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## On Belonging, Difference and Whiteness: Italy's Problem with Immigration

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**ON BELONGING, DIFFERENCE AND WHITENESS: ITALY'S PROBLEM  
WITH IMMIGRATION**

A Dissertation Presented

by

FLAVIA M. STANLEY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2015

Department of Anthropology

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## **DEDICATION**

To the memory of my parents, Timothy W. Stanley and Nadegsda Leon Stanley.

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## ABSTRACT

### ON BELONGING, DIFFERENCE AND WHITENESS: ITALY'S PROBLEM WITH IMMIGRATION

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In the past thirty years, Italy has transitioned from a nation defined in part by a history of emigration, to a nation where immigration and attendant issues surrounding increased cultural and ethno-racial diversity dominates as a national concern. The research presented in this dissertation illustrates the ways in which, within this context, immigration is promoted and perceived unequivocally as a “problem” and a “threat.” However, rather than discussing *Italy's immigration problem*, the issue here is recast as *Italy's problem with immigration*. Despite deep regional differences and identities that continue to exist, increased immigration and the permanent settlement of non-Italians in Italy have reified Italian national identity. In this dissertation, based on 15 months of ethnographic research undertaken between 2001-2005, the perspective of Italians who interacted with immigrants on a regular basis is discussed and analyzed. The perspective of Italians, and their views on how their lives are affected by immigration, enables an understanding of the positioning of immigration as a threat and helps uncover which immigrant groups are most threatening and why. It also brings context to how Italians,

through their ideas about the incorporation of culturally and physically racialized groups, perceive “otherness” in order to then define and more clearly recognize themselves.

Ultimately I argue that not only has a particular version of Italianness emerged out of Italy’s problem with immigration, but that the category of “Italian” contains something relatively new: a racial privilege, indeed, a whiteness, that is connected to being Italian, and connected to being European.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*We have made Italy; now we must make Italians.*

—Massimo d’Azeglio

Every Fourth of July, my mother, who was born and raised in Italy until she met and married my American father and emigrated to the United States, would scoff at the shows of American patriotism, referring to the rampant flag-waving and the elaborate firework displays as “vulgar.” “We don’t do that in Italy,” she would say with an air of superiority. My father, a Connecticut-born Yankee (as my mother referred to him at times), who enjoyed national holidays featuring parades and fanfare, would sometimes counter her. The issue would become a family debate. But my mother held a trump card; she had lived through fascism in Italy, had lost both of her parents during the war and knew first hand how dangerous nationalism could be. Given her experience and perspective, my father, my siblings and I conceded to not display or wave flags at home, and learned to expect lectures (and outbursts in Italian) on Independence Day, during televised Olympic events, and indeed any time American patriotism was on display. Eventually I agreed with my mother’s critiques and would join in the ritual polemics on nationalism.

It is partly through this “immersion” in my mother’s worldview and her experiences, that I initially became interested in anthropological inquiry through ethnography and, more specifically, decided to focus my research in Italy on issues of

nationalism, immigration and race. Over and over again, I have thought back to my mother's statements about nationalism and Italy, especially while I was in Rome conducting research during 15 months between 2001 and 2005, and again while writing this dissertation. While fascism itself had taught her about the dangers of nationalism, she maintained that the word "Italian" held very little meaning for most people in Italy and that local culture and identity mattered more than national identity. "There is no such thing as Italian, we are Romans, or Sicilians, or Venetians..." she reminded me when I first left for Italy to begin this research.

This idea that the term "Italian" is a complicated and perhaps empty qualifier is not my mother's idea alone. In fact, scholars and historians tend to note the fundamental role that regionalism has played, and continues to play, in Italian society and politics. Massimo d'Azeglio's famous and oft-quoted statement written about the unification of Italy in 1861 points not only to the truth of Benedict Anderson's description of nation-states as "imagined communities," but also to the particular "weak nationalism" said to characterize Italy since unification. Despite the nationalism that arose during World War II,<sup>1</sup> cultural politics of difference and regionalism have always been an important factor to consider in Italy. Tensions between regions that existed before unification still exist; these tensions range from quotidian concerns such as sports, cuisine and dialect to larger and potentially fracturing tensions resulting from the continued social and economic marginalization of southern Italians compared to the north. So what, if anything, makes

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<sup>1</sup> Mantovan (2003) argues that fascism in Italy and its aftermath were part of the political and social upheaval that have contributed to a lack of national identity in Italy. Mantovan states that Communist and Catholic ideologies that emerged post-fascism in Italy served to divide the country until the 1990s, furthering the lack of a "national binding-force" (2003:256) as well as that the experience of fascism made Italian citizens more wary of nationalist ideologies.

Italians *feel* like Italians as opposed to aligning themselves more regionally as Romans, Sicilians or Venetians? In Italy, as in many other nation-states, the role of the “other,” or the “non-Italian,” provides a necessary and effective pressure for Italians to define themselves in terms of the nation; in order for any “us”-versus-“them” dynamic to exist, there first must *be* an “other.” In Italy, I argue that it is plausible that despite deep regional differences and identities, *increased immigration and the permanent settlement of non-Italians* in Italy has created the conditions that finally, “*makes*” *Italians*. This compelling dynamic/problematic provided the framework for my research in Italy and now sets the stage for this dissertation more broadly.

### **Italy’s immigration “problem”**

In the past thirty years, Italy has transitioned from a nation defined in part by a history of emigration, to a nation where immigration and attendant issues surrounding increased cultural and ethno-racial diversity dominates as a national concern. Since the late 1970’s there has been a steady increase in the numbers of non-Italians immigrating to Italy, growing from less than 1 percent of the population, pre- and through the 1990s, to 3.5 to 4.5 percent between 2001 and 2005 when I did my fieldwork, to about 8 percent by 2013.<sup>2</sup> While it is arguable whether any of these percentages are cause for the degree of concern that exists in Italy, it is clear that from the onset, Italians have perceived immigration to represent a significant problem, regardless of actual numbers and percentages of immigrants in relation to Italian born citizens themselves.

A poll conducted in 1991 provides a case in point to illustrate this issue: despite the fact that immigrant residents accounted for less than 1 percent of the total population

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics for 1990’s through 2005 (Favazza and Pia 2006:2); Statistics for 2013: ISTAT.

in Italy at the time, 78 percent of Italian respondents felt the number of immigrants was too high while only 43 percent had an awareness of the actual dimensions of foreign migration (Mai 2002:77). Similarly, in 2007, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project showed that 94 percent of Italians polled perceived immigration to be a "big problem" with 64 percent of them indicating it to be a "very big problem." Furthermore, the percentage of Italians who felt immigration to be a very big problem was the highest of the 47-nation survey, and was at least 20 percent higher than Spain, Germany and France (Horowitz 2010). Indeed, studies about popular discourse and debate in the media, as well as increasingly draconian laws restricting the ability of immigrants to reside in Italy long-term, reinforce the sentiment of the majority of Italians, which these polls communicate.

However, the degree to which immigration in Italy is *really* a problem and for exactly whom this problem exists must be questioned. Indeed, it has been acknowledged that Italy *needs* immigrants (at least for the time being), as immigration provides a means of sustaining a country and economy where birthrates are among the lowest in Europe and have fallen below replacement levels. Anthropologist Elizabeth Krause exposes the way in which Italian demographers have successfully created a near panic in Italy around low fertility and the "looming demise" of Italians. Krause also describes the way that the media often juxtaposes Italy's low birth rate with stories about growing immigrant populations, thereby bolstering immigration as a threat rather than as a boon to Italy (Krause 2006). It is in this way that the alarmism about Italy's low birth rates feeds into the alarmism about immigration such that the two issues become paradoxically and irrationally connected. In response, State programs and policies have focused on

encouraging the fertility of Italian-born women<sup>3</sup> while the access of immigrants to Italian citizenship remains limited.

The research presented here will illustrate the way in which, within this context, immigration is promoted and perceived unequivocally as a “problem” and a “threat” while “Italian” becomes reified as a national identity. Instead of looking at the immigration problem in Italy, one aim of this dissertation is to understand and re-cast the issue as *Italy’s problem with immigration*. Specifically, in this work, I look at the perspective of Italians themselves, especially those who interacted with immigrants on a regular basis, in order to learn how they see their lives being affected by the presence of non-Italians. This perspective enables an understanding of, the positioning of immigration as a threat, which immigrant groups are most threatening and why; it also helps bring context to how Italians, through their ideas about the incorporation of culturally and physically *racialized* groups perceive “otherness” in order to then define and more clearly recognize themselves. Ultimately I argue that not only has a particular version of “Italianness” emerged out of Italy’s problem with immigration, but that the category of Italian contains something relatively new: a racial privilege, a whiteness-connected to being Italian, and connected to being European.

The following section will summarize the methods I employed in the field during data collection including a description of my experience in the field and my research trajectory, how my questions and research interests evolved, and my choice of field-sites. Finally I provide an outline to the chapters that follow this introduction.

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<sup>3</sup> Krause and Marchesi, 2007.

## **Fieldwork and Methods**

This dissertation is based on a total of 15 months of fieldwork conducted over the course of three separate trips to Rome, Italy. These trips took place from February through July of 2001, from January through July of 2004, and during June and July of 2005. When I first began this project in 2001, my research questions were broad and intended to help refine my understanding of Italian responses to immigration.<sup>4</sup> During this initial trip, I conducted participant observation at San Pietro<sup>5</sup>, an organization that provides a multitude of services to newly arrived immigrants. Through this period of participant observation, I developed a series of themes and questions and embarked on a more multi-sited approach that informed my second trip to Rome in 2004 and 2005. I present my research trajectory in a chronological way, beginning first with the preliminary dissertation research that I began in February of 2001.

### **Rome 2001: Participant observation at San Pietro**

During the years of my fieldwork, Rome was home to a high number of immigrants.<sup>6</sup> Despite this, there was a notable gap in the anthropological literature on immigration issues in this region. Contemporary anthropological work at this time tended to focus on the lives of immigrants and how immigrants were affected by state-level

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<sup>4</sup> Initially, I kept my research questions deliberately broad, to allow for “questions to lead to methodology (rather than vice-versa)” (Nader 1974:284).

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the names of organizations I visited and informants I write about and/or quote have been changed to preserve anonymity.

<sup>6</sup> Lazio and mainly in and around Rome—estimates ranged from about 5-6% of the population, which had risen to 10% by 2013.

policies and local prejudices.<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Cole's 1997 ethnography, *The New Racism in Europe*, stood apart from this trend by focusing on Southern Italians' experience and response to the increasing presence of immigrants. I became interested in contributing to this area, *how Italians were reacting to and being affected by immigration*, in my work. I felt strongly that looking at Italian responses to immigration was an essential aspect of understanding the immigration "problem."

Laura Nader's (1974) call for anthropologists to "study up" provided a methodological inspiration for this project. Her call represented a shift in anthropology to include ethnographic fieldwork among the more powerful and more privileged. My aim became to "study up" in Italy among Italians in Rome. I focused specifically on Italians who were either working directly with immigrants or on *behalf* of immigrants as is the case for example with service providers, directors and administrators for organizations like San Pietro. Anthropologist Janis Steele (2000) provides insight into this dynamic as she posits that social service agencies and their representatives are not neutral but instead act as *defacto* "cultural mediaries" who are in unique positions to construct and negotiate difference in their encounters with foreigners. Applying this analysis to the case of Italian immigration clarified for me the way in which, regardless of their individual economic status, Italians working on the frontlines of immigration had certain citizen-related privileges compared to their immigrant clients. I therefore decided to integrate both participant observation and ethnographic interview methodologies into my research. This combination of methods enabled me to put myself into spaces where I could observe

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Angel-Ajani 2000 and Carter 1997.

Italian and immigrant interactions directly as well as talk with them about their experiences and concerns about immigration.

I began by visiting the municipality of Rome's special immigration office to interview an "official" hereby referred to as "Paolo." Paolo requested anonymity because he wanted to speak frankly, particularly once I described my research interests and my hope that he might make recommendations about organizations where I might access employees who provide services for immigrants. Paolo told me that Rome was simultaneously under-prepared and overwhelmed by the number of immigrants and their needs. Although the city did provide services to immigrants, he insisted that the inefficiency and bureaucracy of local government would make my getting permission to conduct participant observation within governmental organizations exceedingly difficult if not impossible. He suggested that I seek out the numerous *non*-governmental organizations that provided services for immigrants such as soup kitchens, temporary housing (etc.) as well as free Italian language classes.

Although I was somewhat disappointed by Paolo's deflection and his inability to lead me to what I had hoped would be a cascade of contacts and potential research sites, I was excited to learn of the existence of free language classes for immigrants. I immediately saw the potential in placing myself in language classes where the interactions between *Italian* teacher and *foreign* student might yield insights regarding the construction of national identity and otherness. Finding a site that would allow me access to observe and participate in language classes then became my primary goal.

Ultimately, perhaps sensing my disappointment, Paolo suggested I visit San Pietro, one of Italy's major Catholic charity organizations. San Pietro also had an entire

branch devoted to immigration services and research. Paolo then handed me a booklet written for immigrants that was in Italian, French, Spanish, English and Arabic. This booklet provided information about services for newly arrived immigrants and became a useful guide for me as well. When I read the guide, I noted that much of the information had been compiled by San Pietro and that the organization had numerous immigration centers in and around Rome. I also noted that they had a program devoted to providing free Italian classes to immigrants.

The next day, I visited San Pietro's center for immigrants in Rome's city center.<sup>8</sup> Although I describe my "arrival story" more thoroughly in Chapter 2, my experience attempting to get access at San Pietro significantly differed from my experience in other potential field sites through "official" channels, as the interaction with Paolo conveys. In essence, at San Pietro, I was met with enthusiasm and open arms once I explained myself and my purpose. I received permission to visit and take part in any of the Italian classes I wanted although the individual instructors had to also give permission. Additionally, I was granted access to other areas of San Pietro's immigration center including the spaces where immigrants first showed up to receive services and their intake interview sessions; these sessions involved newly arrived immigrants providing explanations for his/her purpose for being in Italy and was the key to their capacity to access the services provided by San Pietro and other organizations.

For the six months of fieldwork in 2001, I spent most weekdays at San Pietro. As an exchange, I worked as a volunteer in the administrative office, updating the database,

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<sup>8</sup> Although there were other centers for immigrants in other areas near Rome (and indeed in other cities and counties all over Italy), the one in Rome's city center was the largest and most comprehensive branch.

filing records and completing whatever tasks existed that I was capable of fulfilling. This research/exchange enabled the people who worked at San Pietro to get to know *me*, and thus created an ease in our interactions that was very hard to reproduce at other organizations I visited and with whom I established ties. This relationship also provided the opportunity for conversations to occur organically; some of the richest and most informative discussions I was able to have during my fieldwork occurred in this way, providing insights that more structured interviews failed to provide.

During participant observation, I kept fieldnotes where I recorded my daily interactions and observations; I took notes during interviews I conducted. I also maintained a journal in which I recorded my preliminary analyses and thoughts after reviewing my fieldnotes. This journal became a place where I noted ideas and themes of interest that could inform questions during future fieldwork. I also kept track of newspapers and clipped immigration-related newspaper articles, and took notes on news programs and talk shows to inform my understanding. Formally scheduled interviews were generally recorded (with permission) for transcription later. These methods were applied similarly in future fieldwork trips as well.

In addition to learning more about the construction of national identity in the context of increasing immigration and cultural/ethnic diversity in Italy, my preliminary thematic analyses of my fieldnotes led to my observation of a recurring emergent theme: that differential notions of immigrant groups permeated the actions and language of those working at San Pietro and that these notions were reflected more broadly in Italian society, setting up a hierarchy of immigrant groups which (at that point in time) positioned Albanians at the lowest level. Furthermore, even among the staff and teachers

sympathetic to immigrants, I noted that they rarely challenged dominant ideas differential notions of immigrant groups, especially when it came to Albanians.

This theme led to my interest to further understand the disdain for the Albanian immigrant. I also wanted to better understand what kinds of programs and activities existed in Rome that fostered the integration of immigrants into Italian society; I wanted to learn from the perspectives of those on the “front-lines” of integration about how they envisioned a multi-ethnic Italian society. These themes and questions became a central focus during my return to the field in 2004 and 2005.

### **Rome 2004 and 2005: Multi-sited research**

When I went back to Rome to complete my dissertation research for seven months in 2004 and over the summer of 2005, I went back to expand on the themes and questions that had emerged in 2001 and to cast a wider net to understand some of the dynamics and issues that I had observed. My methods were similar in many ways to those in 2001. However, in addition to going back to San Pietro about once a week to sit in on classes and observe what and who had changed, I decided to conduct multi-sited research to follow-up on these new directions in my research.

Multi-sited research is in part a misnomer, as any ethnographic research project, including my research in 2001, draws from multiple avenues and sources, and attempts to connect lived experience with theory. However, as George Marcus discussed in his seminal essay, *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography* (1995), the term “multi-sited” as applied to anthropological research refers to the move away from single-site locations in order to better “follow” local issues that are influenced by larger-than-local cultural phenomena (from regional to national to

global influences and issues). Multi-sited broadly refers to employing classic ethnographic field methods in multiple locations, and among diverse stakeholders. Marcus notes, “multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites” (1995:104). What multi-sited means is expansive, and is even perhaps somewhat nebulous; those writing of it as a general approach<sup>9</sup> use broad terms perhaps necessarily, as multi-sited methods are as specific as every research project that employs them.

Following Marcus, my own multi-sited research might be best labeled as a “strategically situated” ethnographic project, which refers to doing research in a single-site and then “following” themes, conflicts or connections into multiple sites and locations to determine if “cultural phenomena in one site...is reproduced [or resisted] elsewhere” (Marcus 1995:111). From doing in-depth participant observation at San Pietro, I developed themes and questions that I felt needed further exploration in other contexts, and from other points of view. I decided to locate other organizations and interview Italians with different approaches to immigration, especially those with more activist and advocacy-oriented missions. I established connections at two other organizations in Rome, Casa Dei Diritti and Sant’Angelo; I chose them not only because they provided similar services as San Pietro, such as referrals to soup kitchens, temporary housing and medical care and free Italian language classes but because of their reputation for being more progressive.

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<sup>9</sup> Other notable articles explaining multi-sited methods: Hannertz 2003, Coleman and von Hellerman 2011, and Marcus 2011.

At Casa Dei Diritti and Sant'Angelo, I interviewed staff, including teachers and representatives of the organizations and I attended some language classes in each location; while I found it difficult to establish the kind of rapport that existed for me at San Pietro, my connection to the individuals in these organizations led me to many of the immigration-related rallies, discussions and events that I attended in my effort to better understand the integration and incorporation of immigrants into Italian society. In 2004 especially, I attended a wide variety of intercultural events, from community panels and discussions about integration to intercultural and multicultural events and festivals. I also attended rallies, protests and demonstrations about immigration. I cast my "net" very wide in these locations, talking to many people, from Italian activists to immigrants.

These connections and the discussions I had with people attending the conferences, discussions and rallies led to opportunities and sites that I would have missed if I had stayed doing research in a single-site. From these connections, for example, I met an Eritrean woman who gave intercultural presentations about her culture in some of Rome's junior high schools; I not only was able to attend one of her presentations, but she put me in touch with two other people whom I was able to interview who did similar presentations. An Italian man, who I met at an art exhibit featuring photographic portraits of Italians of mixed ethno-racial origins, put me in touch with a group of Italian activists and immigrants who had taken over an abandoned building in the outskirts of Rome; they had been able to broker a deal with the local government that not only allowed them to stay but also gave them access to electricity and hot water. I was able to visit the building once before my research ended and was given a tour of the building, which included dormitories for immigrants and a coffee

shop. They even offered on-site Italian language classes and had recruited law students to come in once a week to provide residents with help in obtaining residency papers.

