, ora residente a Venezia dove ho avuto il piacere di conoscerla e di lavorare insieme a lei. La traduzione inglese di *Negretta. Baci razzisti* uscirà per Rutgers University Press nella collana Other Voices of Italy con il titolo *Negretta: Racist Kisses*, rendendo un'opera dell'autrice disponibile interamente in lingua inglese per la prima volta.¹ Il mondo anglofono potrà conoscere una delle autrici afrodiscendenti di maggior rilievo in Italia, mentre il pubblico italiano potrà presto sfogliare il prossimo lavoro di Delli, un libro per ragazzi in uscita per Einaudi.

Note

¹ Estratti della traduzione sono già apparsi sul sito *Lunch Ticket* e sulla rivista *Voices in Italian Americana*. Si rimanda alla bibliografia per le informazioni d'accesso.

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Sulle macerie di Gaza: sopravvivenza di una colonia

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Luigi Cazzato. *Palestina fra Oriente e Occidente. Anglosfera, ferite coloniali, re-esistenza decoloniale*. Milano: Meltemi editore, 2025 (pp. 268)

ABSTRACT

By reconstructing the history of land expropriation and military occupation that transformed Palestine, once part of the Ottoman Empire, into a European colony, Luigi Cazzato situates the Palestinian Question within a specific colonial genealogy, one that speaks to the age-old project of ethnic replacement and Zionist colonial violence in Palestine. Illuminating this devastation, which is more dire today than ever, is *sumud*, the voice of Palestinian resistance, through art, music, and creativity.

Keywords

The Palestinian question, colonial modernity, the Anglosphere, Zionism, genocide, *sumud*

Con questo libro a cui lavorava già anni prima di dover fare i conti con la tragica data del 7 ottobre 2023, Luigi Cazzato inquadra la Questione palestinese come figlia di una specifica genealogia coloniale che fa della Palestina ancor oggi una colonia europea. Accompagnando con chiarezza la ricostruzione storica ed esistenziale di un popolo, quello palestinese, che ha vissuto una vera e propria sostituzione etnica e sottrazione territoriale, il percorso che Cazzato traccia non si traduce mai in un affastellarsi di date, nomi, luoghi, più o meno familiari per il lettore, ma invece mostra con delicatezza gli snodi cruciali della storia di un territorio su cui si sono addensati tutti gli orrori del Novecento europeo: nazifascismo, olocausto, colonialismo, sionismo. Rievocando l'efferata violenza che ha nutrito e nutre la modernità euro-occidentale, che il pensiero decoloniale (da Quijano a Mignolo) definisce come modernità innegabilmente coloniale, Cazzato propone anche una personale ricostruzione del riscontro mediatico che la Questione palestinese riceveva negli anni Ottanta in Italia. Ne emerge uno sguardo, da parte della classe politica di quei tempi non troppo lontani, più sensibile alle rivendicazioni dei palestinesi, più aperto verso le motivazioni anticoloniali di Arafat, leader dell'Olp, e della lotta armata e l'Intifada. Ma un territorio che è da sempre crocevia tra Mediterraneo, Giordania, Iraq, e lontano Oriente, e dunque così strategico per gli interessi economici e militari delle grandi potenze europee, statunitensi e arabe, non può avere pace. Soprattutto dopo le guerre che

negli anni Novanta hanno sconvolto il Medio Oriente, spianando il terreno alla crociata, statunitense ed euro-occidentale, di demonizzazione totale dell'intero mondo arabo dopo il crollo delle Torri Gemelle nel 2001. Uno sfacelo che, nel nome della 'matrice coloniale' euro-statunitense, collega strettamente le disastrose guerre nel mondo arabo alle migrazioni dall'Africa subsahariana e al destino di Gaza, come ci ricorda Iain Chambers nel suo *Lampedusa/Gaza* del 2025.

La complessità delle vicende che hanno provocato alla Palestina la 'sventurata' trasformazione da territorio dell'impero ottomano in terra di mire espansionistiche, prima con il mandato britannico nel 1922, poi con il vero e proprio insediamento coloniale israeliano, viene dipanata nel libro con la cura necessaria per chiarire snodi storici di rilevanza epocale.

