INTRODUCTION / INTRODUZIONE

DIVERSITY, DECOLONISATION, AND ITALIAN STUDIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Diversity and Decolonisation: Two Contrasting and Multifaceted Terms

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Structure of the Volume

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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