Overall I continued to focus on interviewing and observing Italians working on the frontlines of immigration; however, by positioning myself into situations where Italians and immigrants interacted, I was also introduced to immigrants seeking services, taking language classes or participating in multi-cultural activities. As was the case when I did research at San Pietro, some of these interactions led to informal conversations, to more formal interviews and even to longstanding friendships. Therefore, although this research is primarily about Italian responses to immigration, the perspectives and experiences of immigrants informs this dissertation as well.

### **Outline of Dissertation Chapters**

Just as my time doing fieldwork entailed both research and analysis, the chapters that follow provide a similar blend, offering both ethnographic detail as well as theoretical frameworks. Following this introduction, Chapter 2, “San Pietro and the differential ordering of immigrant groups,” provides an ethnographic description of my initial field-site, San Pietro; it was where I gained the insights necessary for me to clarify my research questions and outline my research trajectory. My time at San Pietro is thus important for understanding my research as a whole. In the classrooms, interview areas and offices of San Pietro in which I conducted my participant observation, I came to see the intimate ways that difference was created and lived by people on different “sides” of the immigration issue. This chapter introduces the overarching questions of how Italian identity can be reified in the context of immigration and of how differential notions of immigrants are created and reproduced. In a sense, San Pietro provided a microcosm in

which I could study the immigration “problem” in Italy, as both a policy and programming issue for the State and as an experience lived by Italians and immigrants themselves.

In Chapter 3, “On the integration of immigrants,” I take a step back from questions related to how issues related to the immigration problem play out “on the ground” in order to focus on a discussion of state-level policies and laws that are meant to facilitate the integration of immigrants into Italian society. This chapter engages with a particular aspect of immigration laws themselves; on one hand these laws facilitate the economic and cultural integration of immigrants into Italian society; however, they simultaneously deny them political rights by restricting the ability to gain Italian citizenship. Through this broader perspective, I draw from insights from my own research and observation as well as from other sources. I conclude that immigration and citizenship laws make becoming an Italian (citizen) difficult to achieve for immigrants; furthermore, I argue that the powerful persistence of phenotype in determining who is and who is not Italian makes a multicultural Italy practically impossible to imagine.

Chapter 4, “The ‘Albanian Question’,” looks at the positioning of Albanians as the most dangerous and disliked group during the time of my research. I argue that root of Italian fears regarding Albanians were connected to phenotype in ways that thwarted mainstream ideas about racial hierarchies. An investigation into the Albanian question unmasks Italian as a racial category and indicates that those groups most closely phenotypically aligned with ideas of what Italians “look like” are in fact viewed as the most dangerous; furthermore, this is not because they are inherently “other,” but rather because they have the ability to *pass* as Italian.

Chapter 5, “Prejudice, privilege and passing in Italy: bringing whiteness theory into the discussion,” expands on ideas about phenotype linked to Italian identity presented in Chapters 3 and 4 connects it to theories of whiteness through a theoretical exploration of the dominant paradigms at work in studies of immigration in Europe in general, and in Italy in particular. Reviewing and analyzing work done in both the new racism and whiteness frameworks, this chapter provides an understanding of theories that have been implemented or operationalized by scholars interested in race, nationalism, and immigration. This discussion serves to unmask “Italian” as a privileged category that masquerades as unmarked white; I argue that it is this *unmarked white* characteristic of being “Italian” that serves as the ultimate barrier to citizenship in a land where immigrants can ostensibly assimilate.

Chapter 6, “Conclusion: citizenship, whiteness, and belonging in/to Italy and Europe,” provides a discussion of the meanings conveyed by the keywords “citizenship,” “nationality,” “Italian” and “European” in order to reveal how whiteness and white privilege in Italy and in Europe is produced and reproduced. I argue that the discourses surrounding nationality and citizenship cast populations into disparate categories, which confer differential notions of belonging. Furthermore, as European citizenship is extended to citizens of member states, the status of non-Italian (and non-European) immigrants becomes all the more precarious, as they are effectively excluded from political rights but included in the European economy in the form of exploited labor.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SAN PIETRO AND THE DIFFERENTIAL ORDERING OF IMMIGRANT GROUPS**

#### **Introduction**

About one month after I started going to the free Italian classes offered to immigrants by San Pietro in Rome, I was sitting in on Marina's class for beginners. Class began with everyone answering the teacher's question "chi sei" (who are you) and "di dove sei" (where are you from). In response, everyone offered their name in answer to 'who are you' and gave their country of origin. That day, four of the students came from South America (two from Ecuador, one from Chile and one from Argentina), two were from Guinea in Africa, three were from India and two had come from the Ukraine. Next, Marina prompted us to answer the question "Chi sono" (who are they) in reference to the rest of the class. This time the class was stumped. I was stumped. Who are 'they' I thought, and what makes them a 'they' other than that they are immigrants and from all over the world? After silence and sheepish glances from the class, Marina offered an answer and pointed to the class in a sweeping gesture: Sono studenti (they are students). The class began to look through their vocabulary lists to figure out some answers and we went around the room again, Marina asking each student "chi sono?," and the student standing up to answer. Most of the answers were predictable and ranged from using Marina's example "Sono studenti," to using other commonly used vocabulary like, "sono stranieri" (they are foreigners), to "sono immigrati" (they are immigrants). At one point, however, a young man from Ecuador stood up, and with a wry grin pointed to the class

and offered another possibility. “Sono turisti” (they are tourists). Everyone, including myself and the teacher, burst into prolonged and somewhat cathartic laughter.

This was the kind of moment I had been searching for in choosing an organization providing services to immigrants as one of my field sites; moments where the line between ‘us’ (Italians) and ‘them’ (immigrants), as well as the positionality of being an immigrant, were clearly delineated and expressed. In this case, the humor of the situation made light of the fact that the students in this class were anything but tourists; they, as well as the teacher and myself, were well aware of their vulnerable statuses as newcomers to Italy, who wanted to learn the language not out a desire for worldliness or for college credit, but as a necessary tool towards making a life and a living in a country that was defining itself through a history of emigration and with a sense of under-preparedness regarding the increasing numbers of foreign residents.

I begin this chapter with the Italian school at San Pietro, primarily discussing my observations of the setting, the materials used and interactions between the teachers and the students because that was my original goal for fieldwork at San Pietro. In the following section, I discuss some of the other sites at San Pietro where I was able to spend time: behind the “sportello” (teller window) in San Pietro’s waiting room, at the intake interview sessions to document the experience and the needs of the immigrants seeking resources, and in the administrative office at San Pietro where I volunteered doing assorted clerical tasks as a kind of exchange for allowing me open access to the classrooms, interview sessions and to the workers.

I then discuss my interviews and discussions with some of the teachers, the workers, and the leadership at San Pietro to help illustrate how ideas about difference

regarding immigrants are expressed. I found that ideas of difference that were expressed by the workers at San Pietro about immigrant groups reflected many of the dominant ideas and anxieties in Italy about immigrants and the national cultures that they were seen to represent; furthermore, such differential notions of immigrant groups were expressed even by those who purported to be sympathetic toward immigrants.

### **La Scuola Italiana (Italian School) at San Pietro**

The only service provided onsite at San Pietro was the free Italian language school for immigrants, which they could attend regardless of their legal status in Italy. The requirement needed for someone to take the classes was the card issued by San Pietro, which showed that they had registered with the organization. The classes were taught by volunteers (predominantly retired school teachers) and ranged from beginning to advanced levels with each immigrant progressing at his or her own pace. The numbers of students fluctuated from day to day, and classes were held for two hours, three times per week.<sup>10</sup> All the beginning classes were held in a few rooms in a small building across a courtyard from San Pietro's "centro ascolto e accoglienza" (listening and reception center) where there was a small library and workspace for teachers. The intermediate and advanced classes were held in various rooms in two other nearby buildings. As such, there was no central meeting place, as once students were initially assigned to classes, they would show up directly to those classrooms. Although it seemed a bit scattered and perhaps lessened the feeling of community among the teachers and learners, after a few months I was able to recognize the core group of students who came regularly.

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<sup>10</sup> This was true for 2001 and 2004, though in 2005, San Pietro had added a literacy class as well.

At first, I attended different classes in each of the levels to get an idea of what was being taught and to get to know the different teachers. There were two beginning classes, one beginning/intermediate class, an intermediate class, and an advanced class. When I first arrived as a participant observer, the students would pass from level to level and from teacher to teacher but about two months later, at a teachers' meeting, those teaching the beginning to intermediate classes decided to follow the same group of students (although there was always fluctuation in attendance and new students to incorporate) from beginning through the intermediate levels.<sup>11</sup> This was put into place to not only help develop more rapport between teachers and students but to allow for a continuity of teaching material. The exception to this change in 2001 was the teacher of the advanced class, who preferred not to cycle through the other levels.

Although I continued to go between the different classes, the change to the organization of the classes also allowed me to follow and get more acquainted with one teacher, Roberta, and a group of students, whom I followed on a regular basis until the Italian school ended for the year in late June. Although I will talk more about my conversations with Roberta later in the chapter, for now I will discuss some of the everyday occurrences in the classroom that illuminated the space of difference between teacher and student, Italian and non-Italian.

Educational settings have been discussed by researchers such as Reed-Danahay (1996), Fordham (1996), Pi-Sunyer (1992) and Bauman (2004) as rich sites of the articulations and contestations of national interests and identity. As anthropologist

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<sup>11</sup> When I went back to do more classroom observation in 2005, the teachers were once again assigned to a particular class level. The lead teacher explained that because of the fluctuations in attendance and the fact that there were new students to incorporate nearly every week, the other system wasn't as feasible.

Donald Carter notes, school settings can provide the “context of everyday life in which the social and political contours of . . . the community are negotiated, transformed, and lived” (1997: 9). Indeed, at San Pietro, the Italian classes provided a space for understanding the nuances of the expression of difference, not only between Italian and foreigner, but also the expression and reproduction of the differential visions of immigrant groups in Italian society.

Moments like the scenario I began with, where the division between ‘Italian’ and ‘non-Italian’ became tangible, were common and occurred in some shape and form in nearly every class that I attended.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that language teachers often make use of the specialized vocabulary and experiences of the classroom population. Indeed, based on my own experience taking Italian as a college student on a semester abroad in Florence, and from having been a French teacher in Louisiana lessons and vocabulary is often tailored to the “audience.”<sup>13</sup> However, I argue that especially in the context of classes for immigrants, the commonplace references to the foreignness of students as well as essentialist ideas about immigrant culture and experience reflected the national ideologies and anxieties at the time in Italy regarding immigration.

As stated previously, the demarcation of the line between ‘Italian’ and ‘foreigner’ was commonly expressed. The following example is from a beginner class taught by Francesca who used the San Pietro card (which the students, at least theoretically, had to show in order to get into every class) to highlight the differences in usage between the

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<sup>12</sup> In time that I conducted fieldwork at San Pietro, I attended more than 100 classes.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, in the classes I took in Florence, our categorization as American “college students” was used to build a vocabulary for negotiating our imagined lives. So, for example, the vocabulary might include what to say a party or social gathering with other students (etc.)

verb “essere” (to be) and the verb “avere” (to have). She stated, “I don’t *have* the San Pietro card because I *am* Italian. You (pointing to the students) *have* the San Pietro card because you *are* foreigners.” Amid the many possibilities illuminating the distinction of verb usage, and taking into account the fact that all the students had a San Pietro card and that it was therefore an understandable point of reference, Francesca underscored not only her national identity but marked a clear boundary between herself and the rest of the class.

References to the foreignness of students varied in form and content and depended on the context of the material being introduced to students. In many of the classes that I observed, introductions consisted of the names and nationalities of the students in attendance. Again although this can be seen as a logical point of departure, such moments also enhanced the difference in power and position between teacher and pupil. Roberta, for example, almost always started the class with students stating their name, and their country of origin. One day, Roberta extended the conversation from ‘mi chiamo’ (my name is \_\_\_\_ ) and “sono di” (I am from, for example, the Ukraine) to “sono \_\_\_\_ ” (I am, for example, Ukranian). We went around the room until we got to one man who stated “mi chiamo Daran, sono di Iraq” and then paused as if unsure of what to say next. Roberta prompted him as to what she thought he was searching for and offered, “sono Iraqi” to which Daran stated somewhat angrily “no!” but was unable at the time, due to a limited vocabulary, to explain. Roberta insisted “si, sei di Iraq, sei Iraqi” (you are from Iraq, you are an Iraqi). Daran still did not reply, just shook his head, and Roberta, a little exasperatedly repeated again “sei Iraqi” and indicated that the next student should speak. At this point, Daran’s friend who had more familiarity with Italian, interrupted and

explained that they were Kurdish. Roberta apologized once she realized the source of confusion and said, “*va bene, allora sei Kurdo*” (ok, then you are Kurdish). Daran then offered “*sono Kurdo*”.

This example is interesting because it represented one of the few times that I witnessed a student resist the cultural/ethnic category allotted to him/her. Interestingly, the very next time we congregated as a class, as we were going through the same introductions as the class before, a woman who had been in the previous class revised her statement from making her ethnicity based on nation to “*Mi chiama Olga, sono di Moldova, sono Bulgariana.*” Roberta smiled when she said this and when I talked to her at a later date about the incident, she was sympathetic to the students needing to state their own allegiance of identity. She even offered the importance of regional identity for many Italians as an association. Although these examples were the only notable revisions of the tendency to assign culture and nationality to students in the Italian classes that I witnessed, it points not only to the commonplace categorization of the students but also to some of the problems regarding the categorization of an ‘identity’ that is not based on nation of origin.

Another example points not only to the difference between teacher as “Italian” and student as “foreign” but also to the essentialized views of different immigrant cultures that teachers can have and reproduce in the classroom. One remarkable moment happened in the advanced class one day when Mario asked a student to describe his family. The man, who was from China, used “*le mie moglie*” (my wives) to refer to his wife. Mario laughed and corrected him and stated, “*la mia moglie*” (my wife), and then said “*qui in Italia non diciamo questo*” (here in Italy, we don’t say that), but then

teasingly, he pointed to a man who looked “Arab” and said “ma forse lui puo dire questo” (well maybe he can say that), and the class laughed, including the “Arab” man, who insisted that he didn’t have any wives.

Similarly, one day, in class with Marina, the students were asked to talk about their families. A man from Peru, Jose, said “Io ho dieci fratelli” (I have ten brothers). Marina stopped him at that point, made a surprised face and replied, “avete tanti bambini nel tuo paese, comme in Africa” (you have many children in your country, like it is in Africa). This moment in particular not only highlighted ideas of difference between Italy and ‘underdeveloped’ nations in Africa and South and Central America, but it also reflected a commonly articulated fear regarding Italy’s low birth rate in public discourse.

Although the above examples are particularly striking, ideas about Italy, as opposed to the national cultures that the students represented, were highlighted much more frequently in less consequential ways. In fact, in most of the classes, whenever new vocabulary was introduced and in order to give the students practice talking, the student’s national culture was almost always the point of departure. So for example, in a lesson in a beginning/intermediate class introducing food the teacher’s example, “gli italiani mangiano la pasta” (Italians eat pasta) was followed by statements about the assumed food preferences of the students present and the nations they represented, “i cinesi mangiano il riso” (The Chinese eat rice) and “i russi mangiano le patate” (Russians eat potatoes) and because I was included in the lesson as a participant, my national affiliation was used to state “gli americani mangiano hamburgers.” However mundane and perhaps normal it might seem to use the cultures of the students present as a means of teaching, these moments, whether in using vocabulary about food, or clothing, or types of

dwelling etc., were also spaces where the line between “us” and “them,” between “normal” and “different,” were rendered tangible.

Furthermore, these examples reflect larger discourses of fear around immigrants and their cultures that have been documented by other scholars doing ethnographic research in Italy.<sup>14</sup> In particular, notions of the cultural incompatibility of certain immigrant groups (Arabs having many wives) and the reproductive practices of immigrants not only highlighted supposed cultural differences between students based on their nation of origin, but also reinforced ideas about what it means to be “Italian.” In other words, the differences regarding cultural particularities of certain immigrant cultures also reinforced what Italian is not.

Notions of overall cultural difference between Italians and immigrants were also reproduced and made tangible in the form of materials used in class. There were no official rules regarding what should be used to teach the Italian classes and the teachers at San Pietro used a wide variety of workbook pages copied from various language textbooks, including ones primarily used for tourists. However, there was a handbook in the library at San Pietro that many of the teachers used as it was specifically designed and written by a collective of Italian teachers who taught Italian to immigrants in Bologna. The overall purpose of the handbook was to create lessons that incorporated the experience of the immigrant and which presented a vision of Italy as a multicultural society that includes non-Italians. Despite the intent, essentializing presumptions of the culture of immigrants were embedded in many lessons. Often they promoted views of immigrant life that expressed commonly held fears among Italians regarding

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<sup>14</sup> see Angel-Ajani 2000, Carter 1997, Cole 1997, Krause 2001.

immigration. In fact, some of the pages may have prompted or normalized the “us”-vs.-“them” dynamic in the classrooms at San Pietro.

In lessons to introduce students to vocabulary associated with family relationships, for example, there were two workbook pages used frequently alongside each other.<sup>15</sup> Each page introduces a family and associated vocabulary. One page (Figure A) is entitled “La Famiglia di Veronica” (Veronica’s Family). Veronica’s family is obviously Italian as all the members have Italian names: Giuseppe, Antonio, Maria, Rosa, etc. It consists of a chart showing the relationships between three generations of one family. Two of the Italian couples have two children, one has three children, and one has one child. The other workbook page (Figure B) is entitled “La mia famiglia è numerosa” (My family is large), and shows a portrait of a Muslim family (expressed via the names, Aziz, Leila, Majdo, and by the mother’s headscarf) that has come to Italy to find work. The Muslim family consists of the two parents and five children. On the one hand, Veronica’s family represents population in control (although Veronica’s uncle has only one child, which may symbolize Italy’s fear of a low-birth rate), whereas with Aziz’s family we are told from the title of the page that his family has (too) many children.<sup>16</sup> It is worthwhile to note that while Veronica’s family contains pictures of actual people, Aziz and his family are hand drawn; the family looks friendly, however, as everyone is smiling and the mother and the youngest child are holding hands.

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<sup>15</sup> I was present in three classes, taught by different teachers, when these pages were used. In talking to the staff, I learned that many of the teachers used these pages when teaching a lesson on family.

<sup>16</sup> It is also interesting that the Muslim family is ‘generically Muslim’, in that no specific country of origin is mentioned for Aziz’s family. This may indicate another general boundary between Muslims and Christians or it may refer to an unspoken assumption of Italian identity as Christian.

Figure A.