La decisione di fare del territorio palestinese la casa promessa per gli ebrei d'Europa, ostracizzati, scacciati, perseguitati già secoli prima dell'atroce progetto di sterminio nazifascista, andava a completare, idealmente, e molto utilmente, il programma europeo di fine Ottocento di spartizione coloniale del continente africano (*scramble for Africa*), creando una sfera di influenza strategica nel versante arabo. E se il 1948 celebrava la nascita dello stato di Israele come nuova casa per gli ebrei, quell'anno decreta pure la catastrofe del popolo palestinese, la Nakba, dato che il sionismo trasformava gli ebrei da vittime del nazismo in carnefici del popolo palestinese.

Difatti, già il progetto sionista promosso dall'ebreo ungherese Herzl nel 1896 sembrava aver alimentato la fantasia genocidaria di far 'scompare' gli arabi da quelle terre, rimuovendoli attraverso modalità più o meno subdole, come rivela il cosiddetto Piano Dalet del 1948. Oggi questo delirante piano sembra ormai 'missione compiuta', grazie alla convergenza 'anglosferica' degli interessi economici e militari.

La grande macchina dell'imperialismo britannico, che nel Medio Oriente dettava legge – dalla Dichiarazione Balfour (1917) che assicurava duraturo sostegno alla causa sionista e stabiliva la Palestina come 'casa' promessa al popolo ebraico; al mandato britannico del 1922 e alle esplicite dichiarazioni razziste insite nell'appoggio dato da Winston Churchill al sionismo; fino alla nascita dello stato israeliano nel 1948, con la successiva occupazione del resto della Palestina nel 1967 – ancora oggi forgia le relazioni politiche e commerciali dell'area mediterranea, subsahariana e mediorientale, in maniera più o meno velata, cementando incessantemente quella che, dalla fine della Guerra Fredda, è nota come 'anglosfera', categoria che Edward Said avrebbe semplicemente chiamato, nel suo *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), 'imperialismo'. Per l'intellettuale di origine palestinese, infatti, se è vero che il colonialismo diretto si è in gran parte estinto tra fine Ottocento e Novecento, persiste invece la condizione di asservimento economico, politico e socioculturale indotta da una sfera di potere che da un centro metropolitano dominante governa territori lontani. In questo senso, il

sostegno statunitense assicurato allo stato di Israele si configura chiaramente come garanzia di un avamposto per il controllo 'anglosferico' economico e politico nel Medio Oriente.

L'occupazione israeliana ha trasformato un territorio come la Striscia di Gaza in una gabbia a cielo aperto per i palestinesi che vi abitano; ha confinato i palestinesi in luoghi che sono per lo più campi di detenzione in cui la vita, misera e limitata, si svolge fin dall'infanzia sotto sorveglianza militare; ha scandalizzato la 'civile' opinione europea, nel 1982, con l'invasione del Libano e con i massacri di palestinesi nei campi profughi di Sabra e Shatila a Beirut; ha costretto la gente sotto occupazione a ribellarsi a mani nude, con lanci di sassi, l'Intifada del 1987 e del 2000; ha massacrato i rifugiati nel campo di Jenin in Cisgiordania nel 2002; ha continuato fino ad oggi a umiliare i palestinesi con violenze militari sui civili e sul territorio per tutte queste decadi.

Ma è dal 7 ottobre del 2023, quando circa quattromila miliziani di Hamas irrompono dentro Gaza, trucidando più di mille israeliani e prendendo centinaia di civili in ostaggio, che la Questione palestinese ha conosciuto, nella Striscia di Gaza, un eccidio senza precedenti, per la furia di vendetta sterminatrice messa in atto dal Primo ministro israeliano Netanyahu, da quel momento a oggi, bombardando e annientando in maniera efferata gli abitanti di Gaza, insieme alle loro case, ospedali, scuole, cimiteri, strade, servizi e infrastrutture.

La Striscia di Gaza è un territorio che già negli ultimi decenni aveva catturato l'attenzione dell'attivismo pacifista, di artisti e intellettuali, che da diverse prospettive e provenienze hanno indagato la particolare condizione di 'prigionia', di detenzione, di sorveglianza e disumanizzazione a cui sono soggetti gli abitanti della Striscia, definiti 'animali umani'. Qui non è solo la vita delle persone ad essere esposta alla quotidiana minaccia di morte e alle continue umiliazioni riservate a genti considerate subumane; è il territorio stesso, lo spazio ecologico delle creature, animali, alberi e piante, rocce, aria, acqua e terreno – Joseph Pugliese lo definisce *more-than-human* nel suo *Biopolitics of the More-Than-Human* (2020) – ad essere violato, offeso, massacrato, estirpato. Non si può continuare, spiega Cazzato, a chiamare questo progetto con termini diversi da quello che realmente è: genocidio. Al dibattito sull'uso di un termine, appunto, genocidio, che è sembrato, in questi ultimi tre anni, inopportuno ai difensori dello status quo, Cazzato ha dedicato uno spazio specifico, affinché non si possa dubitare di quello che è accaduto e sta accadendo sotto i nostri occhi. Perché i muri e i blocchi, ci ricorda l'autore, non sono solo quelli materialmente imposti al territorio geografico, ma sono anche quelli creati da un linguaggio che si presta ad erigere, sul terreno discorsivo, barriere che zittiscono la violenza coloniale sionista in Palestina.

In questo scenario atavicamente offeso, Cazzato ci guida attraverso la forza di un popolo, che riesce, pur nella miseria materiale, a creare speranza, immaginario, espressività artistica, vita culturale. La terza parte del libro, intitolata significativamente "Re-esistenza decoloniale", non vede avvicinarsi soltanto voci dall'arte araba diasporica, che in molti modi

dialoga sorprendentemente con la controcultura africano-americana, ma si viene accompagnati tra i murali, i graffiti, le vignette, i poster che fanno, del minaccioso muro che dal 2002 squarcia il paese, lungo il confine tra Israele e Cisgiordania per settecento chilometri, una “tela globale” su cui si racconta una “guerriglia visuale dal basso” (Cazzato 2025, 186). Una esplosione di “re-esistenza artistica”, che emerge dalla cultura popolare, lungo i muri e dalle strade, come il ritmo sincopato del rap e dell’*hip hop*; le voci di Rafeef Ziadah, o del gruppo *hip hop* israelo-palestinese Dam, danno un volto giovane a questo sfacelo antico. Per questo, come scrive Tomaso Montanari nella Prefazione, il libro di Cazzato parla dell’inferno della condizione palestinese, ma dà anche voce a quello che inferno non è. Nell’indomita creatività artistica che emerge da questi luoghi privati di mezzi e di speranza, si coglie la portata rivoluzionaria di un termine che risuona in particolare nelle pagine del secondo capitolo del libro, per poi ricomparire attraverso la forza dei linguaggi dell’arte: *sumud*. Questo termine che evoca resilienza, pazienza, perseveranza, accettazione parla anche dell’ostinazione di un popolo che non lascia la propria terra – come la pianta dell’olivo, profondamente radicata – e che è pronto a sacrificare la propria vita per questi territori, che rappresentano radicamento e identità. Questo attaccamento dignitoso, coraggioso, che non indietreggia di fronte alla sopraffazione e alla minaccia di morte quotidiana, anzi, le sfida entrambe risolutamente, scompiglia le logiche razionali di tutti noi che guardiamo da lontano, senza capire. Dalla comodità delle nostre case sicure, o di sale cinematografiche, in Europa e altrove, siamo rimasti ammutoliti dinanzi all’ostinata insistenza, e consapevole rassegnazione, di ragazze e ragazzi giovanissimi, che, come Fatima Hassouna, la giovane protagonista del docufilm *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk* (di Sepideh Farsi, 2025), hanno continuato ad abitare edifici in pezzi, squarciati dalle esplosioni incessanti giorno e notte, o rifugi improvvisati tra gli ammassi di detriti, esprimendosi con calma, nell’attesa di un cessate il fuoco che neppure Fatima, poi uccisa dai bombardamenti, potrà mai testimoniare.

Come se lo spirito dei palestinesi parlasse, miracolosamente, di un proprio nocciolo duro, indomito, un cuore mai violato. Ci auguriamo che i poveri resti delle vittime di questa atroce pulizia etnica, consumata sotto gli occhi dei paesi ‘civili’ in tutto il mondo, infestino il sonno di chiunque contribuisca al satanico e perverso progetto del Presidente degli Stati Uniti, Donald Trump, di trasformare Gaza, con tutte le sue macerie e ossa umane, in una nuova “Riviera del Medio Oriente”.