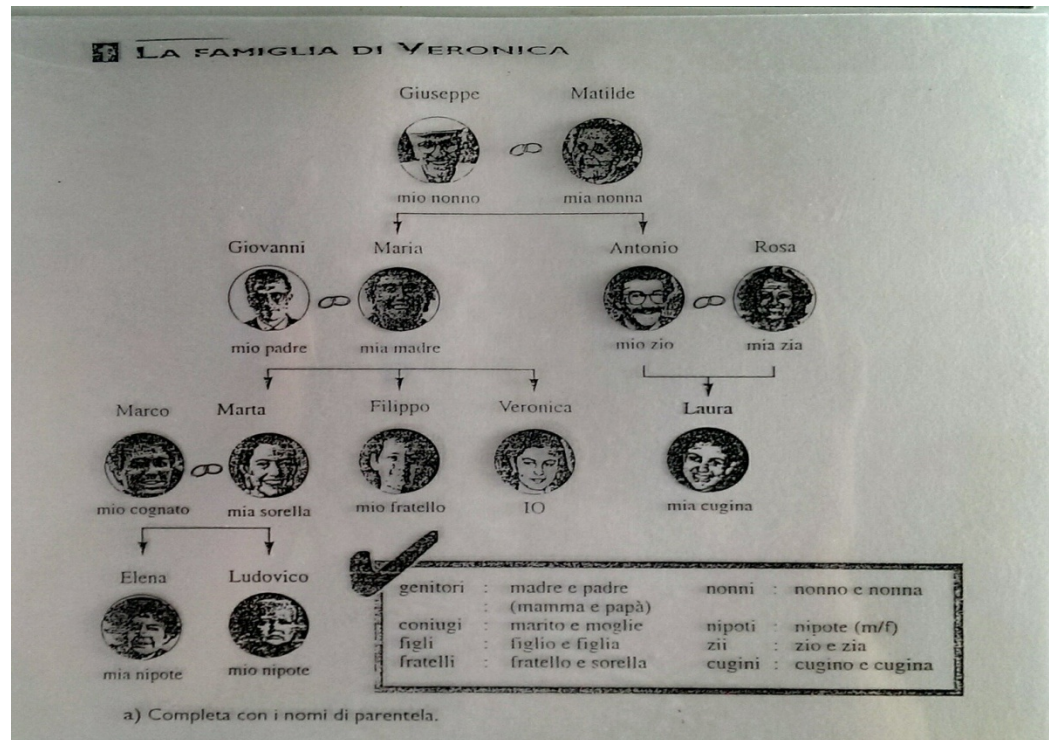
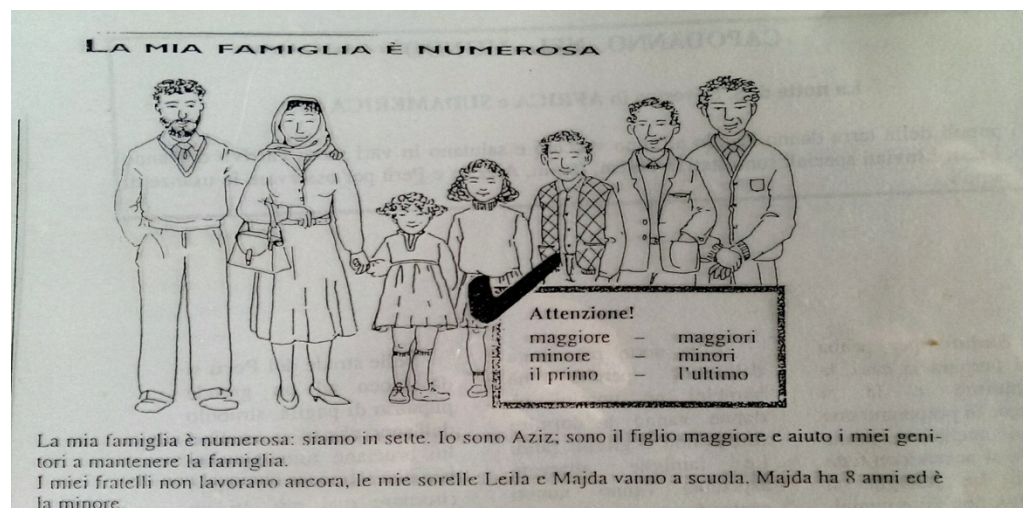


Figure B.



In these two pages, which depict not actual realities, but imagined ones, the underlying message of cultural difference is marked. In this case, as with Marina's statement about Africa and South America, immigrants are represented as having more

children than Italians and recalls fears associated with Italy's low birth rate.<sup>17</sup>

Paradoxically, although perhaps highlighting a national anxiety, the page portrays Aziz and his family as sympathetic and unthreatening and a part of 'new' Italian social life.

Although this was the most striking juxtaposition that I came across in the classes that I attended at San Pietro, the handbook in general depicts very different visions of immigrant versus Italian life. Again, although teachers used pages from all sorts of workbooks, the workbook pages handed out in the classes that I attended that did incorporate lives of immigrants tended to *reproduce rather than challenge* the spaces that immigrants occupied socially and economically in Italian life. One page for example tells the story of a man from Senegal and a woman from the Philippines who have come to Italy to find work; he is a vendor of African artifacts, she was a teacher in her home country and now does housekeeping for an Italian family; another workbook page used in an advanced class consists of a dialogue between Massimo and Ahmed who work together at a shoe factory. The conversation reflects Ahmed's struggle, before finding his current job, to find work that isn't exploitative. Aside from the vision of immigrants, the more 'neutral' worksheets (i.e., ones that do not attempt to show immigrant life) tend to present Italians as upwardly mobile and privileged (they are shown at work, at parties, as tourists) whereas virtually every representation of immigrants depicts them, perhaps sympathetically, as exploited and living on the margins of Italian society. And although these pages do reflect perhaps the situation of the precariousness newly arrived immigrants, they do not reflect the actual life for most Italians.

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<sup>17</sup> Krause (2006) notes that the low-birth rate of Italians is often juxtaposed in media reports against the growing non-European immigrant population and becomes linked to fears about the demise of the Italian 'race' and to the disappearance of European culture.

The classroom at San Pietro was a site where general boundaries between “us” and “them,” as well as specific ideas about the cultures of immigrants, were communicated by the teacher and via class materials. At the same time, I argue that such distinctions may not only reinforce notions of “Italian” identity but also may naturalize the space that immigrants occupy in Italian society.

### **“Italianness” and boundary maintenance at other sites at San Pietro**

The classroom at San Pietro was just one of the spaces of interaction between Italian and immigrant and where the meanings and notions of Italianness and otherness were formed and transmitted. I chose San Pietro, not only because I had learned of the language school, but because it is was of the largest and most well-known service organizations in Rome. San Pietro was a popular destination for recently arrived immigrants because it provided a multitude of services to immigrants. It ran soup kitchens and shelters in Rome and provided referrals to lawyers, health services, dentists, and to potential employers. In 2001 it was popular even among those not seeking specific services, as each person was issued a San Pietro card. The card was laminated, had a picture of the person and, most importantly, included the date of the immigrant’s first visit to San Pietro. These cards had served as proof, to authorities, of an immigrant’s date of residence in the event of a declaration of “sanatoria” (amnesty), which enabled illegal immigrants to obtain a “permesso di soggiorno” (permit of stay) if they had proof of residence before a certain date.

The “centro ascolto” (the listening center) was the first necessary stop for an immigrant seeking any kind of service provided by San Pietro. Here, they waited in line, showed their passports, were given a number and then sat waiting to be called to the first

intake interview session to begin the process of getting the San Pietro card. The process usually took the better part of a day. Here and throughout an immigrant's interactions with San Pietro's workers, the barriers between immigrant and Italian were both physical and symbolic. Those waiting were walled off from the service providers, the only space of interaction being the "sportello" (teller window), a bulletproof window underneath which existed an opening just large enough to slide papers through. While their information was processed, immigrants were called one by one for the first of two intake interviews. These occurred in a separate room, the immigrant on one side of a desk and the interviewer on the other. The purpose of the first interview was to weed out anyone who might not need any of the services San Pietro provided (i.e., to make sure the sole purpose of the immigrant was not the San Pietro card itself). If the person was cleared to receive the San Pietro card, and hence access to services, they were given an appointment for a more thorough interview up to two weeks later.<sup>18</sup> If there was not enough time to have preliminary interviews with all of those still waiting, most of whom would have been waiting for hours, they would be told to come back another day, although if they showed up with their numbers, they would be given priority. This was understandably frustrating to those who were told to come back and many would complain. The staff at San Pietro were not unsympathetic about the situation, and found it frustrating themselves, often offering exasperated comments in return like "what can we do, there are too many of you!"

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<sup>18</sup> By 2004 the San Pietro card no longer served as proof of residency in Italy, and because of its more restrictive policies towards resource allocation, demand for services had decreased from previous years. However, San Pietro continued to be a popular destination for immigrants seeking services in 2004 and 2005.

The second interviews were conducted by trained volunteers who were tasked with getting an immigrant's arrival story; they also were to determine that person's need for services and plans for living in Italy. The interviews lasted up to an hour and were condensed by the interviewer into a four-page form that was kept on file at San Pietro.<sup>19</sup> After the interview, the completed forms were filed according to country of origin so that all the files of each country were organized together.<sup>20</sup> The form included information about the immigrant: names and locations of any dependents and/or family members, the date of their arrival in Italy, why they came to Italy, what their needs were, as well as the impression the interviewer had about the character of the interviewee. After the interviewer listened to and took notes regarding the personal history of each immigrant, s/he was asked what kind of services s/he needed from San Pietro. Virtually every immigrant was encouraged to go to the Italian school and got permission to do so. Any services sanctioned by the interviewer resulted in a stamp on the card. At San Pietro's soup kitchens, for example, one had to present the San Pietro card with the appropriate stamp in order to get a meal.

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<sup>19</sup> Those who asked were assured that their information would be kept private and not shared with police although San Pietro did collect statistical information regarding the numbers and national origins of immigrants.

<sup>20</sup> The form included two numbers as well as a code for the person's country of origin. The first number indicated the latest person served at San Pietro overall since a census was instituted in 1990, and the second number referred to the latest person served from that particular country of origin. A form reading 297121 ALB 7207 would indicate that the person was the 297121th person served at San Pietro since 1990, and was the 7207<sup>th</sup> person from Albania to pass through San Pietro's "centro ascolto."

### **“Secondo Ascolto” (second interview)**

The second interview took up the better part of a day for an immigrant resource seeker. Interviewees had to show up by 8 AM and were served one at a time until all the interviews of the day were completed. This time all the interviewers and interviewees were in the same room. On one side of the room there were folding chairs for those waiting. On the other side of the room was a line of desks where the interviews took place. While there was an obvious utility to the desk during the interview, the set up of the room clearly demarcated and separated the service providers from the immigrants. Furthermore, the physical distance of the desk was seldom crossed by the interviewers.

Out of the fifteen interviewers on staff I only observed one, Mauro, who made a conscious effort to bridge the distance between interviewer and interviewee and shook the hands of his interviewees, both before and after the interview. This gesture was symbolically powerful. Because of its rareness, it seemed to render the boundary between Italian and immigrant more obvious. In fact, many immigrants showed visible signs of surprise when offered Mauro's hand. Such demarcations and boundaries between service provider and service recipient can be commonplace in many social service organizations. They were often so familiar that they took on a common sense feel. However, such barriers at San Pietro (and arguably at any service organization) were also symbolic. In this case, the boundary between “us” and “other,” between Italian and non-Italian, was firm and rarely transcended. General boundaries, whether physically demarcated at the “sportello” and the intake interview sessions or articulated in the classrooms, only stressed such differences. While the demarcation of Italian and non-Italian was tangible in the classroom, intake interviews, and even in the mundane interactions between San

Pietro employees and their clients, San Pietro workers also communicated ideas about differences between immigrant groups.

### **Initial contact with San Pietro (my arrival story)**

My own point of entry was through the waiting room, and my experience is worth noting in that it reflected the privilege associated with looking like you belong to a particular nation or area of the world. As stated in the Introduction, I learned about San Pietro from an interview with an immigration official and decided to stop by the very next day. I didn't call and make an appointment to meet with anyone at San Pietro initially; instead, I went to the waiting room to observe the organization from the perspective of an immigrant seeking resources. When I entered the room mid-morning, I noticed about twenty people standing in line and about thirty others sitting down in chairs along the walls of the room. I took a seat and spent about forty minutes watching and taking notes before someone next to me nudged me and drew my attention to a man (whom I later knew as Carlo) who was motioning from behind the "sportello" to come up to the window. When I approached him, he spoke to me in English and asked to see my passport. Just like that, I had been 'found out'.

I showed him my passport and my letter of introduction from the Chair of UMass's Anthropology Department and I was immediately ushered to a back room, ahead of all those biding their time until they would be either called to meet with one of the workers or sent home to come back another day. This of course had not been my plan. I had planned to spend a day or two observing unobtrusively before calling for an appointment to talk about doing research at the organization; however, my obviousness to the San Pietro workers as a "non-immigrant" and more surprisingly as an "American,"

had not occurred to me (it turned out another worker, Luca, had noticed me and he and Carlo had had a conversation regarding “what to do with the American”). From a conversation I had later with Carlo about that day, he told me he’d intuited my “Americanness” based on how I was dressed, how I carried myself, the fact that I was writing and the fact that they did not remember seeing me in line. When I asked him why he thought I was American as opposed to another “Western” nationality, he said that he didn’t really know, but that it may have had something to do with my shoes.<sup>21</sup> In any case, the assumption of my national affiliation led to my *own differential treatment*; with my passport and letter, I was given precedence over all the other (more legitimate) seekers of San Pietro’s services. I was sent to talk to one of the interviewers, who photocopied my documents and left the room. When he came back after about 15 minutes, he gave me a number and told me to call in a few days and ask for Marco who would be able to tell me whether I was approved or not. I called Marco exactly 3 days later; not only did I receive permission to observe and participate in the language classes (my original request), but I was also granted access to nearly every space at San Pietro.<sup>22</sup>

### **On the Differential Ordering of Immigrant Groups**

As with my observations at the various sites of communication between San Pietro workers and their immigrant clients and my own experience gaining entry to San

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<sup>21</sup> This became a bit of a joke between us. At the time, “clunky” shoes were in fashion in the states and I had a penchant for wearing them and it was something Carlo liked to tease me about. As for Luca and Carlo’s assumption of “American,” Luca was more forthcoming. He said he figured I was an American study abroad student, because he felt only an American (as opposed to British or French or German) would be so lost or so brash as to seek services at San Pietro.

<sup>22</sup> In the interest of protecting their identities, I was not allowed to attend interviews with asylum seekers.

Pietro, it stands to note that a person's national affiliation played an important role in the construction and reproduction of difference. This differential ordering of immigrant groups was usually hierarchical, placing groups of people into categories of, for example, more trustworthy to less trustworthy, more hardworking to less hardworking, and from more dangerous to less dangerous. Such notions about the differences between groups seemed informed more by popular ideas of such groups produced in the media and in discussions among Italians than by actual interaction with immigrant groups.<sup>23</sup>

Before discussing specific examples at San Pietro, it is useful to outline some of the observable differential status of immigrant groups that existed in Rome during the time I conducted fieldwork. First of all, the spaces that different groups occupied in Rome were distinct. If one paid attention, even one day in Rome yielded evidence of how bounded and distinct immigrant spaces were. Most obvious was the presence of street vendors. While many groups engaged in vending as a primary source of income, the items different groups vended were specific to each group. For example, Bangladeshi immigrants were rarely, if ever, seen working as anything but vendors, most typically as sellers of roses in restaurants and tourist areas, and as pay-per-service photographers for tourists. Chinese immigrants vended as well, usually plastic toys and lighters. Many African groups vended handbags, perfume, and wooden African statues along popular pedestrian areas in historic parts of Rome. Especially in Rome, where factory work was hard to find, I rarely saw immigrants integrated into the formal economy. Instead, most found work informally, even those who may have had working papers. Similar to the

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<sup>23</sup> Despite the fact that San Pietro workers interacted with immigrants every day, as noted previously, there are distinct barriers regarding such interactions. This may have limited the ability of the workers to form relationships that might challenge dominant notions of different immigrant groups.

history of immigrants in the United States, the most common and productive means of finding work was via one's own group network of previously settled immigrants.

There was a correlation between this segregation and common assumptions about the culture of immigrants' nationality in discourse among Italians. This brief and perhaps "essentialized" synopsis comes from my conversations with the workers at San Pietro and with other Italians I spoke with and from paying attention to media portrayals of immigrants. Briefly, Ukrainian and Filipino women were typically seen as trustworthy enough to find work in Italian homes as nannies, cooks, and to care for the elderly.<sup>24</sup> Some African groups (Senegalese in particular) were seen as hardworking, though they rarely found domestic work (usually deemed the most desirable form of employment), instead they usually settled for vending items illegally or as low-skilled, low-paid factory laborers. Most interestingly, the distinct spaces and employment that different groups occupied seemed rarely challenged and were quite difficult to transgress.

For example, one close informant, Alpha, from Guinea, tried very hard to find some sort of domestic placement. He wanted to clean, shop, or cook for an Italian family or individual. While through underground networks he found potential employment, each time, instead of being refused outright, he was offered a salary that he simply could not live on. I spoke to a potential employer on the phone one day (Alpha's Italian was rudimentary at the time) to help set up a meeting and he said, "He's African, right?" I found myself responding without thinking, "Yes, but he's very reliable." When I translated for Alpha what had happened (including my response) he laughed. He met with

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<sup>24</sup> A joke I heard multiple times in 2001 was something to the effect of "What is the make-up of the typical Italian family? A father, a mother, one child, and a Ukrainian."

the man and was again offered a low hourly wage. Alpha's example is just one of many that I heard from different immigrants at San Pietro.

Marco, who was one of the coordinators of San Pietro's "centro ascolto" in 2001, confirmed that Alpha's experience was not an exception. Because San Pietro was a well-known organization, Italians in Rome seeking caretakers for children or the elderly would call the organization for referrals. In one of our conversations about San Pietro and on issues of immigration, I mentioned Alpha's frustration, Marco explained:<sup>25</sup>

Yes, it's a difficult situation. First of all, we can't refer anyone without working papers, but even if someone from Africa has them, and we recommend them, most people don't want to hire them [for work as domestics]...I think it is because it can be strange for Italians to have a 'black' person living with them... I'm not sure if it's racist, but when people call, they usually want someone from the Philippines or Eastern Europe. Sometimes they will even specify "I don't want any Africans." It's gotten to the point when we don't bother offering them for these positions. (Fieldnotes May 2001)

Aside from how hard it was for an immigrant to transcend the space allotted to him or her by Italian society, it was hard to talk with Italians about immigrants (as the above examples show) without acknowledging or reproducing in some way dominant views on immigrant groups; in my experience, Italians did not hold back on their ideas and views of different immigrant groups. Indeed, it was not really viewed as racist to do so. Therefore, such expressions of difference between immigrant groups, which were based on their stated or assumed country of origin, became so commonplace as to seem natural.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all statements are translated from Italian.

<sup>26</sup> When a person's country of origin was not known outright, it was usually assumed and based on phenotypic and cultural clues such as dress and accent. People were also lumped into geographic regions (African, Eastern European) if a specific country of origin was hard to place. Sometimes one country became synonymous for an entire

At San Pietro, a worker's views of what an immigrant's nationality represented could also have consequences. At the first intake interview, for example, a person may be denied a second interview (and therefore the San Pietro card and any access to its services and resources) if they did not seem needy enough or if they were assumed to have a steady source of income. One intake interviewer, Giovanni, said:

I watch out for Albanian and Romanian men. They make a lot of money through the black market . . . many of them are with the mafia. A lot of them have more money than I do! I have to figure out who needs help and who doesn't. And they already speak Italian well, so they don't need the Italian school.  
[Fieldnotes March 2001]

The service information and referrals distributed during the second interview process was entirely up to the discretion of the interviewer. A few interviewers had a policy of giving information and referrals to anyone who asked for particular services. Other interviewers, however, seeing San Pietro's resources as limited, sometimes denied a person access to certain resources, even if those resources were requested. For example, Chinese and Bangladeshi immigrants were often not given access to soup kitchens. One interviewer, Paola, referring to why she usually did not give soup kitchen referrals to Bangladeshi or Chinese immigrants explained "even if we give them the stamp to use the soup kitchen, they won't go . . . they don't like Italian food, so it would go to waste. They eat rice and other things. They think Italian food tastes weird."

Sometimes the debates over resource allocation grew antagonistic. People who were seen as overly pushy and/or faking desperation were sometimes denied any services at all. One young man from India, Deepak, originally had come to San Pietro for the

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group, so that people who seemed vaguely Eastern European would become 'Romanian', Asians would become 'Chinese' etc. As Angel-Ajani (2000:339) notes, the term *Marrochini* (Marroccans) was often used to signify a person of color, regardless of his/her actual nationality.

Italian school. After one month, he requested to be interviewed again because he realized he needed assistance with food, clothing, and medical care. The person in charge of the decision denied his request, believing Deepak to be exaggerating his situation. Deepak then went directly (violating protocol) to the person who had given him the second interview and demanded an increase in services. The interviewer denied his request as well and a loud debate ensued, resulting in Deepak being removed from the premises and told not to return.

After the altercation, the interviewer told me that he simply did not believe Deepak's story and that he was just taking advantage of San Pietro. He said that in his first interview, Deepak had stated that he was living with family who were taking good care of him. When I saw Deepak leave frustrated, I followed him outside and asked him about what happened. His story (told to me in English) differed substantially. He told me that when he first was signing up for services, he felt that he should not ask for too many things. At the time, he felt that his family (his father's brother's family) was happy to take care of him. However, because he was having a hard time finding work, he felt that he was becoming a burden on them and wanted to seek alternative sources for food and clothing. While Deepak's nationality may not have been a factor in this particular case, his situation serves as an example of how a service worker's personal view on an immigrant may determine his or her access to resources.

Notions of success were also embedded in different service workers' views of immigrants. I had noticed in my observations at the Italian school that the beginning classes had a mixture of many different nationalities, but that the intermediate or advanced classes were primarily made up of South and Central Americans and Africans. I

asked the supervisor for the Italian school, Marta, what she thought about my observation. She asked me to speculate and I offered up my interpretation, that perhaps the other nationalities (predominantly Russians and Ukrainians) found employment more easily, which was the primary reason that people stopped coming to Italian school. Marta countered with:

Maybe it's because they (Ukrainians and Russians) learn Italian very fast . . . they come from very determined and hardworking cultures. Yes, they do also find jobs but it is because they try very hard to find work . . . people from South American and Africa don't care as much about work. They come from more fluid cultures.  
[Fieldnotes March 2001]

Such ascribed behavioral characteristics also played a role in an immigrant's treatment in Italian society. In Alpha's example, notions of what Africans were like prevented him from finding certain employment while being Albanian or Romanian may have excluded a person from vital services. Being locked into a certain space in Italian society was not the only potential problem that emerged from such notions, however. This differential ordering also tended to naturalize the economic and social marginalization of certain groups, who like Alpha and countless others, had a hard time finding viable employment.<sup>27</sup>

Notions of difference among immigrant groups certainly varied from individual to individual and some Italians certainly challenged and worked against dominant notions. What was remarkable though, regardless of how an individual might feel, was the ease with which s/he could describe how a particular immigrant group was viewed in Italian society. The language teachers at San Pietro, for example, were much less likely than

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<sup>27</sup> Evidence that immigrant groups occupy distinct and hard-to-transgress economic and social spaces are similarly documented by, for example Angel-Ajani (2000), Carter (1997), Cole (1997), Mai (2002).

either the interviewers or office workers to make blanket statements about the culture of an immigrant. However, most recognized and could detail popular conceptions of certain immigrant groups.

Despite the differential imaginings, many of my informants asserted that Italy is not a racist country. Many pointed to the more favorable treatment of certain “nonwhite” African groups, such as the Senegalese, over certain “white” groups, such as Albanians, as proof. By interviewing and observing social service workers at San Pietro and their interactions with immigrant clients, I hoped to find out whether Italian identity is reified in such spaces. Indeed, I found that the social service workers at San Pietro are not neutral. Instead, they engaged in everyday practices that serve to reinforce categories such as “Italian” and “foreigner.” Furthermore, despite the everyday contact with immigrants, few of the staff at San Pietro challenged the dominant notions and ideas and notions about immigrants. One might argue that this is partly because the organization itself. Indeed, as mentioned before, San Pietro it is a well-known charitable organization providing services, resources and information and is hardly known for a radical perspective. And as I mentioned before, the structure of the organization, the layout of help itself created a social difference between worker and immigrant that seemed very difficult to overcome. If differences between “immigrant” and “Italian” were tangible and reproduced in many ways at San Pietro, even among those sympathetic to the needs and issues of immigrants, then what of that greater and perhaps illusive goal: integrating immigrants into Italian society? In the next chapter, I discuss a problematic regarding the integration of immigrants, that of the sheer difficulty for most Italians to imagine a cultural and phenotypic “other” as also, “Italian.”

### CHAPTER 3

#### ON THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS IN ITALY

##### Introduction: “MADE IN ITALY”

On a beautiful spring Sunday in early May 2004 I visited Villa Pamphili, one of Rome’s largest parks where many go for picnics and *passeggiata(s)*. At first glance this particular Sunday was no different, with the park playing host to its usual assortment of weekend visitors. But as I weaved through the crowd, I began to hear music. It was not the guitar strums of buskers who frequented the grounds, serenading the visitors. This was a much different sound, and as I turned the corner I began to understand the musical dissonance. For here before me was a parade of children bedecked with drums, recorders and shakers, carrying balloons and all wearing identical bright red T-shirts emblazoned with the well-known phrase “MADE IN ITALY.”<sup>28</sup>

I did not happen upon this scene by accident. I had been invited, though at the time I didn’t quite realize what I would be encountering. During the previous month I had interviewed Paola, an activist and teacher at the language school at Sant’Angelo, a Catholic charity that, similar to San Pietro, provided a host of services for immigrants, but had a reputation for being more progressive. I went to interview Paola about the language program and other services offered at Sant’Angelo, and as we talked, she raised the topic of race, or more accurately, of phenotype. While discussing immigration, Paola noted that, in her opinion, one of the biggest obstacles regarding the integration of

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<sup>28</sup> This phrase translates in Italian to ‘*Fabbricato in Italia*’. Notably, the Italian phrase is rarely used, while the English ‘Made In Italy’ is usually printed on clothing tags, food items, and other exports.

immigrants was shattering the idea that “being Italian” correlated with “*looking Italian*.” Later on in the interview, she invited me to attend a demonstration at Villa Pamphili, organized by Sant’Angelo, in support of immigrant rights. Neither she, nor I, connected this invitation to her seemingly off-the-cuff remark about “looking Italian,” so when I arrived in the park that day I was expecting the kind of demonstration I’d grown accustomed to: where immigrants and Italian allies, carrying banners and signs, marched together through the streets of Rome, or picketed in a heavily trafficked *piazza*, or protested in front of the *questura*<sup>29</sup> or another government agency. I was not prepared for this “demonstration” of children, about twenty or so in number and ranging in age from around six to twelve, who clambered noisily through the park followed by adults (some parents, some supporters, some affiliates of Sant’Angelo) that passed out leaflets to the confused and somewhat startled park patrons. I was not prepared for the children or the T-shirts, or the discord between them. Because these racially and ethnically diverse children – all bearing the stamp “Made in Italy” – could not have looked more *non-Italian*. And of course, as I soon came to understand, that was precisely the point.

In fact, the organizers of this event had predicted the cognitive dissonance that bystanders would inevitably experience when seeing the words “Made in Italy” beneath the non-white faces of the children. Indeed, it was this moment of incongruity and discrepancy that the organizers relied upon; the leaflets they distributed argued that (despite how they ‘looked’), all these children had been “made” (read: born and/or raised) in Italy and were thus “Italian.”

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<sup>29</sup> The ‘*questura*’ is the administrative office of regional police, and is where people apply for residency and work permits among other things.

Although the parade drew many amused, and sometimes confused, looks from the ad hoc audience, I did not sense any immediate effects of the demonstration; there was no onlooker debate or bystander uproar. Likewise, in contrast to the usual format and publicity of other demonstrations, there were no media present, no megaphones, and no speeches. It was quiet, but profound. In fact, I felt more affected by this demonstration than nearly any of the other dozen I had observed. I was most moved by my own reaction: my surprise, my “aha moment” regarding how deeply entrenched my own ideas were of what an “Italian” looks like. Through my own moment of cognitive dissonance I came to understand the brilliance of the protest and of how it cleverly revealed a significant problematic, that of the difficulty for many (including myself) to imagine physically and/or culturally distinct people *as Italian*.

So what does this mean then regarding the integration and inclusion of immigrants into Italian life? After all, the experience of immigration is not only about recognizing and tolerating differences between Italian and “other,” and between members of different ethnic or national groups; the host community also has the onus to accept, or “integrate,” newcomers. What integration *means*, however, has varied tremendously among the thought leaders of the host community: the politicians, religious and community leaders, activists, social workers, lawyers, policy makers and service-providers. During the time of my research and as of this writing, immigration laws have included provisions that provide the means for programs aimed at the integration of immigrants. However, rather than a unified national policy that defines integration and promotes specific parameters on how to achieve integration, the practicalities of

integration have been relegated to—and have become the primary domain of—local and regional institutions.

In addition, there has been a relative absence of legislation that secures the *political integration* of foreign residents; instead, there has been an explosion of services and programs focused on improving immigrants' *social and cultural integration*. Dubbed “intercultural,” these services and programs strive to facilitate the integration of immigrants into Italian life by promoting tolerance and understanding among and between Italians and non-Italian residents. Such depoliticized integration efforts are not unique to Italy, and they reflect a trend among liberal democracies, as Wendy Brown argues in her 2009 book *Regulating Aversion*.

In this chapter, I begin with an overview of the immigration legislation that existed and exists “on the books” in Italy, tracing some debates about these policies and exploring how they were translated into practice and received ‘on the ground’ by immigrants and residents alike. Such issues were, and are, crucial for, as I will argue, the investment in cultural integration programs (however well intended or effective they may be) will fail to bring about an integrated Italy *without attendant legislation providing for easier access to permanent residency and citizenship* for immigrants. In fact, the lack of such legislation may make it harder for Italians to even *envision* a culturally pluralistic Italian society, or an integrated Europe. These issues call into question the plausibility of what the European Commission calls the goal of integration: “a thriving Europe (with) active citizens, living together in integrated societies” (EU Council 2008:7).

## **Immigration “By The Books”: Turco-Napolitano, Bossi-Fini & “Security Set”**

### **Legislation**

In two scholarly investigations into Italy’s immigration legislation, political scientist Giovanna Campini’s report, *Migration and Integration in Italy* (2007) and legal scholar Kitty Calavita’s *Immigrants at the Margins* (2005), both authors underscore the stopgap trajectory, indefinite parameters, and inconsistent nature of Italian integration policies. Indeed, from the early 1980s until 1998, most migration policy in Italy could be considered expedient, with a focus on regularizing migrants and “responding more to ‘urgency factors’ than to a coherent migratory policy,” (Campani 2007:1). Issues relating to the reality of migrants’ *establishing residence* in Italy were not addressed until 1998, with the passage of the Turco-Napolitano law (40/1998).<sup>30</sup> This law, drafted by the center-left government then in power, introduced for the first time a “general integration” policy, which remains (despite subsequent revisions) a “blueprint for immigration integration” (Calavita 2005:80).

In many ways, the *gestalt* of integration in the Turco-Napolitano law was well intentioned; the law provided a host of benefits to legal immigrants, including access to national health care, public education, housing, and public assistance; undocumented immigrants were granted access to emergency services and public education. Furthermore, the law made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, or nationality and provided funding for programs aimed at cultural adaptation, access to services, and freedom from discrimination (Calavita 2005:78–80).

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<sup>30</sup> The first laws on immigration, law 943/1986 and law 39/1990 known as the Martelli Law provided basic ----

However well intentioned, integration in the Turco-Napolitano law was conceived of, and broadly framed as part of an integration strategy with many priorities. As Campani notes, “[i]ntegration is an extremely complex concept, involving multiple dimensions—cultural, social and economic—that vary according to the territorial, the historical and the political contexts” (2007:3). The law, while setting parameters regarding integration and designating funding for integration projects, dispersed “the task of developing broad integration policies” (Calavita 2005:80) across Italy’s twenty regions, with each having their own “provinces and towns responsible for working out the details and for their actual implementation” (ibid.). This designation of integration efforts to regional entities has led prominent scholars to conclude that *there is no de facto national integration policy* in Italy (see for example, Campani 2007 and Al-Azar 2010) although there are numerous and varied programs that promote integration in Italy.

Even those who see the ingenuity and promise of local initiatives describe the delegation of integration to localities as potentially problematic.<sup>31</sup> As Jonathan Chaloff states in a report on immigration services in Italy, integration “relies very heavily on civil society and the large NGO community in particular,”<sup>32</sup> (2006:185) which is a “community” that itself lacks connection and continuity as it is subject to the variations of needs and services across the spectrum of local contexts. This lack of unity among NGOs, when combined with the lack of national cohesion regarding integration, further complicates the evaluation (and possible improvement) of integration programs and

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<sup>31</sup> See Campani 2007, Zincone 2001 & 2002 who argue that while there are many innovative programs for integration, the lack of national cohesion makes the goal of integration elusive.

<sup>32</sup> As these are the “key providers of basic social assistance services, including housing,” (ibid).

policies. Blangiardo and Baio, for instance, describe some of the challenges of evaluating integration in Italy, locating this problem in “the inadequateness of the information system ... and the non-measurable level of ‘social integration’ ” (2006:1).

As these processes existed and continue to exist mainly at the regional level, integration efforts in Italy have been fragmented and patchy and subject to the changing needs of the local community. Indeed, at San Pietro, the evolution of services and programs reflected the challenges of regional responses to immigration. As Giulia who was the Director of Services for Immigrants at San Pietro, described, the changes in the way immigrant services were structured were highly contingent on the local context and needs. As she noted in our interview,

When the center for immigrants was formed, it was very loose, we basically started by providing for just their immediate needs in terms of housing and food. But in 1994, San Pietro released a document that showed the large numbers of immigrants staying in Italy. We started planning [longer term] services for them, that’s when we started the Italian School and some of the intercultural programs. ... It’s still a growing process as time passes and the numbers continue to grow. [Interview March 2004]

The intercultural programs Giulia mentioned were, in fact, a key component of integration as it was conceptualized under the Turco-Napolitano law. In this context, ‘integration’ is used to refer to a host of efforts, programs, and policies, and this is reflected in the disparate actors, institutions, and interventions that exist in the name of ‘integration’ in Italy. Calavita states that the Turco-Napolitano law used the term integration to:

refer simultaneously to cultural adaptation, access to services, and freedom from discrimination, with heavy emphasis on culture—both the cultural *adaptation*, of immigrants and, somewhat paradoxically, Italians’ appreciation of immigrants’ cultures. [2005:80, emphasis original]

Under Turco-Napolitano, the preference for the *cultural and social integration* of immigrants was also established, as priority funding was given to projects that,

privileged social service assistance to immigrants ...emphasized the positive contribution immigrants make to the local economy...promoted a positive image of immigration among the general population ...and contributed to positive relationships between immigrants and Italians. [Calavita 2005:78]

Arguably, then, some of the more fundamental and *political* aspects regarding integration for immigrants, getting and retaining legal status and facilitating access to citizenship, were thus de-prioritized as immigration policy refocused itself instead on *cultural* integration .

In 2002, another challenge to the development of a national integration policy was enacted with the passing of the Bossi-Fini law. Although the broad scope of intervention established by the Turco-Napolitano law was not altered, the Bossi-Fini legislation enacted some deeply repressive measures regarding immigration and slashed the budget for integration projects. Most damaging was the linking of residence permits with employment contracts, and a requirement that migrants have jobs *before* entering Italy. Calavita (2007) argues that these new restrictions made obtaining and maintaining legal status for immigrants especially difficult given the unstable job market and the notoriously complicated Italian bureaucracy regarding applications and permits; as a result, even those with contracts (which were often short term) and the ability to claim legal status often became illegal when they lost their jobs or had to return “home” to a foreign land (thereby interrupting the continuous residency now necessary for citizenship under Bossi-Fini). The Bossi-Fini law also stipulated that all “social integration measures would be limited to *legal* immigrants and therefore denied private bodies the possibility

of assisting and giving shelter to undocumented migrants,” (Al-Azar 2010:3, my emphasis).

More recently another law, dubbed the “Security Set” (94/2009) has made getting and maintaining legal residence all the more difficult. Thomas Hammarberg, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, refers to the Security Set laws as “draconian” (2009:44). Among some of the measures undertaken in the name of “increasing security,” illegal immigration was criminalized and punishable by detention, deportation and/or fines. Italians themselves can face legal action if they knowingly provide services or house illegal immigrants. Grazia Naletto, in her summary of the laws for the European Watch Report reports:

if a civil servant gains knowledge of the irregular state of a foreign citizen, he/she must notify the authorities. The first episodes of reporting by medical and school managers have already occurred. As a consequence, the right to education as well as to urgent medical care are now threatened, whereas until a short time ago these rights were guaranteed to youngsters and citizens regardless of their residence status. [2009:62]

Furthermore it connected “integration” with an immigrant’s ability to get a residency permit:

The security package provides that foreigners will sign, together with the residence permit, an ‘integration agreement’ committing to specific ‘integration goals’. Precise standards and modalities for this have not yet been defined. Foreigners living legally in Italy for a long time can request a long-term resident permit, which is conditional upon passing an Italian language test. [ibid]

This version of integration is a far cry from the vision of the proponents of the cultural and social integration of immigrants which is discussed later in this chapter. But the message of Italian legislation is loud and clear; only those who can pass stringent requirements for legal residence are even eligible to be “integrated.”

**“How can people make a life with laws like those?” From Turco-Napolitano to Bossi-Fini on the ground**

The experience of one informant, Alpha, is a good example of how the shift from Turco-Napolitano legislation to the more repressive Bossi-Fini laws could affect individuals. I met Alpha, who was from Guinea, in a classroom at San Pietro in 2001, and we became friends. During one of our first conversations after class in the little piazza nearby, Alpha told me that although he had been living in France with his sister, and even though he spoke French and had better connections there, that he came to Italy because he found France to be too restrictive. “They (the police) will harass you if you look African and ask you for your papers on the bus,” he told me. I remember expressing my incredulity that just because someone didn’t look “French,” that their right to walk the street or ride the bus could be challenged. While Alpha was in fact illegal (he’d overstayed on a family visa), he said that his sister, who was married to a French man, was legal and was frequently asked to show her residency papers. And so he’d decided to come to Italy, where there was a small community of people he knew from Guinea, because they had told him that you could learn Italian for free, find a job pretty easily, that Italians in general were not hostile, and the police wouldn’t harass him and ask for papers. Furthermore, there was hope (at that time) that a *sanatoria* (amnesty) might be declared that would allow for illegal residents to become legal and be able to apply for residency permits.<sup>33</sup>

When I returned to Italy in 2004 (after the passage of the Bossi-Fini laws), Alpha had moved to Blois, France, and I went to visit him. I knew of his difficult time, even in 2001, at being able to find employment in Italy. I asked him why he’d moved back to

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<sup>33</sup> Another reason Alpha took classes at San Pietro, was that in the event of a “sanatoria” the San Pietro card could act as proof of residence. That was no longer possible in 2004.