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Per Gaza: le lezioni di umanità e *logos* di Tomaso Montanari

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Tomaso Montanari. *Per Gaza*, con disegni di Marco Sauro. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2025 (126 pp.)

ABSTRACT

This contribution reviews Tomaso Montanari's *Per Gaza* and proposes a reading of the book on the current genocide as an elegy for the Palestinian dead and for the loss of logos and humanity in the contemporary Western world.

Keywords

Gaza, genocide, colonialism, Israele, gente senza-potere, *logos*

Theodor W. Adorno formulò il noto aforisma secondo il quale “scrivere una poesia dopo Auschwitz è un atto di barbarie.” Tomaso Montanari sembra implicitamente opporsi a questa asserzione col suo *Per Gaza*, non perché scrive poesie ma perché usa il registro elegiaco dei poeti che piangono la morte di qualcuno. In questo caso la morte di decine e decine di migliaia di gazawi sotto le bombe israeliane. Piange la morte per genocidio di un “altro popolo” dopo Auschwitz e dimostra che non è un atto di barbarie ma, al contrario, di umanità, l'umanità rimasta a questa nostra parte di mondo che chiamiamo Occidente. Quell'umanità che non chiude gli occhi davanti alla barbarie, questa sì, del massacro in diretta streaming di donne e bambini, giovani e vecchi palestinesi.

Gaza, scrive all'inizio, “è la ‘cosa’ più sconvolgente vissuta dalla mia generazione.” Come si fa a non essere sconvolti davanti alle immagini che arrivano sui nostri device elettronici? Eppure, non tutti rimangono sconvolti, sicuramente non i media mainstream, non i governanti italiani, europei e occidentali quasi tutti. Continua Montanari: “Ingenuo, avevo sempre pensato che se il mondo avesse visto cosa succedeva ad Auschwitz sarebbe insorto, spazzando via il nazismo. Mi sbagliavo...” (11). Allo stesso modo, si sbagliava quell'attivista palestinese che una decina di anni fa con il cellulare in mano disse: “We will not have another Nakba, because now we have this. We have a smartphone. We have Facebook. They will try to drive us away

again, but everyone will see it and stop it. In '48 we had no smartphones, no Facebook. Now it will not happen.”¹

Invece è successo di nuovo, dopo la Shoah, dopo la Nakba del '48. “Noi vediamo ripetersi – sottolinea Montanari – ciò che accadde al Ghetto di Varsavia, e non smettiamo nemmeno di vendere armi agli aguzzini. Vediamo cosa indicibili: corpi di bambini straziati, neonati scheletrici morti di fame, vecchi che cadono a terra stecchiti, migliaia di cadaveri lasciati sotto le macerie. E mangiamo e beviamo, e dormiamo, e lavoriamo: come se niente del genere accadesse su una sponda vicinissima del nostro stesso mare” (11). Insomma, siamo nella “zona di interesse,” dove curiamo il nostro giardino incuranti dei fumi delle camere a gas del lager accanto.

È facile allora cadere nella tentazione di pensare che le parole sono inutili, inadeguate, vuote. E, tuttavia, il rettore di Siena insiste che “è alle parole che dobbiamo ricorrere, se vogliamo fermare ciò che accade: perché le parole – nude, povere, inermi – sono l'unico strumento dei senza-potere” (11). È questo, infatti, il refrain principale del libro: da una parte ci sono quelli che hanno il potere, il potere di fermare il genocidio e non lo fanno, dall'altra coloro che si oppongono ma non hanno il potere di fermarlo. Da una parte, per riprendere le parole della poesia di Haidar al-Ghazali posta in esergo al libro, i giovani che si sollevano nelle università e vengono promossi all'esame di umanità, dall'altra chi non si presenta neppure a quest'esame.

Se volessimo continuare con questa figura, potremmo dire che il libro è scritto per coloro che vogliono sostenere questo esame ma anche per coloro che non vogliono sostenerlo: coloro che lavorano nell'ambito della conoscenza (gli intellettuali) e coloro che lavorano nell'ambito dell'informazione (i giornalisti), entrambi spesso scandalosamente impreparati a riconoscere l'umanità dell'altro.