France and reminded him of what he'd told me about the harassment he'd faced. He answered,

Well it was bad in Paris, but here in Blois, it is not so bad. I'm left alone. And now I am legal...Italy was just too difficult...I couldn't find a job and I didn't have many problems with the carabinieri [the police] but my friends did. Everything became difficult. [Fieldnotes June 2004]

Indeed Alpha's life was much better in France. Although he'd lived for a while illegally, he'd been able to find work, through a friend, and was a caretaker to an elderly man. This was a kind of domestic job Alpha had tried very hard, but failed, to get in Rome. He'd met and married a French woman, and so was now legal and eligible for citizenship. I asked him about his friends remaining in Rome, some of whom I'd met, he told me that most of them left, and mainly the ones who had their *permesso di soggiorno* (residence permit) stayed. He said,

you know I tell them it's crazy to stay there, I tell them I will find you a French wife and you can be legal. *I don't know how a person is supposed to make a life with laws like those* [Fieldnotes June 2004]

Indeed, for an immigrant, being able to make a life and feel secure in Italy is difficult, given the shift in immigration law that has effectively reduced the capacity of foreign residents to make a life in Italy while it has increased the precariousness of those who try.<sup>34</sup> Campani (2007) argues that this is where integration policy remained “frozen”—where the ideals of integration put forth by the Turco-Napolitano law clash with the

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<sup>34</sup> Paradoxically, the lack of national regulation regarding integration can be seen as beneficial, as it has been documented that many private, NGO agencies overlook the legal status of immigrants when enrolling them in language courses and when providing emergency services such as clothing, shelter, and food (Al-Azar 2010). Indeed, I also found this to be the case regarding the programs and agencies I became familiar with in Rome, although I can't speak to how things have changed since my last contact (August 2005) with some of those agencies and people.

repressive policies of the Bossi-Fini legislation. More recently with the “Security Set” laws of 2009, the effects are all the more draconian.

Perhaps it is no surprise then, given the scattered nature of integration efforts and the workings of a repressive laws in an unfavorable political climate, that efforts to secure and protect the *political* rights of immigrants (e.g. establishing and maintaining the residency that is necessary for obtaining citizenship) pale in comparison to the efforts, dubbed “Intercultural” geared at increasing tolerance and exchange between groups as a means of integration.

### **“Integration” Translated: From Multicultural to Intercultural**

The usage of the term *intercultural* in Italy as opposed to *multicultural* to frame integration and describe events, programs, and activities for—and regarding—immigrants reflects rich debates on how multiculturalism is now seen by many of Europe’s scholars.

As Modood notes,

[t]he criticism is that “multiculturalism” and related discourses assume that for each identifiable group there is a single culture, that it is homogenous, that it has always been the same, that wherever the group is found or travels to, the same culture is found, so that one can talk about a group and its culture without any reference to context, to contact or interaction with other groups, to economic circumstances, political power and so on. [1997:10]

In contrast, Calavita argues that the term *intercultural integration* “fills the semantic space between the politically incorrect ‘assimilation’ and the politically unpalatable ‘multiculturalism’,” (2007:80). In this vein, advocates of intercultural approaches in Italy note the conscious shift away from terms such as *assimilation* and *multiculturalism*.

The use of intercultural as a term is promoted as a promising opportunity; Santerini suggests that unlike assimilation, which forces people to “abandon their cultural and religious identity (2008:188),” intercultural education programs provide a space for

“reflection upon identity and difference [that promotes] a positive vision of culture outside of any form of essentialism [which] keeps the individual a prisoner within the confines of his own group,” (ibid). Jabbar (2002) writes that *intercultural* means interacting in a multicultural context, but that instead of highlighting and then accepting differences, intercultural interactions produce a space for mutual acceptance.

Favaro and Luatti in *L'intercultura dalla A alla Z* (2004) also argue for the necessity of intercultural spaces and education in Italy in order to create an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual understanding. Their book outlines the kinds of efforts that exist as part of intercultural integration; what is described as intercultural is vast—ranging from everyday interactions through to art exhibitions and multicultural festivals, as well as cultural mediation and intercultural dialogue and education. Indeed, the variety of intercultural efforts that existed, and continue to exist in Rome, mirror intercultural programs in other parts of Italy as documented by Pero (2002), Zinn (2005), Salih (2002), Calvita (2005), and Chaloff (2006) and Marchesi (2013).<sup>35</sup> The proliferation of intercultural programs across the country were part and parcel of the ideological shifts regarding integration that occurred in the wake of Turco-Napolitano and Bossi-Fini laws. These ideological shifts were not only about language (i.e., the move from multiculturalism to interculturalism) but they are also about how immigration is “translated” in a larger sense, and how it is operationalized on the ground.

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<sup>35</sup> I base this not only on what others have documented but also on my own research on the variety of services, organizations, associations, and programs for immigrants that I gathered from booklets distributed by organizations about resources available to immigrants, and on “Roma Intercultural,” an email bulletin created in 2003 that publicized various intercultural events, talks, exhibitions, and conferences mainly in Rome, but also other places in Italy and Europe.

In Italy, the post Turco-Napolitano and Bossi-Fini landscape bore the fruits of *integration* programs and services geared primarily towards two ends: negotiating Italian bureaucracy (i.e. helping immigrants obtain residency papers, housing, health care, education and other social services) and increasing tolerance (fostering understanding and dialogue between groups). This intercultural approach to integration stems directly from article 40 of the Turco-Napolitano law, which outlined several activities directed towards immigrants' "social integration." As Calavita explains, among these activities were courses in Italian language and culture, the dissemination of information regarding "opportunities for integration and personal growth" (2005:80); enhancing Italians' "appreciation of the cultural, social, recreational, economic and religious expressions" (ibid.) of immigrants and the prevention of racial discrimination and xenophobia; and the establishment of "intercultural mediators" (ibid.) to facilitate interaction in schools and other public institutions.

My goal here is not to dismiss the importance of intercultural efforts at integration. Scholars and proponents of intercultural integration have shown that is a documented commitment and passion to the goals of integration on the part of those Italians and resident foreigners who are on the front lines of integration, be they teachers or pupils at the many language schools throughout Italy, or cultural mediators, or participants and presenters in intercultural education programs or even enthusiasts of intercultural events. Such persons, projects, programs and dialogues are certainly necessary steps toward creating a more inclusive Italian society; however, the project of integration, *writ large*, may fail if it remains primarily confined to the "social" aspects of integration. Without legislation that addresses the political integration of immigrants, the

deep correlation between belonging in Italy with how a person looks will not be challenged in any meaningful way.

Indeed, the t-shirt story that began this chapter may point to how deeply entrenched ideas of race and culture can be—regardless of the explosion of programs, festivals and protests categorized as intercultural and envisioned as an alternative to multiculturalism and melting pot ideologies. In other words, despite the critical scholarship about immigration and representation, and the well-intended discourse on how to approach and reconfigure difference, the central problem remains: What will cultural pluralism in Italy look like? It is a crucial question—and one whose answer may require a sort of ‘science fiction’—a suspension of (dis)belief about deeply entrenched ideas about race, culture, immigrants and the anthropological ‘other’.

### **Envisioning a Culturally Pluralistic Italy: Is It A Small World After All?**

Not long after my fieldwork ended I visited Disneyworld with my (then) twelve-year-old niece who wanted nothing more than to go on the “It’s a Small World” ride. After waiting in the seemingly endless line for our turn, we got in a boat that traveled along a river that took us past the many cultures of the world. These cultures were arranged vaguely geographically, so that European cultures were grouped in one area, Asian cultures in another, African cultures in another, and so on. Each culture was represented by a boy doll and a girl doll, surrounded by regional landscapes and cultural icons. For instance, the boy and girl from the Netherlands were blond, wearing clogs, and were surrounded by tulips. The boy and girl from India stood in front of the Taj Mahal; she was wearing a sari and had a bindi on her forehead. And as we traveled along from culture to culture, the message seemed to be that all the cultures and colors of the world are beautiful and non-threatening.

The last area of the ride, however, departed from the other ones in a meaningful way. We arrived in our boat, inside a huge room which was blue and silver and filled with clouds and rainbows. Here we were reacquainted with the dolls of the world, although this time they were all in the same room, dressed the same. There were no specific cultural references and I couldn't tell where in the world this place was. When the ride ended, my precocious niece turned to me and said, "So are they saying that we're not all going to get along until we all die and go to heaven or something?"

While humorous, her comment made me realize that the confusion of the final vision for humanity on the "It's a Small World" ride mirrors the sense of disconnection I've encountered regarding the goals of intercultural interventions in Italy: that no worldly vision exists regarding how diverse groups of people can live peacefully and equally with one another. Indeed, Italian programs and plans for integration seem to have illusive goals, ones that are perhaps impossible to imagine, reflecting a kind of cognitive dissonance similar to the one I felt when watching the parade of ethnically diverse children march through the park with the words "Made In Italy" emboldened on their t-shirts. In fact, that sense of cognitive dissonance was not mine alone, as I found out in my discussion with informants about their sense of what an integrated Italian society might look like.

One of my informants, Maura, a teacher at San Pietro, spoke eloquently of the bewilderment she felt when she realized her own tendency to equate "being Italian" with "looking Italian," despite having taught immigrants and fervently believing in the integration and acceptance of immigrants into Italian life. In her words,

I went to pick up [my daughter] Elena at school. She was talking to this boy, who I assumed was African, and I was glad to see that she seemed to be friends with

him, I was proud of her. So when I walked up to them to see what they were talking about, I was shocked...his Italian was perfect! I expected him to have an accent, to be different, and I couldn't stop myself from telling him how good his Italian was. And all his hand gestures, everything—everything was perfectly Italian. ... Later my daughter told me that he came to Italy when he was a baby, so of course it makes sense that he seemed so Italian. But it made me realize that anyone from any country can be Italian and it was strange to suddenly think that way. (*Interview March 2001*)

The importance of this comment, this recognition of a kind of dis-cognition, should not be taken lightly when we take into account that Maura in her role as a teacher at San Pietro, was one of the people working “on the ground” for intercultural immigrant integration. Rather her comments speak to this gap between theory and practice, between the well-intended discourse of interculturalism and the (im)possibility of actually seeing a phenotypic “other” as Italian.

In fact, another informant spoke to this same issue, although from the opposite perspective. Miriam, an Eritrean immigrant and Italian citizen (through marriage to her Italian husband), lived this problem on a daily basis: her children were Italian, they were born and raised in Italy and had an Italian father, but she would see and note the shock on people's faces when her children spoke. Indeed, in these and in other discussions I had with my informants, I found that asking them to imagine an inclusive and multicultural Italy, even when they themselves were immigrants from another culture, was a kind of exercise in science fiction. It is my contention that part of the problem they had in imagining a cultural pluralistic Italy, the “vision block” they encountered, was the unspoken impossibility of separating “Italian” from phenotype. When coupled with the shifts in immigration policy away from political citizenship and towards an obscure and ill-defined project of tolerance and “social integration”, the vision of an integrated Italy remains all the more elusive.

### **The problematics of depoliticization**

The passage of the Turco-Napolitano, Bossi-Fini and the Security Set laws have created a harsh and de-politicized landscape of immigration, one where immigrants have a very difficult time establishing and then maintaining legal residency, and are subjected to increased surveillance and deportations. Despite years of intercultural integration efforts and the growth in popularity for the fields of cultural mediation and intercultural education, popular support for right-wing governments who advocate quasi-fascist approaches to dealing with the immigration problem illustrate how tolerance for immigrants has actually decreased in the wake of these harsher laws.

Many scholars and advocates have argued that *access to nationality is a key factor in integration* regarding the inclusion and integration of immigrants. Yet Italy still has some of the most stringent requirements in the European Union regarding citizenship acquisition, especially for immigrants. As sociologist Georgia Bianchi states, “[i]mmigrant integration is a constant theme in Italian public discourse, and facilitating naturalization and access to citizenship by birth would be one step towards a meaningful integration in society” (2011:322). And while offering an easier path towards citizenship hardly guarantees a more tolerant Italian public, the results from a longitudinal study conducted by a research team for a project entitled “Access to Citizenship and its Impact on Immigration Integration” (heretofore referred to as the ACIT report) offers proof that immigrants who obtain citizenship are at an advantage. The report states:

Immigrants who have naturalized are often better off than immigrants who have not naturalized. This is true even after taking into account the differences in age at arrival in the country, the years of residence, education, the region of origin, the region of destination, and the reason for migration. On average...the difference between naturalized and non-naturalised is particularly high for immigrants from non-EU countries. Overall, naturalized migrants are more often employed, less

often overqualified for their jobs, have better housing conditions and have less difficulty paying household expenses. [ACIT report 2013:18]

And herein lies the inherent problematic of the de-politicization of immigrant policies: immigrants find a plethora of language classes and other (politically neutral) social services but a dearth of momentum for their political integration on the state level, assuring that immigrants remain in a kind of citizenship limbo.

### **Italian citizenship laws in brief**

Citizenship law originated in 1865; it essentially declared those living in the geopolitical area of Italy to be Italian citizens, which was made retroactive to 1861 when Italy was unified. In 1912, a provision was added that allowed children of Italian men born abroad to be able to retain Italian citizenship with subsequent revisions that allowed the same for those born of Italian mothers. In essence, these laws established that Italian nationality was achieved by “blood” or *ius sanguinis*. Current Italian citizenship law dates to 1992 (law 555/1992) where naturalization processes were redefined and “differentiated access to citizenship was introduced” (Schuster and Solomos 2002:46).

Prior to 1992 (before the permanent settlement of non-Italian immigrants became demographically significant), becoming an Italian citizen for those who were not born of Italian citizens required 5 years of legal residency. After 1992, preferential access was granted for some groups (descendants of Italian citizens and citizens of EU member countries) while more stringent requirements were set up for other seekers of citizenship. More specifically, since 1992, those with Italian ancestry have an expedited means of obtaining Italian citizenship, and are required to have 3 years of residency in Italy instead of 5. Citizens of the EU must maintain legal residence for 4 years to be eligible, whereas *non-EU, non-descendants of Italian citizens must maintain 10 continuous years of legal*

*residence in Italy before being able to apply for citizenship.* In addition, they must have no criminal record, and have proof of economic security.<sup>36</sup>

According to the law of 1992, children born to Italian citizens (no matter where they are born) become automatic citizens. However, children born in Italy to non-citizens are not automatically granted citizenship (except the case of abandonment by foreign parents, or if their parents are Stateless) instead, as Bianchi notes, they:

inherit the citizenship (and immigrant status) of their parents. Only after reaching 18 years of age and satisfying numerous conditions (such as having no criminal record, continuous legal residence on Italian soil, financial independence and social integration) are they allowed to request Italian citizenship- ensuring that [make the request for citizenship] before turning 19, and beginning a tortuous process that can take many years to navigate the Italian bureaucracy. [2011:324]

This “tortuous process” is documented not only by Bianchi who cites the lack of transparency in the Italian state’s granting of citizenship to immigrants who qualify; the ACIT report also compares EU member countries’ citizenship policies. In their evaluation of Italy’s citizenship policies and procedures, they found the naturalization process to be confusing, bureaucratic and discretionary. The report states:

In Italy, there are three different authorities involved in processing the application. The prefect receives the application, the police checks the documents and the Interior Ministry makes the decision. Additional agencies will be consulted for checking documentation...this can lead to serious delays in the procedure...and while time limits for processing the application exist, there are no sanctions applied to authorities that violate time limits. [2013:16]

Not surprisingly, the report concludes that citizenship laws in Italy are some of the harshest in the EU, specifically as they pertain to the naturalization of immigrants.

Among their conclusions:

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<sup>36</sup> More information on citizenship requirements can be found at:  
[http://www.esteri.it/MAE/EN/Ministero/Servizi/Sportello\\_Info/DomandeFrequenti/Cittadinanza/](http://www.esteri.it/MAE/EN/Ministero/Servizi/Sportello_Info/DomandeFrequenti/Cittadinanza/)

There are higher legal obstacles to ordinary naturalization in Italy than in most EU countries... Requiring a 10 year residence for ordinary naturalization is far longer than the EU average... Italy requires proof of income during the three years prior to application. Most other EU countries either do not require income for naturalization or accept any legal source of income at only the time of application. Italy has done the least to promote naturalization, requires the most demanding documentation, and maintains the most discretionary and bureaucratic procedure in the EU [2010: 16]

Current Italian citizenship law, which has not changed since 1992, would seem to effectively prohibit any real integration of non-Italian and non-European foreigners who reside in Italy, *even if they do so legally*. Although immigration legislation supposedly provides a framework for integrating cultural outsiders, as political scientist Mathais Koenig-Archibugi writes:

the reform of Italian nationality law [in 1992] seems to have had two aims. First, to encourage emigrants to keep their Italian nationality and to facilitate the acquisition of the Italian national by former nationals and their descendants. Second, to make naturalization of non-EU immigrants more difficult. These aims reflect a political choice: maintaining or restoring bonds with *old* nationals and their descendants was considered more important than creating *new* nationals. [2003:104)

In continuing to privilege citizenship by descent, citizenship becomes not just a right of belonging to a nation but “a status that can be passed on to offspring...emphasizing *a biological or ethnic link* between citizens of a nation” (Bianchi 2011:322, my emphasis). Combined with harsh immigration laws, Italian citizenship laws limit in a very real way the actual integration of immigrants (especially non-European immigrants). The way citizenship works in Italy the notion that only those who are Italian “by blood” are/can be citizens of/belong in Italy.

### **Conclusion: the primacy of phenotype**

Scholar Livia Turco argues for the political integration of immigrants in order to construct a useful plan for acceptance of cultural diversity in Italy. She notes that in some

ways there is indeed a “science fiction” involved in imagining a multicultural (and phenotypically diverse) Italy, but argues that political integration is a necessary first step in being able to see through that vision block. As she states,

[A] nation doesn’t only live within traditions and memory. Her homework is not only to preserve heritage, but to advance, with an eye to the future, expanding and enriching history with the contributions of new protagonists. To look to new problems and new challenges not only as a responsibility and effort, but also as an adventure, curiosity, frankly preferable to the fear. There is a need of multitudes of people, there is need of plurality and diversity, there is need for play and noise and not just rules. [2005:]<sup>37</sup>

In keeping with Livia Turco’s vision, I contend that the solution to the “problems” of integration must also come with laws and political will, and not only be left up to well-meaning programs and organizations and individuals to solve. Without attendant developments regarding the political rights of immigrants especially around some of the key problems (like nationality and obtaining citizenship), the focus of integration will remain on local initiatives that work towards changing individual conceptions of immigrant and ‘other’ yet which ultimately do nothing to address the political inequalities and structural problems that immigrants face.

Yet the de-politicization of integration policies is only half the problem. If it is true that part of the solution to the problematics of immigration rests upon the individuals in the host country, then we must also address the issues that keep people from imagining a culturally pluralistic society. I posit that a key problem in this regard is due to the “primacy of phenotype” or, the tendency to read race, nationality and ethnicity through physical appearance. Regardless of how “politically correct” one is, how well educated one is on issues of race and phenotype, or how close to home the issues of immigration

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<sup>37</sup> My translation from the Italian.

are (as I found in interviews with both immigrants themselves as well as those who worked in the immigration service industry), we are taught from a young age that race, nationality, culture and ethnicity map themselves onto the physical body. Being able to read against the grain, for instance, being able to see an “other” as Italian when they do not appear to have stereotypical physical Italian characteristics—goes against some deeply entrenched cultural norms and ideas.