Ecco allora che i vari capitoletti, intervallati dai disegni di Marco Sauro, possono assumere la valenza altamente politica di lezioni di umanità. Lezioni teoriche e pratiche, poiché molti di essi corrispondono all'azione del gruppo “Ultimo giorno di Gaza,” che ha promosso numerose manifestazioni dei senza-potere in Italia contro il genocidio in corso.

Uno dei primi capitoli, intitolato “La famiglia al-Najjr: la strage degli innocenti,” è dedicato alla pediatra dell'ospedale Nasser che tornando a casa trova nove dei suoi dieci figli ammazzati dai missili israeliani, insieme al marito ferito e poi morto anch'egli. Montanari vede questa strage come un martirio di medievale memoria o la trama orripilante ordita da un romanziere sadico: “una pediatra che va al lavoro per salvare i bambini in quella situazione estrema, e lì viene raggiunta dallo sterminio dei propri figli. Un abisso su cui non si riesce a tenere fissi gli occhi” (23). Non può mancare, allora, il riferimento alla fuga della Sacra Famiglia da Betlemme per sottrarre bambino Gesù alla strage ordinata da Erode.

Un altro capitolo si intitola “La trappola mortale degli aiuti,” quella della cosiddetta Gaza Humanitarian Foundation” costituita nel febbraio 2025, fra America e Israele. È

“l’organizzazione più disumana che si potrebbe immaginare. . . strumento diabolico del genocidio” (39), chiamata “umanitaria” secondo la pratica orwelliana della tortura delle parole cui assistiamo da tempo. Più di 1000 palestinesi sono stati uccisi da questa fondazione “umanitaria” mentre cercavano da mangiare, compreso quel bambino noto come “il piccolo Amir di Gaza” che aveva baciato la mano al contractor dopo aver ricevuto una porzione di cibo. Pure lui ucciso mentre si allontanava con le sue piccole cose. Inaspettatamente, Montanari omette dal suo racconto sia la storia straziante del piccolo Amir sia della piccola Hind Rajab; non quella però di Mohamed Ramez Al-Sultan di 14 anni, anche lui assassinato da Israele, e noto alle cronache come il “Pelé palestinese”. Grazie a un altro calciatore ben più famoso, l’egiziano Salah, è stata denunciata la vergogna del sistema mediatico occidentale che omette di dire chi uccide chi, cioè che il bambino era stato ammazzato dall’esercito israeliano.

Poi si passa al giornalisticidio nel capitolo “Senza testimoni,” quelli di cui i capi israeliani hanno paura perché potrebbero “finire come i gerarchi nazisti che i loro genitori e nonni hanno braccato, catturato e condannato a morte” (49). E qui la lezione è anche quella di Norberto Bobbio che parlava dell’importanza di “non lasciare a chi ha il monopolio della forza, anche quello della verità” (50): la verità calpestata nel contesto del “penoso stato del giornalismo italiano (con poche, luminose e eccezioni)” (49).

Seguono tre capitoli in riferimento alle iniziative del gruppo “Ultimo giorno di Gaza”: “Sudari,” “Campane per casa,” “I nomi dei bambini di Gaza.” Azioni di massa, fra reale e virtuale, largamente ignorate dai media mainstream. Perché? “Il motivo può essere solo uno: il distacco tra popolo e classi dirigenti” (73). Il capitolo “Global Sumud Flotilla” è dunque dedicato all’azione più potente dei senza-potere, a quei folli, che, come sulla famosa nave dipinta nella visione del pittore fiammingo Hieronymus Bosch, sono stati più saggi dei veri pazzi che da terra hanno deriso chi voleva portare umanità laddove veniva negata: col paradosso, uno di tanti che “a differenza di Socrate o Gandhi, la Flotilla non disobbediva a leggi ingiuste, no. La Flotilla rispettava scrupolosamente la legge, per denunciare la prepotenza di chi non lo fa” (95).