Indeed, if a cultural anthropologist with an interest in race and culture notices the cognitive dissonance she experiences when seeing a group of multi-ethnic children wearing t-shirts that read “Made In Italy,” then it is safe to imagine that many other people would encounter a similar dis-cognition. And so it is to this primacy of phenotype that I turn in the next chapter—through an exploration of a group of immigrants that received an undo amount of attention precisely because they could appear physically (i.e., phenotypically) Italian, and were thus capable of ‘passing’ *as Italian*. Indeed, almost no other group at the time of my research received as much attention, or as much press, as those who are part of what some have termed “The Albanian Question.”

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ALBANIAN QUESTION

They live like we lived one hundred years ago. They are savage, tribal. They will kill for nothing.

—Angelo, a social service provider for immigrants at San Pietro speaking of Albanians.

*(Fieldnotes June 10, 2004)*

Lasciatemi cantare/con la chitarra in mano/Lasciatemi cantare/  
Un canzone piano piano/Lasciatemi cantare/Perché sono fiero/  
Sono italiano...Un italiano vero

Let me sing/With my guitar in hand/Let me sing/  
A soft, soft song/Let me sing/Because I'm proud/  
I'm Italian...A real Italian

— Sung by a group of Albanians in a truck, trying to get to Italy, in the film, *Lamerica*.

### Introduction

The above quote by Angelo illustrates the vitriol that many Italians hold towards Albanians. His statement shocked me, as he was one of the workers tasked with interviewing and allocating resources and services to newly arrived immigrants in Rome. I was accustomed to hearing offhand and dismissive comments from some of the administrative staff about immigrants, but I had observed that those working more directly with immigrants seemed more compassionate and nuanced in their ideas about these populations. In fact, Angelo was usually quite receptive and generous; that day as I observed him interview immigrants from all over the world, asking about their arrival, their goals, and their needs, he seemed patient and concerned about each person's

welfare. But when I asked him about Albanians, he abandoned his willingness to see past the prevalent stereotypes in Italy regarding the national belonging of immigrants.

Although Angelo's response was particularly caustic, his notions of Albanians as both dangerous and savage reflected widespread anti-Albanian sentiment that existed in Italy at the time of my research.

In this chapter, I explore why Albanians as a group were seen as “uncivilized” and “dangerous” in Italy. I begin by tracing the development of my own awareness of widespread anti-Albanian sentiment to describing what I learned via interviews and conversations with Italians, which highlight some of the fears and prejudices that many Italians reproduce. I then use an example from a film to highlight themes central to how Albanians are perceived in Italy. To bring a theoretical perspective to what has been called Italy's “Albanian Question,” I turn to the research of those offering insight into historical and political contexts. Finally I focus on what I consider to be the crucial issue regarding the bounding and marking of Albanians as ‘other’, and which the above excerpt from *Lamerica* highlights, that Albanians, more so than some other immigrant groups, possess the ability to pass as Italian and therefore pose a threat to Italian identity.

### **Anti-Albanianness**

I had already deduced the widespread fear of Albanians when I decided to attend a conference called *New Perspectives on Albanian Migration and Development* in Korçë, Albania, held in September of 2004. The conference was organized and sponsored by the *Sussex Center for Migration Research* in England; I read the announcement in the weekly newsletter from *roma-intercultura.it* when I checked my email one day at San Pietro in May of 2004. I was in the administrative office where I sometimes volunteered to do

filing and data entry. It was around lunchtime and two employees, Andrea and Marco, were eating at a nearby table. When I read the email, I told them excitedly about the opportunity. They looked at each other, shook their heads and gave me a hand gesture signifying that I was crazy.

I was often the subject of bemusement and teasing by them, especially my linguistic and social gaffes; in fact, for a few days afterwards, Andrea teased me about my decision to visit Albania, announcing to other workers, “Guess where Flavia is planning on going?” Marco warned me outright to be careful, and asked me pointedly about the logistics of the conference. When I explained that I would be picked up at the airport in Tirana by conference organizers and then given transportation to Korçë, he seemed placated, but warned me not to go outside of the airport in Tirana without a chaperone. Everyone I told expressed such concern that I both regretted telling them, and I began to get nervous.

My anxiety dissipated when I arrived in Tirana, where I felt comfortable enough, *without a chaperone*, to walk outside of the terminal to a nearby café for an espresso macchiato; and after spending three days in Korçë, I realized that notions of Albania, as a chaotic, lawless and dangerous place where I would immediately be targeted by thugs, was a myth. In fact the reaction of those I told in Rome about going to Albania reminded me of the reaction many of my friends and family had when I had decided to take a job as a community organizer near a housing project in Detroit in the mid-1990’s; they were projecting fears prompted not by experience, but mainly by media coverage and widespread prejudice. My first clue regarding prevalent anti-Albanian sentiment occurred

long before I stepped foot in Albania, when, in 2001, I was mesmerized by the media frenzy surrounding a crime in a small northern Italian village.

### **National hysteria: The case of Erika**

In February of 2001, an Italian woman and her son were found murdered in their home in Novi Liguri. Within a day, the murdered woman's sixteen year-old daughter, Erika, in a moment perhaps inspired by the overall anti-immigrant sentiment, stated that the men who killed her mother and brother "looked Albanian." The police immediately accepted Erika's story and released to the public that the murder was an attempted burglary gone wrong, carried out by illegal immigrants, most likely Albanians (King and Mai 2008:116).

When the story first broke, I watched the events unfold on Italian mainstream TV. Although I accepted the initial account that Albanians were responsible, I felt critical of the resulting bombardment of anti-immigrant and anti-Albanian sentiment. Whether via discussions about crime and immigration on talk shows, or reports of anti-immigrant rallies, or through the words of shocked neighbors broadcast on the news, the link between the demise of Italian society due to immigration in general and Albanians in particular was palpable and ubiquitous.<sup>38</sup>

Geographer Russell King and anthropologist Nicola Mai have collaborated extensively on issues related to Albanian migration. In their book *Of Myths and Mirrors: Interpretations of the Albanian Migration to Italy*, they report that in response to media attention and anti-immigrant fervor, the police in Novi Liguri arrested and interrogated a multitude of immigrants living in the area in the first days following Erika's accusation

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<sup>38</sup> This statement is based primarily on my own experience watching the news and talk shows mainstream TV during the time, although King and Mai (2008:116) also mention the prevalence of anti-immigrant and anti-Albanian sentiment resulting from Erika's accusation and media response.

(2008:116). In a shocking turn of events, Erika and her boyfriend Omar were arrested about a week later, and were eventually found guilty of the murders. Erika's savvy in blaming Albanians capitalized on Italian prejudice, which both deflected attention from her and reinforced negative beliefs about Albanians.

In watching the events surrounding the Novi Liguri murders unfold, I was struck by the similarity to the Susan Smith incident that took place in the United States in 1993. Ms. Smith was responsible for drowning her two children by driving her car into a lake. She was overlooked initially as a suspect because she stated that a black man had taken her car and her two children at gunpoint. The Smith case rendered visible the hierarchy of race that placed black men as the most feared and vilified group (Terry 1994, Ross 1994). While the Smith case stimulated a debate about racism and stereotyping in the United States, no such nationwide debate regarding the stereotyping of Albanians as problematic unfolded in Italy. The frenzy surrounding the murders in Novi Liguri, and the unquestioned acceptance by the police that an Albanian was responsible, made me wonder about the particular threat Albanians represented in Italy and about the problematic link between Albanians and an especially savage and violent criminality. Immediately after hearing about the murders, I began to ask not only the workers and teachers at San Pietro, but anyone willing to discuss immigration issues, about why Albanians were viewed as so dangerous in Italian society.

### **Notions of Albanians as dangerous**

During my fieldwork in Rome, I found that those I spoke with about immigration, from the workers at San Pietro, to people I met at intercultural events, to others, such as cab drivers, workers at cafes and restaurants, my landlord, my neighbors, as well as my

friends, were not hesitant to talk about the issue of immigration and their views of immigrants. Generally speaking, everyone I talked to about immigration, even those who resisted dominant ideas about immigrant groups, were able to recite what those dominant notions were. Indeed this reproduction of dominant notions was most prevalent when I asked about Albanians. In these instances any resistance regarding stereotypes vanished; I was either offered blanket statements about Albanians without explanation, as in the case of Angelo, or I was offered reasons that justified negative perceptions of Albanians.

My pointed questions to my informants about Albanians provided me with some understanding of the pervasiveness of the “Albanians as patently dangerous” stereotype. While I usually addressed the issue directly in interviews, sometimes without prompting, the problem of Albanians would arise:

One day, I arrived early to observe Luigi’s class at San Pietro’s language school. I took the opportunity to ask him about what he thought about immigration and whether he considered it to be a problem. He told me that on the whole, he thought that Italy needed immigrants, the good ones in any case. I asked him what he meant by the term “good ones.”

“The ones that work hard, respect the law, like Filipinos,” he replied.

“So who are the bad ones, then?” I asked.

“Eastern Europeans, mainly Romanians and Albanians,” he responded.

“You think that they are all bad, really?” I inquired.

“Well of course not all, but I would say that 90 percent of Albanians are bad, and 90 percent of Filipinos are good,” he said.

[Fieldnotes March 2001]

I was unable to push more on the issue because students arrived and he started class.

Although he had initially mentioned Eastern Europeans and Romanians along with Albanians as a “bad” group, he ended up highlighting Albanians as the opposite of hardworking and law-abiding Filipinos. The notion of Albanians being associated with

crime as a kind of national cultural trait was widely shared among the other people with whom I spoke:

One evening, after asking me why I was in Rome, my cab driver asked me if I wanted to know what he thought about immigration.

“Of course,” I said.

“Well, it’s complicated because people who really need to leave their countries should be allowed to come here...but some come just to be thieves,” he replied.

“Who?” I asked.

“Albanians,” he stated.

“What about them?” I asked.

“Well, they’ve never worked, so they come here to steal because that is the way it is in their country,” he answered.

[Fieldnotes February 12, 2004]

Again, the notion of Albanians not respecting the law, of being intrinsically untrustworthy, was given as justification for prejudice. Indeed such notions existed not only in lay accounts but were also reproduced by immigration officials.

Luca, an assistant director of immigrant services at San Pietro, reproduced this dominant narrative of Albanians as criminal, though he also rationalized this within the context of history and the collapse of the Albanian state:

They [Albanians] are criminals, or they live off the state and drain resources. There is no work in their country, because of the fall of communism, and it is very poor so they come here. There are statistics that show this [that they come to Italy and engage in illegal activity.]

[Interview March 2004]

Although I asked Luca for these statistics, he wasn’t able to come up with any concrete evidence or references. Yet the belief that these statistics existed, even without references, belie how engrained the notion of the dangerous Albanian had become. Indeed, this narrative was not only accepted and perpetuated by Italians, but also found its way into the consciousness of other immigrants.

Even my American-born landlady, Ann, an artist, who had made Italy her home for more than 20 years, feared Albanians. I had lunch one day with her and her husband, Mauro, at their home in a small town outside of Rome. I came to interview Mauro because he had just retired from being a supervisor at an organization in Rome serving homeless youth, many of whom were immigrants. Ann was seated at the table when I began the interview:

Ann: Speaking of immigration, two Albanian men broke into our home last month when we were sleeping! Thank god Mauro awoke and was able to chase them off!

I asked her if they had caught the men. When Ann said no, I asked how she knew they were Albanians.

Ann: Well of course they were Albanians.

Flavia: Did Mauro see them?

Ann: No it was dark. But you don't understand Flavia. Everyone knows that it's Albanians, the police know it, the whole town knows it.

Flavia: But what proof is there that it's Albanians who are responsible?

Ann: When they came to town, that's when it all [burglaries] started.

Flavia: But unless someone is caught, how do we know that it's Albanians and not people assuming they are Albanians. Can you really tell an Albanian from an Italian?

Ann: Oh yes, it's very easy. You can spot them a mile away. Mauro and I have talked about it. For instance they have much larger heads at the top and then very narrow chins. Perhaps I can tell more easily than others because I've done a lot of portraits and I notice those things.

(Interview June 2004)

I almost dropped the issue, because I felt strange about Ann's response, as I had expected her to state, as others had, that clothing or accent was the primary way to distinguish Albanians from Italians. That she linked it to physiology made me want to confront her in a way that I felt would be damaging to our landlord/tenant relationship. Instead, I decided

to approach the subject as part of my research, asking for insight on the issue of

Albanians:

Flavia: I know that I don't know what's been going on here, and it's entirely possible that two Albanian men broke into your apartment, but I've noticed that there is a lot of fear regarding Albanians. I'm interested in the issue because everyone I've asked says that Albanians are dangerous, not to be trusted, and are part of crime rings throughout Italy. I've asked people at San Pietro to help find me some statistics and I can't find any research that says that Albanians are any more likely to break the law than any group of immigrants. I also haven't met anyone who actually knows any Albanians. So, I've been thinking that perhaps the way that Albanians are seen and treated in Italy is similar to the way that black men have been feared and stereotyped in the United States.

Ann took this in, saying that it was an interesting thought, and Mauro jumped into the conversation:

Mauro: Flavia, I don't think it's the same thing. You are speaking of a very different history. In America, you had slavery and then segregation and have many problems with racism. Here in Italy, we don't have the same problems with racism. In fact at first, we welcomed Albanians to Italy... But they took advantage of our good will and began linking up with the mafia and setting up drug and prostitution rings. It's a huge problem that is documented.

Ann: I know this may sound bad, but in many ways the feelings towards Albanians are justified. There is a lot of crime, not only here, but in the towns nearby committed by Albanians and you read about it in the newspapers, so it's not just stereotypes. And for the [Albanian] women it's horrible, they are forced into slavery in Italy and if they try to leave the men will kill their families in Albania.  
[ibid]

I didn't know what to do with this information at this point, and the conversation drifted as we prepared to eat lunch *al fresco*. I made plans to interview Mauro at his office on another day.

Mauro's response and story about Albanians being initially welcomed but then betraying the trust of Italians due to their participation in crime rings was echoed by others as well, including Luca.

Luca:           When the first Albanians came to Italy in 1991, we welcomed them. Did you know there are ancient Albanian villages in Sicily? Well that community sponsored many Albanians, and even they have rejected them. So even Albanians don't like Albanians!  
[Interview March 2004]

Although I didn't know about it at the time of the interview, the ancient Albanian community he referred to are the Arbëreshë people, a minority group from Albania who migrated to Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and settled in various areas in Southern Italy and who speak a dialect that is different from modern Albanian. While it is true that many families offered asylum initially to Albanians, the "rejection" that Marco spoke of resulted more from changing Italian policies regarding Albanian immigration, marked by their deportation, than from a feeling of betrayal in those communities (King and Mai 2008:66). Although the Arbëreshë have lived in Italy for over 500 hundred years, Luca bounded them as permanently "Albanian." This made me wonder about the ability for any group marked as "other" to be able to claim a legitimate space in Italy.

Overall, what became clear to me from my discussions with non-Albanians about Albanians was that they believed in and reinforced the notion of Albanians as dangerous and untrustworthy; not only were the stereotypes true, but as Mauro and Marco asserted, they were *earned*. One would think that the patent acceptance regarding the dangerousness and criminality of Albanians was due to personal experience, however, most had never met nor had the opportunity to develop close ties with Albanians. Ann and Marco never found out the identities of their intruders, though that did nothing to

dispel their belief that the men were Albanian; just as in the case of Erika, the fact that Albanians were not to blame did nothing to detract from anti-Albanian sentiment. I decided to try to find someone, anyone, from Albania in Rome who might be able to reflect on their experience living in Italy as an Albanian.

### **Finding someone from Albania to interview**

Although I was able to interview one Albanian man in Rome, in general, I had a very hard time trying to access anyone to interview from Albania. The presence of Albanians at San Pietro was negligible. In all of the intake interviews I observed, I never met someone from Albania and there were no Albanian students in any of the language classes I attended. This was attributed by one teacher, Maria, to the proficiency in Italian that many Albanians had by the time they arrived in Italy. However, at the language schools I visited, there were numerous students who spoke Italian well, as the schools were also places to meet other people, learn about job opportunities, and practice Italian. Although this wasn't the case at San Pietro, the language schools at other organizations such as Diriti per Immigrati and San Pietro, provided a sense of community and belonging for the students.

So why no Albanians? Luca attributed the lack of presence of Albanians at San Pietro to:

They want the *tessera*<sup>39</sup> to prove that they were here in case of amnesty, but they have their own networks for meals, employment... so they don't need other things from us, like training courses or job referrals...and most of them are illegal and don't qualify for those services anyway.  
[Interview March 2004]

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<sup>39</sup> The tessera is the card that enables immigrants to obtain services through San Pietro.

In many ways, Albanians seemed a much-discussed yet invisible and hard-to-access population. This may be understandable because of the stereotypes that existed were so dominant that they relied more on their own community. Indeed, the one interview I was able to have with someone from Albania happened by pure chance.

I was at my local internet café and had printed some information on Albania. When I went to the front desk to collect the pages, the owner asked me why I was interested in Albania. I answered that it seemed like an interesting place:

“Are you kidding? Everyone is trying to leave there to come here,” he said. I then told him about my research and my interest in immigrants of Albanian origin.

“We have an Albanian who works here, you should ask him! You would never know he was Albanian, his Italian is perfect!” the owner announced.  
[Fieldnotes February 20 2004]

He then called over Davide and introduced me. I had seen and talked to Davide on previous visits, and as the owner said, it never occurred to me that he wasn't Italian. I asked Davide if he was willing to talk to me about his experience, and we decided to meet the next day at a nearby café.

### **Interview with Davide**

When I met with Davide, we talked for about twenty minutes, and I realized that he didn't seem entirely comfortable about being interviewed “as an Albanian.” In fact, he stated a few times that he wasn't really representative of most Albanian immigrants, for one, he was on a student visa, which meant that his family had money and status in Albania.

Davide: I study at the university, and I spend time mainly with other Italians... my brother is here too, and we feel comfortable here...  
Flavia: but do you ever feel like you being Albanian has an effect. Are you ever singled out for being Albanian? Your boss at the café made a point of telling me you're Albanian.

Davide: ah that, well yes, he teases me, calls me ‘Albanese’<sup>40</sup> but it’s nothing, my friends sometimes tease me too. I don’t have problems usually, except for that bastard [pointing to the barista], he’s always giving me shit. [Barista laughs] but it doesn’t bother me...and I tease him back for being ‘Italian’...we make fun of each other.

I had a hard time trying to get him to open up about some of the details of the teasing between him and his Italian friends. It didn’t seem as if the topic itself made him uncomfortable but I had to wonder if his reluctance to expand on topics reflected the fact he had been “out-ed” as Albanian by his boss and felt somewhat coerced to meet with me. I decided to ask him if he had any problems getting a job or finding housing.

Davide: No, not me, but for others [Albanians], yes.  
Flavia: How did you get your job [at the internet café]?  
Davide: My friend recommended me.  
Flavia: Do you think you might have had trouble if not?  
Davide: Probably.

I asked him about his plans after finishing University, he told me he was going to return to Albania. I was somewhat surprised by this and asked him why he wanted to return.

Davide: I like it there [Albania] better, and there are more opportunities.  
Flavia: That is interesting because so many come here to find opportunity.  
Davide: Well, yes, but they are looking for any jobs.  
Flavia: So it would be hard for you to find a higher level job here?  
Davide: Yes, besides, where I am from [Tirana] there are many more opportunities for good jobs.

Davide’s somewhat perfunctory remarks reflect the difficulty in interviewing someone where a lack of regular interaction makes rapport harder to establish. His reticence shifted when I stopped asking about him about his experience as an “Albanian” and instead asked him more generally about the issue of prejudice against Albanians.

Davide: Yes, there are many problems.

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<sup>40</sup> The word “Albanese” as is a wide-spread derogatory term that “carries a heavy connotation of intolerance and derogatory attitudes which condemn all Albanians as unwelcome, uncivilized, poor, violent, criminally-inclined and untrustworthy” (King and Mai 2008:20)

Flavia: Why do you think that is?  
Davide: Well, the bad stuff that happens gets attention, but the good things not so much. Perhaps there are problems with crime, but of course not all Albanians are like that. And no one notices when nothing happens, only when bad things happen.  
Flavia: So how do you think Italians can tell if someone is Albanian?  
Davide: Well, mainly the accent, but well, we do blend in, don't we?

Suddenly, Davide was a "we." And he did blend in, his accent indiscernible, his jeans, white button-up shirt, and black leather shoes normative to Italian trends for young men. Certainly I saw nothing about his skin, hair and eyes nor his facial structure (in contrast to what Ann asserted) that would set him apart or that would label him as non-Italian. The issue of the ability for Albanians to 'pass' as Italian is a central theme in Gianni Amelio's film *Lamerica*.

### *Lamerica*

I didn't see *Lamerica* until I had already noticed and begun to talk to people about the widespread anti-Albanian sentiment in Italy. The film was released in 1994 and won the 1994 European Film Award for best film, and four awards, including Best Director at the Venice Film Festival (Vitti 1996). *Lamerica*, as a cultural text, does an excellent job of summing up and critiquing Italian fears associated with Albanians. *Lamerica* is used as the film's title to underline a specific theme, that from the start of the migration of Albanians into Italy in 1991, Albanians saw Italy the way that Italians who emigrated saw America, as a safe haven and a land of opportunity. Furthermore, Albanians are positioned as seeing a connection, a relationship of obligation with Italy, because of the two countries' intertwined past. One theme throughout the film recalls the historical connection between the two countries during World War II. In 1939, Italy, under Mussolini, invaded and annexed Albania. While Italy's intervention in Albania only

lasted until 1944, when Enver Hoxha seized control of the government and created a communist regime, the film makes clear that Albanians have never forgotten the relationship.

*Lamerica* begins with footage from an Italian newsreel about the April 1939 arrival of the Italian military to the Port of Durraza as the announcer states:

the political union between Italy and Albania is made in the name of Fascism...the union of Albanian and Italian armies, the foundation of the Albanian Fascist party. Joint initiatives are formed, courts are organized, schools and hospitals founded...housing for peasants built, and last, thanks to Italy, among the Albanians, *civilization takes its place*. (my emphasis)

The newsreel then shows the arrival of Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's foreign secretary, and the stately welcome he received for his speech in Tirana. The announcer states, "Ciano is welcomed with enthusiasm as representative of the great nation which ended the misgovernment of King Zog and the poverty of the Albanian people." The movie then cuts to the Porto of Durazzo in 1991, when the film takes place. It features a crowd of Albanians, gathered and waiting for the opportunity to get a ship to Italy, chanting, "Italy, Italy, you are the world" as the main character, Gino arrives with his boss, both from Naples, to found Alba Calzatura, a shoe factory.

Gino doesn't realize it at the time, but the shoe factory is a sham, set up by his boss to pocket development grants meant to stimulate the Albanian economy. This particular plot line, which, in various scenes, shows the rampant corruption on the part of both Albanian and Italian officials, serves as a foil to Italian notions of Albanians as corrupt and uncivilized. To legitimize the company, they find a man, Spiro, whom they've been told is a political prisoner from the communist era to act as the Albanian

“chairman” of the company. Spiro is elderly, poverty stricken and shows signs of senility, thus he is the perfect puppet. But Spiro disappears, and Gino is sent to find him. The rest of the film is about Gino and Spiro’s journey and misadventures where they find themselves stranded in Albania. Ironically, Gino eventually finds himself, without a passport, having to make it back to Italy, following a group of Albanians by truck and then by boat, who are themselves trying to get to Italy.

Another central theme in *Lamerica*, perhaps illuminating Italian fears of miscegenation, is how much Albanians and Italians, especially Southern Italians, look alike. For example, Gino, continually gets mistaken for an Albanian, having to declare numerous times, “I’m Italian,” while Spiro, is actually an Italian named Michele, who, after Hoxha took control, had to pass as Albanian in order to survive. In nearly every scene, Italian popular culture and icons are omnipresent (as well as the presence of Italian TV), and nearly everyone Gino meets speaks Italian. While the film is fictional, it does an excellent job of bringing to the forefront how history, notions of backwardness, and fears of miscegenation play out in contemporary interactions between Italians and Albanians. The film also helps set the stage for critiquing one of the most pervasive stereotypes, that of so-called Albanian deviancy.

### **Albanians as “deviant” and “prone to criminality”**

I am not alone in concluding that Albanians were particularly vilified as a group, occupying the “least desirable” category in the hierarchy of immigrant groups in Italy; the issue of anti-Albanianness in Italy is well documented and has been written about extensively. (fix it) the supposed criminality of Albanians is offered as a justification for Italian fears and prejudice; however, researchers such as Jamieson and Sily (1998) and

Bonifazi and Sabatino (2003) have called into question the link between Albanians and crime.

Jameison and Silj's report on Albanians and criminality analyses data compiled by the Ministry of the Interior in Italy on crimes committed by foreigners from 1991 through 1997; they find that, in numbers similar to other immigrant groups, the vast majority of criminal offenses committed by Albanians were non-violent "survival crimes" (petty theft, drug distribution, prostitution) and that "illegal status contributes significantly to the likelihood of committing crimes" (1998:39). Bonifazi and Sabatino published a study on the kinds of crimes committed by Albanians and their incarceration rates. They conclude:

In Italy, Albanians have been for a decade now one of the main targets of public concern over crime. The statistics investigated describe a remarkably different picture however. Although they show a high involvement of Albanians in illegal activities, particularly in petty crimes, these figures are not spectacular in relation to the size of the community, and most serious crime appears to be committed within, and against, the national community itself (2003:993).

Prevalent beliefs in Italy then, of Albanians as being more prone to crime than other groups, is unfounded.

Both studies report that the illegal status of foreigner, *regardless of national origin*, plays a primary role in criminal activity. Jamieson and Silj note that:

The majority of Albanian immigrants to Italy undoubtedly wish to live and work legally, however, the difficulties in obtaining a visa or residence permit make this extremely difficult. This situation will not change unless formal procedures become less bureaucratic, and unless the general public and potential employers become less biased against Albanian labour. [1998:40]

*Bias* is also cited by Bonifazi and Sabatino regarding the arrest rates of Albanians:

the percentages of Albanians charged have been regularly higher than the percentages sentenced. This situation suggests ethnic targeting by the media, and consequently, the police. However, Italian popular stereotypes of Albanian ethnic

deviancy cannot be upheld, and any identification of Albanian immigrants as such with crime would be erroneous and simplistic [2003:992-3]

That the Italian media is seen as complicit in the perpetuation of stereotypes and the ‘ethnic targeting’ of Albanians is shared widely among scholars writing about immigration in Italy.

There is no shortage of literature on media in Italy and its effects on public opinion regarding immigration in general. To note a few, Angel-Ajani (2000), Campani (2001), Grillo (2002), Krause (2001, 2006), Perocco (2003), Piperino (2002) Sciortino and Colombo (2004) and Zincone (1999), cite the media’s role in the creation of immigration as a broad threat to Italian identity. Alessandro Dal Lago (1999) surveyed key words in the titles of Italian newspaper articles about immigration and found that the words ‘Albanian’, ‘clandestine’, ‘drugs’, ‘arrested’ appeared most frequently. Sciortino and Columbo (2004), who surveyed principle daily papers and weekly news magazines argue that, in fact, that media representations of immigration is the primary means from which Italians have formulated ideas about immigrants. King and Mai note the particular attention given Albanians:

Within the wider context of the Italian media representation of migrants, Albanians are the group that has been the most intensely stereotyped, stigmatized and criminalized. They have been readily associated with criminality and moral degeneration, and in particular with drug smuggling and sexual exploitation. In fact, crimes committed, even if supposedly, by Albanian migrants have been given particular prominence by both local and national Italian media from the very first episodes of the Albanian Migration. [2002:190]

While some might critique the role of media influence as over-determined in the development and perpetuation of anti-Albanian sentiment, King and Mai point out that in Italy, media discourse often reflects political agendas:

given that the media are closely tied, often in terms of outright ownership, to the main political parties in Italy, the media discourse reflects political prerogatives of stereotyping and victimizing immigrants, especially Albanians [2004:19]

Whether causal or merely reflective of discourse, the role of the media is central to the construction of Albanians in Italy. It is therefore interesting, as some have noted, that Albanian migration was conceived of very differently initially; discourse regarding the arrival of Albanians in March of 1991 in Italy was “positive” and “accepting.”

### **Albanian Immigration to Italy 1991**

Earlier in this chapter, I included the statements of Mauro and Luca, who both alluded to a sense of betrayal regarding Albanians; from their perspective, Albanians were initially welcomed, but earned negative perceptions because of their participation in crime and illegal activities. The notion of an initial positive reception of Albanians in Italy is backed by Zinn (1996) who writes of Albanians being as seen as a kind of “Adriatic brethren.” Kosic and Triandafyllidou note that the first arrival of Albanians were:

welcomed warmly. Then Prime Minister of Italy Giulio Andreotti suggested that families ‘adopt’ Albanians. Italian politicians claimed that Italy and Albania were part of a common Adriatic culture, and thus had special bonds and obligations to one another. (2003:999)

Perlmutter similarly notes that political discourse and media:

portrayed the Albanians as historic neighbors. They were ‘sons of the same sea’ sharing an ‘Adriatic patrimony’... most critically, they were seen as racially similar and sharing common aspirations, and thus easier to integrate than dark-skinned Africans- however, popular opinion has swung dramatically against the Albanians...what has happened can be best described as the criminalization of the Albanian refugee [1998:211-212]

King and Mai refer to the trajectory of the perception of Albanian immigration as moving from “welcome to stigmatization”:

initial construction of the Albanian migration was of an heroic event—of ‘Adriatic brethren’ escaping the yoke of communism, sailing out of their isolated history to join the West... but the welcome of the West was short-lived. A very different kind of reception and representation quickly emerged, and Albanian migrants in Italy... came to be subjected to fiercely negative stereotypes [2004:1]

The shift towards the stigmatization of Albanians was backed by action; while the migrants in March of 1991 were granted asylum as political refugees, subsequent groups of migrants, beginning in August of 1991 and continuing until now, have been treated as illegal and subject to deportation. As Perlmutter notes, “Italian response to the flow of Albanian refugees, initially one of acceptance, rapidly turned to an emphasis on expanding Italian intervention in order to keep Albanians in Albania (1998:208).”

What, then, accounts for this discursive shift regarding Albanians? An historical perspective is relevant to understanding the initial welcome of Albanian immigrants in 1991, which included the recognition of the past, of overlapping borders, as well as a sense of obligation. For, as Zinn notes, the “positive” media reports contained undertones of Albanians as “pitiful, backward, helpless people” (1996:12). Vullnetari writes that:

By the time the August 1991 immigrants arrived, the press discourse of an ‘Albanian invasion’, of ‘ungrateful, lazy and violent criminals’ flooding the coastal towns of Italy, was ever-present... The full range of negative thematic images of Albania and Albanians was deployed: violence, chaos, backwardness, poverty, desperation, mass migration, child trafficking, prostitution, family breakdown—all of which, it was implied, were the exact opposite of the ‘good society’ of Italy. (Vullnetari 2007:55)

Vullnetari’s quote shows that already existing notions of Albania as “backwards and uncivilized” framed migration to Italy. The “shift towards stigmatization” might then be better understood as a shift that positioned Albanians first, as “savage and uncivilized,” requiring intervention from Italy, and then as “deviant and dangerous” and incapable of being integrated.

The resulting reification of the Albanian as both savage and criminal is linked to Italy's perilous location in Europe, relating to history, and to Italy's location within Europe. Perlmutter calls the complicated reaction of Italy to Albanian immigration as resulting from the "politics of proximity" (1998:204). He argues that Italy's geopolitical location, close to Albania and Europe, has made it an "important point of contact (and conflict) between Europe and the Balkans" (1998:204) and as an important factor framing Italy's status in the European Union. King and Mai note that the shift towards the stigmatization of Albanians "was consistent with Italy's need to create for itself an EU compatible identity, by redefining its perceived moral and cultural boundaries against its 'albanian frontier' "(2008:207). As a result:

two symbolic places emerged as poles respectively of 'projective identification' ... Europe, connoting the West, civilization, and modernity; and Albania, symbolizing Italy's own rejected past of poverty, backwardness, emigration and totalitarianism [2008:122]

Italy's historical insecurity regarding its status in Europe has been documented by many, including Herzfeld (1987) and Schneider (1998). Albanian immigration in the 1990s "came at a time of profound change and identity crisis for Italy itself related to its position in the post-Cold War era, (and) the subsequent transformation of its role in the EU" (Vullnetari 2007:55). So where history and the pressures of the European Union helps contextualize the complicated reception of Albanians in Italy, the proximity of Albania to Italy, especially to Southern Italy, is also cited as a reason for the subsequent rejection and stigmatization of Albanians, which has precedence in Italy's own "Southern Question."

### **The “Albanian Question” as an extension of the “Southern Question”**

There is an obvious interconnection between the Albanian Question and the Southern Question with reference to their positionality within the historical process of definition of Italian identity—in sum, we argue that Albanians, were... identified with...the Italian Southerner as the main constitutive other against which to articulate a civilized and democratic Italian identity in relation to Italy’s aspirational belonging to Europe. [King and Mai 2008:123]

King and Mai (2008) and Zinn (1996) use the term the “Albanian Question” in reference to the “Southern Question”; the term ‘Southern Question’ refers to a historical dynamic, emerging after the unification of Italy, that has shaped the economic, political and cultural landscape of Italy, creating divisions between the North and South. Jane Schneider’s edited volume *Italy’s ‘Southern Question’: Orientalism in One Country*, provides an investigation into “how and why the forceful rhetoric of North versus South took hold in Italy, becoming an everyday symbolic geography for northerners and southerners alike.”

According to Schneider, the Southern Question positions:

provinces south of Rome as different from the rest of the peninsula, above all for their historic poverty and economic underdevelopment, [and includes a] catalogue of stereotypes... that southerners, by dint of their very essence...possess character traits that are opposite to the traits of northerners [1998:1]

In the volume, Mary Gibson notes that the differences between North and South became racialized in part due to the legacy of Italian criminologists such as Cesare Lombroso. Although the “hard-edged racial determination...softened into a determination based on culture,” (19) essentialized notions of the difference of southerners has remained salient, and this legacy of the creation of difference within Italy makes it extendable to other groups, as in the case of Albanians.

The Southern Question then provides a kind of precedence, a space for, the racialization of certain groups.<sup>41</sup> Mai (2002) and Perlmutter (1988) also posit that part of Italian reactions to Albanians may be due to residual racism against Southern Italians. Perlmutter elaborates that Albanians, “represent an earlier, poorer, more barbaric version of Italians, and one that is typically indistinguishable (1988:8).” To make the point that the phenotypic likeness of Albanians poses a threat to Italians, Perlmutter uses the following quote from *La Repubblica* (March 27, 1997), “If their jackets were of real leather and their gym shoes real Nikes, they could be confused with anyone living in the periphery of a Southern city” (1988:8). The indistinguishable-ness of Albanians may indeed be key to the extension of the Southern Question, in an effort to bound them as ‘other’, in the context of immigration and debates about belonging in Italy, and in Europe.

### **Conclusion: on the ‘phenotypic’ proximity of Albanians and Italians**

In contrast to Ann’s contention that Albanians are noticeably different based on physiology, Davide’s statement of Albanians blending in, as well as the moments in *Lamerica* where Gino gets continually mistaken for an Albanian (and vice versa) point to a key issue regarding anti-Albanian sentiment, that of the ability of Albanians to “pass” as Italian. A particularly evocative scene takes place when the truck that Gino and Spiro/Michele are riding in stops. Gino gets out to relieve himself, and one of the Albanian men follows him and says:

hey friend, can an Italian girl marry an Albanian? Or is there a law that says no?  
Now that I go to Italy, I find a girl in Bari. I want to marry her and have many

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<sup>41</sup> This extension of the ‘Southern Question’ is also applicable to other stigmatized groups in Italy, such as the Roma and Eastern Europeans, especially Romanians, who, as one interviewee stated in 2005, “are the new Albanians.”

children. I will never speak Albanian to my children, only Italian, so my children forget I am Albanian.

This moment is soon followed by the scene quoted at the beginning of this chapter, when the Albanian men break into a robust version of Toto Cotugno's *L'Italiano*; their refrain "I'm Italian/a real Italian" spilling out from the truck as it continues down a dirt road in Albania, on its way to the port of Durazzo and to the ship that will take them to Italy.

The purported danger of Albanians then is clear. Aside from cultural clues such as accent or clothing, Albanians are hard to distinguish from Italians. I contend that what is most threatening to Italians is not Albanian behavior, their "backwardness" nor "criminality"; rather, the marking and bounding of Albanians as "other" reflects their possibility of assimilation, the kind of assimilation that is nearly impossible for groups from Africa, Bangladesh, China and the Philippines, for example, who look very different from Italians.

## CHAPTER 5

### ON PREJUDICE, PRIVILEGE & PASSING: PUTTING WHITENESS THEORY INTO THE DISCUSSION

#### Introduction: *To Kill a Mockingbird*

In 2004, as Spring was making its presence known in Rome, I took one tram and two busses to the *peripheria* (suburbs), to a junior high school purported to have one of the largest percentages of immigrant students—around 15 percent. Though I had come there during a week of multicultural events to see an intercultural presentation on Eritrea, I arrived early and the teacher allowed me to sit in on her literature class. As I took a seat on the side of the classroom, I was drawn into the class discussion. The students were discussing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which they had just finished reading in Italian.

As the conversation about Scout and her adventures with Jem and Dill turned toward their sneaking into the courtroom to watch Scout's father, Atticus Finch, unsuccessfully defend a black man accused of raping a white woman, the students began asking questions about racism in the American South in the 1930s. Unfamiliar with the racial landscape of the American South during this era, the students were grappling with understanding the kind of legal and tacit separation that was the norm. Many of the students expressed frustration and even outrage about the treatment of African-Americans.

As I sat on the sidelines, scribbling notes, the teacher “out-ed” me as an American who had come to see the upcoming presentation on Eritrea. I remember one boy turned to me and asked, “Are you still racist?” to which the teacher clarified, “I think what he means is, are Americans are still racist?” Caught off guard I responded, hesitantly, “yes,

even though the laws have changed.” In that moment I had a newfound perspective about how my interviewees must have felt when I asked them to speak for “Italians” or “immigrants” as a whole. I also felt like I needed to explain myself better, to clarify the nuances of racial relations some sixty years after the events in the book had taken place. As I struggled to put together a more thoughtful answer, the bell rang, signaling the end of the class, and Miriam, the presenter on Eritrea, arrived. I was (embarrassingly) relieved. But my curiosity had been sparked.