Al nesso fra Shoah e Nakba e al ritorno al colonialismo primonovecentesco, con l’orwelliano “piano di pace” che doveva interrompere la “guerra,” sono dedicati gli ultimi capitoli, in cui questo nesso è rilevato con amaro sarcasmo: “Immaginate se qualcuno avesse trattato con Hitler, e non con gli ebrei, proponendo la fine della Shoah in cambio di una cessione dei beni delle vittime, e di sovranità sulle loro vite. E con la minaccia di accendere i forni, se gli ebrei avessero rifiutato” (113).

Il volumetto si conclude con il capitolo “Genocidio, ancora” e con parole molto chiare. “Dobbiamo dire con tutta la nostra voce che l’Italia, nella sua storia repubblicana, non si era mai macchiata di un crimine così orribile. Chi non si oppone a un genocidio compiuto da un proprio alleato, chi non lo previene, chi lo facilita, chi in qualsiasi modo partecipa, potrà – dovrà

– risponderne in un processo” (121-22). Certo, adesso il diritto internazionale vale “fino a un certo punto” (ministro degli esteri italiano vergognosamente *dixit*), ma in futuro potrà avvenire che la Corte penale internazionale accerti le responsabilità personali di Meloni, Tajani, Crosetto, oltre che dei vertici della Leonardo e degli altri mercanti d’armi” (121).

Siamo lontani da questo futuro. Anzi, il presente è quello in cui le maschere della civiltà e del diritto sono cadute e il volto, troppe volte mostruoso dell’Occidente, viene di nuovo mostrato, questa volta senza infingimenti. Ma Montanari ci ricorda che: “Noi siamo Gaza. Siamo la civiltà millenaria del nostro Mediterraneo, in cui alberi, monumenti cibo sono gli stessi nostri. . . è lì che si gioca il nostro stesso futuro” (124). Se Gaza muore, moriamo insieme ad essa: “per questo noi dobbiamo salvare Gaza: perché è Gaza che salva noi” (124).

Secondo Hannah Arendt, “sheer violence is mute” (Arendt 1958, 26), e dunque violenza e linguaggio (poetico e non) si escludono a vicenda. Secondo Heike Schotten invece questa ipotesi è falsa e ciò è provato dall’attuale genocidio a Gaza, sul quale vi è una proliferazione di discorsi che non solo dicono delle terribili violenze subite dai palestinesi, ma anche della trasparenza delle intenzioni dell’oppressore israeliano espresse in parole spaventosamente chiare: “questi sono animali umani,” disse il ministro della difesa israeliano all’indomani del 7 ottobre. Ci lamentiamo dell’apparente impossibilità di descrivere la Nakba di Gaza, ma secondo Schotten non è tanto l’impossibilità di farlo attraverso il linguaggio quanto di farlo dando senso a questa violenza “within the parameters of meaning-making afforded us by so-called logic, reason, and morality, much less the versions of government, state, and citizen enshrined in the ‘international rules-based order’” (Schotten 2024, 7).

Insomma, non si tratterebbe tanto dell’incompatibilità tra *logos*-come-linguaggio e violenza, quanto la nostra incapacità di dare un senso a questa violenza nei limiti disposti dal *logos*-come-ragione e l’ordine di regole che ne scaturisce. Frantz Fanon, a proposito dell’odio razziale che era costretto a subire in quanto nero, scrisse:

J'étais en butte quelque chose d'irraisonné. Les psychanalystes disent que pour le jeune enfant il n'y a rien de plus traumatisant que le contact du rationnel. Je dirai personnellement que, pour un homme qui n'a comme arme que la raison, il n'y a rien de plus névrotique que le contact de l'irrationnel (Fanon 1952, 95).

Questo libro prova a fare i conti con questa nevrosi dell’Occidente, che da un lato si considera il padre della ragione e dall’altro ne diventa il suo killer. Questo libro cerca il senso smarrito del *logos* come ragione con le possibilità del *logos* come linguaggio, cioè con parole ‘toccanti’, che vogliono ancora provare a raggiungere l’umano rimasto dentro l’Occidente.²

Note

¹ <https://www.972mag.com/israelis-atrocity-denial-gaza/>

² I proventi dei diritti d’autore del libro vengono devoluti alla Culture and Free Thought Association (<https://web.cfta-ps.org/>) attiva nella Striscia di Gaza.

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