What was it, I wondered later, about the classroom discussion that had thrown me for such a loop? Certainly it was about more than feeling put on the spot, or having some realization about interviewing my informants. Over the next few days I began to connect the dots, and here is the picture that emerged: these students, sitting in a fairly diverse classroom in the suburbs of Rome, a portion of whom were themselves immigrants (or children of immigrants), could not, in 2004, make sense of the racism that defined the south in America during segregation. Moreover, they could not understand a country that was defined, largely, by racism that, through my own admission, had not changed very much, even if our laws had. As I thought more about this disconnect, I reflected upon my own research on Albanians, and the questions their positioning as ‘dangerous’ raised about race and racism in Italy. I came to three important areas of concern.

First, I wondered, to what extent could the “Albanian question” map onto traditional conceptions of race and racism? As Wildman and Davis note, “[r]ace is often defined as Black and white; sometimes it is defined as white and ‘of color’ ...All these words, describing racial subcategories, seem neutral on their face, like equivalent titles,” (1995:646). But as ‘Albanians’ as a group didn’t map onto common racial subcategories

and vernacular, I wondered how to talk about race in regards to the Albanian question. This led me to my second question/area of concern, which was how to talk about race in Italy *writ large*.

Returning to the classroom discussion about *To Kill A Mockingbird*, I came to understand that part of the students' reactions had to do with the popular notion that Italy is not racist (or at least not racist like America is racist). While I explore this idea further in this chapter, it is important to note here that discussions of race in Italy have tended to center around questions of immigration, creating a cognitive link between these two issues. As such, any exploration of 'immigration' in this context is incomplete without tracing some of the discourse about race in Italy. This means not only exploring common cultural assumptions but also unearthing the scholarly research into race in Italy and Europe, especially exploring the proliferation of paradigms like the 'new racism' and related terms.

Lastly, I return to the Wildman and Davis quote about racial categorization from above, the one they end with the following sentence, "however the subcategories are listed, however neutrally the words are expressed, these words mask a system of power, and that system *privileges whiteness*," (1995:646, my emphasis). So finally in this chapter I turn to a discussion of whiteness, where I will argue that it is whiteness theory that provides the most useful conceptual framework for understanding both the Albanian question in particular, and questions of race and whiteness in Italy in general. This is important because, as Wildman & Davis note,

[t]o remedy discrimination effectively we must make the power systems and the privileges they create visible and part of the discourse. To move toward a unified theory of the dynamics of subordination, we have to find a way to talk about privilege.... Most of the literature has focused on

disadvantage or discrimination, ignoring the element of privilege. To really talk about these issues, privilege must be made visible. [1995:648] Whiteness theory allows us to make visible the privileges associated with the dominant or unmarked racial (or in ‘new racism’ terms: cultural) categories. I contend that it can help us uncover what is truly at stake in the debates about immigration. I will argue that these debates are, in reality, about the project of protecting the privileges associated with whiteness or, in the context of immigration, “Italianness.” I turn first to a discussion of race and racism in Italy.

### **Italians are not racist (at least not like Americans are racist)**

[C]ontemporary, western, postcolonial societies are imbricated in an idea of their constitutive nature as tolerant and democratic and, by association, non-racist or indeed anti-racist. [Lentin 2008: 488]

Anthropologist Jeffrey Cole (1997) examines the discourse around the commonly held assumption that “Italians are not racist” and offers that after World War II, Italians learned to denounce any form of racism, and a sense of Italians being “immune to racism” emerged with the rejection of Fascism. And as Cole points out, discourse around immigration in the early 1980s did express a tolerance for immigrants, “regarding [them] as more a resource than a problem, seeing in them the potential for a new and pluralistic Italy” (1997:8). Several scholars point to a shift away from that initial framing of immigration during the late 1980s and 1990s, a shift that entailed not only racialized violence but also a watershed moment in the Italian response to immigrants (specifically) and immigration *writ large*.

According to Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, “influential sociological works...first linked the rise of racism in contemporary Italy to the arrival of immigrants and the implementation of restrictive immigration policies,” (2012:14). Wren-Owens notes that

this era represents, “a very specific moment in the Italian experience of immigration [where] racial violence had erupted as Italy sought to adapt to its new status as a country of immigration after a century of Italian emigration to Northern Europe and the Americas,” (2011:378). Wren-Owens pinpoints four events that bring issues of Italian identity and responses to immigration to the forefront during this period. Of these, it is the first, the murder of South African activist Jerry Masslo in Villa Literno that, “whilst not the first racially-motivated murder in Italy, nonetheless represented the first national indication of the extent of racism in Italy,” (2011:379). As Wren-Owens explains,

[a]lthough Italy had technically been a net importer of people since 1972, the earlier waves of migrants had been chiefly ‘invisible’ domestic workers from the Philippines, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. These mainly female, Catholic, migrants were perceived as much less threatening and ‘other’ than the more highly visible male, mainly Muslim, immigrants from North Africa, often working as street vendors, who became more widespread in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and who brought the issue of immigration to the fore. [2011:381]

This historical moment brought forth a tension between the racialized violence against immigrants and “the continued belief amongst Italians that the country’s recent history of mass emigration precluded the existence of racism in Italy,” (Wren-Owens, *ibid.*).

Similar to 1980s and 1990s, Curcio & Mellino note a rise of racialized violence from 2007-2009 which was detailed in the “Report on Italian Racism.” Yet despite such research they contend that “racism as a challenging and ghostly ‘Italian subject matter’ – *symptomatically* enough – is still absent from national intellectual debate and the public sphere,” (2010:1). Lombardi-Diop notes that Italy is often conceived of as a “postracial society, a society where widespread racism permeates the political discourse, the societal behavior, and popular culture, yet race is often unnamed and ultimately silenced,” (2012:175). This may be related to the notion that Italians aren’t racist, as the response to

researchers about a ‘white riot’ in Pignetto in 2009 illustrate: “Everybody knows, we were told, that Romans of this historically Left wing neighborhood could not be at all racist,” (Curcio & Mellino, 2010:1).

In their forward to the special issue of *Darkmatter* focused on “Challenging Italian Racism” Curcio & Mellino make the following argument,

[s]o if the *specters* of race and racialization clearly emerge from these essays it is also true that their discursive materialization as *historical structuring structures* (to use here Pierre Bourdieu’s notorious definition of *habitus*) in Italian society and culture is still – at least through some of them – very precarious and ambivalent. Again, this under-theorization, even in the most radical anti-racist debate, is extremely indicative of the complexity that the question of race still carries with it in the Italian scenario. In fact, throughout Italian intellectual history it is very difficult to find any significant theoretical debate on racism: needless to say of its constitutive role in the formation of the modern Italian nation...In sum, racism has no significant place in Italian self-reflection about its own history. And this too could be read as a *symptom* of foreclosure of race on the national public sphere. [Curcio & Mellino 2010: 3]

Still, even with the difficulty of ‘speaking about race’, Italy has a history of making internal divisions and is also (in)famous for giving birth to one of the most paradigm-changing theorists about race. As Pugliese states, “the discursive stratification of Italians along a racial hierarchy...[is a] practice [that] must be seen as something that originated in Europe, and that, furthermore, gained its most comprehensive theoretical articulation in Italy,” (2002:155).

This theoretical articulation and “the racial hierachisation of Italians received its most comprehensive treatment by the nineteenth-century criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso,” (Pugliese, *ibid.*) who used anthropometry to argue that criminality was inherent, biological and mapped onto the body. In particular, Lombroso focused heavily on skin color, what would later be the most important (or at least most prevalent) site

onto which race is mapped. Importantly, “such a chromatics of race serves not only to explain the inferior position of Blacks in Lombroso’s evolutionary thesis; it also serves to explain the existence of seemingly aberrant types amid the white Italian population,” (Pugliese, 2002:156). By means of explanation Pugliese notes that,

[i]n the Italian context, as early as 1806, the French traveller Augustin Creuze de Lesser in his *Voyage en Italie et en Sicily* articulated what was to become a governing topos in the racialised mapping of the Italian peninsula: ‘Europe finishes at Naples, and, in addition, it ends badly enough. Calabria, Sicily and all the rest are Africa’ (quoted in Placanica 1989: 20). In the twentieth century, de Lesser’s observation has become a popular aphorism in the mouths of Northern Italians, with the slight difference that the racial dividing line has shifted further to the north: ‘Africa begins south of Rome’ [2002:155]

Still, in order to understand the ways in which certain groups were marked as non-white we must pay attention to what Pugliese discusses as the “problematic racial status of Italians” and “the untenability of speaking of Italians as homogenously white,” (2002:154).

As Lombardi-Diop notes, “in Italy, the condition for such denial of race is rooted in the very articulation of racial difference in terms that implicitly and constantly affirm the *demographic and social hegemony of whiteness*,” (2012:178, my emphasis).

If Pugliese and Lombardi-Diop’s assertions are correct, then the notion that “Italian is white” is a hegemonic idea that must continually be reinforced and strengthened through consent of the populace. It is primarily through the topic of immigration that these two narratives, one of the racial/other and one of the white/Italian, are woven together, creating a discursive opening for debates about immigration vis-à-vis race and vice versa.

## Immigration & Race

Demographers' alarms assist in constructing and normalising Italians as homogenous, "white" and European. They enable racism by promoting a politics of difference that heightens whiteness, not as an objective skin colour but as a subjective ideology. This ideology functions as an instrument of power by guaranteeing and naturalising privilege. Furthermore, alarmist discourses encourage a form of demographic nationalism in which the national population is depicted at risk from internal sources – low fertility and rapid ageing – as well as from external ones – increasing immigration. [Krause, 2006:7]

Given the pre-existing conflict about what being Italian means, who belongs to Italy and who doesn't, Krause's quote illustrates how Italy's "immigration problem" is transformed into Italy's "race problem," a discursive sleight of hand that allows whiteness to remain at once invisible yet privileged, while also serving as a marker of difference in immigration and its associated moral panics regarding the Italian nation. At the same time, through the same discourse the opposite is made true, as Italy's "race problem" is discursively shifted into Italy's "immigrant problem." This is made possible, and also reinforces itself, due to the 'floating signifier-ness' of both race and immigration. As Mezzadra explains,

The fact that racist rhetoric and practices adopted as their object what Stuart Hall calls an 'empty, floating signifier' – which is to say, 'immigrants' – signaled the fact that the legitimate order of things, the complex structure of citizenship itself, was becoming 'empty and fluctuating'. [2012:43]

The link between race, racism and immigration cannot be overlooked as Cucio & Mellino contend that, "the rise of an Italian racism is frequently conceptualized as a recent xenophobic response to the development of current international migration," (2010:4). If this is true, then what Mezzadra calls the "complete and utter crisis of citizenship," (2012:43) in Italy is actually framed through race and racial relations. He notes,

The critical issue here is that the new configurations of racism we are obliged to deal with in Italy and elsewhere in Europe at present do not aim at assigning different populations to different spaces; rather, they function to uphold (as their ‘internal supplement’) migratory policies that aim to regulate the hierarchically organized cohabitation of different bodies within a territory. [2012:47]

Yet calling on the term “race” or “racism” as a lens through which to view Italy’s struggles around immigration is quite complicated, especially given that, as Stuart Hall (1997) states, race itself is a “floating signifier.” As Lipsitz notes, “even though there has always been racism in American history, it has not always been the same racism. Political and structural struggles over power shape the contours and dimensions of racism in any era,” (1995:371). And just as race and racism in America shifts across time and space, the same is true of race and racism in Italy as well.

### **‘New Racism’ and related terms**

It is perhaps the shifting nature of the race concept that Lipsitz and Hall describe that brings up a problem regarding how to position the kind of othering immigrants in Italy face. There is obvious evidence of discrimination and xenophobia towards immigrants, as well more everyday notions of difference regarding the differential ordering of immigrant groups that I discuss in Chapter 2. However, as Cole (1997) and Lombardi-Diop (2012) have pointed out, there is also a denial that this discrimination amounts to racism. In my own fieldwork, I observed that there was the rejection of the label ‘racism’ by of many of my Italian informants who pointed to the more favorable treatment of certain ‘non-white’ African groups, such as the Senegalese, over certain ‘white’ groups such as Albanians, as proof that Italy did not have a racism problem. In other words, part of the difficulty addressing discrimination towards immigrants in Italy

as ‘racism’ is that does not map onto traditional Lombroso-esque understandings of race, the kind of racism “made in America,” the kind written about in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

This conundrum has not been unique to Italy, and the effort to name the seemingly “new” discrimination that immigrant groups face in Europe took hold of scholars who first made note of the connection between increasing immigration and the rise of xenophobic discourses in Britain, France and Germany in the late 1970s and early 1980s and continuing to the present. Cole discusses the various terms offered to specify the rise in anti-immigration ideologies and politics in Europe (and in Italy) as:

a novel form of racism, whether “new racism” (Barker 1981), “neo-racism” (Balibar 1991), or “differentialist racism” (Taguieff 1989,1990). In their view...targeted populations (including immigrants) [are treated] as naturally occurring groups whose fundamental difference and inferiority furnish sufficient reason for the curtailment of their opportunities in Europe. Faced with the official repudiation of racism, in memory of Nazism and Fascism, and a vocal “anti-racist” lobby, the ideologues of intolerance have discarded the rhetoric of race for that of culture and nation. While such ideologies are new to the extent that they denigrate culture and nationality rather than skin color, they reiterate the former colonialist vision of humanity as made up of bounded, natural and unequal peoples. [1997:12]

Grosfoguel uses the term ‘cultural racism’ in a similar manner, indicating a change in racial ideology that occurred “after the defeat of the Nazi occupations in Western Europe and the 1960’s Civil Rights struggles in Britain and the United States, global racial discourses shifted from biological racism to cultural racism” (1999:409). Along with new racism theorists, Grosfoguel notes that often, “the word race is usually not even used. Cultural racism assumes that the metropolitan culture is different from ethnic minorities’ cultures but understood in absolute, essentialist sense” (1999:412).

As for the plethora of terms used to bound and identify this (new-ish) moment of difference finding in Europe and Italy, Paul Silverstein speaks to the floating signifier-ness of race as well as to the discursive shift away from race as grounded in biology:

As the racial schemata into which immigrants have negotiated their slotting have shifted, so too have the frames of xenophobic discourse and violence to which they have been subjected. Within the anthropological literature, there has been a certain amount of debate... regarding the semantic implications, political relevance, and presumptions of discontinuity that accompany terming contemporary discourses of discrimination as a "new racism"...nonetheless, there is some general sense that a discursive shift has occurred in Western Europe in which racist paradigms according to a purely biological foundation to racial categories have increasingly given way to a wider presupposition of cultural difference as the fundamental and immutable basis of identity and belonging. [2005:365-6]

New racism theory (and its related concepts) recognizes the very real discursive shift that has taken place in Europe and in Italy which rejects biologically based arguments for a group's unequal treatment for notions regarding the compatibility or incompatibility of a group based on that immigrant group's culture or nation. New racism theory then does an excellent job of contextualizing the differential ordering of immigrant groups in Italy as well as the tendency of Italians to pinpoint 'culture' as a means of defending their notions of certain immigrant groups. Furthermore, the need for the discursive shift away from race and onto culture regarding how to bound and discriminate against certain groups is linked to the recognition that the kind of racism that gave rise to slavery and segregation in the US, the kind promoted by Fascists and Nazis, is an undeniable evil.<sup>42</sup> Such outright racism flies in the face of European ideals of tolerance and democracy, as Lentin (2008) points out, and may help explain why I was met with resistance by some of my Italian

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<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Hervik explains that European anthropology had been slow to take up the discussion on race and racism in Europe because of the erasure of race noting that "German-speaking and Scandinavia have morally and legally banned the term 'racism', which the memory of Holocaust had discredited and made it almost taboo to use,"(2004:149).

informants when I tried to equate the criminalization of Albanians in Italy in the early 2000s with the criminalization of Blacks in the US in the 1980s.

However for some scholars writing about race in Europe, “new racism” theory has its limitations since, whether culture or biology is used to assign individuals to ranked groups, the effects of the prejudice on these bounded populations are effectively the same. Grosfoguel notes that cultural racism “is always related to a notion of biological racism to the extent that the culture of groups is naturalized...(and) articulated in relation to poverty, labor market opportunities, and/or marginalization” (1999:412). Similarly, Angel-Ajani points out that:

the ‘new’ racism is a misnomer, as the history of racism during colonization, slavery and indentured servitude has long conflated race, culture and location (or nation)...the cultural politics of race, much like the ‘new racism’, produces national articulations on race that are not understood in crude biological forms but are mediated through official notions of cultural differences [2000:343]

Here, Angel-Ajani, echoing Silverstein and others, recognizes the salience of racism as a “floating signifier” that shifts and attaches itself to whatever can be used by those in power, be it notions of inferior biology, culture, national identity, religion, etc. In this way, ‘new’ racism seems not so new after all, rather, it is a newer incarnation of the same racialization process that privileges some and disadvantages others.

Philomena Essed, writing about the experience of Black women and everyday racism in the Netherlands, confronts a central issue regarding new racism and observes that “whether racism is racially or culturally expressed, the basic struggle is for power and control over societies’ resources” (1991:252). In other words, regardless as to how prejudice is justified, a core issue for the existence of racism, whether ‘new’ or not, is about protecting access to social, economic and political opportunities.

This point is particularly salient regarding the question of whether the real threat that Albanians posed was that they possessed the ability to “pass” as Italian more so than other phenotypically distinct groups. The threat around the ability to “pass” needs to be fleshed out, as the firm boundaries that marked Albanians (and increasingly other “white” non-Europeans since 2005) reveal the bounding, and the construction of Italian whiteness. Although ‘new racism’ theory tends to focus on discrimination as opposed to systems of privilege, as Garner notes, “the idea is not to subordinate the study of racisms to whiteness, rather to place whiteness within the confines of the material-ideological elements of studies of racism,”(2006:269). In the following sections I’ll explore a brief history of whiteness theory and its applications and viability in the European context. I begin by exploring why such a framework is necessary.

### **Why Whiteness**

Indeed, the study of whiteness tilts and exposes, not only by adding previously silenced and alienated voices but also by studying the very rules that have covertly governed the conversation. [Fine *et al*, 1997:viii]

Focusing on whiteness, rather than racism, shifts the gaze from those oppressed to those who are privileged by this system. However, it also exposes the ‘floating signifier-ness’ of whiteness itself, marking it as a *process* that assigns privilege and power to groups at varying levels. In the introduction to her 1999 edited volume *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, Ruth Frankenberg identifies a number of risks she associates with “*not* critically engaging whiteness” (1999:1), the most relevant of these for our discussion being that,

...to leave whiteness unexamined is to perpetuate a kind of asymmetry that has marred even many critical analyses of racial formation and cultural practice. Here the modes of alterity of everyone-but-white-people are subjected to ever more meticulous scrutiny, celebratory or not, while

*whiteness remains unexamined – unqualified, essential, homogenous, seemingly self-fashioned and apparently unmarked by history or practice.*  
[ibid, my emphasis]

Lipsitz echoes this sentiment noting that, “[a]s the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations,” (1995:369). Garner likewise discusses the difficulty of discussing whiteness, especially, “[w]hiteness without blackness...the former deprived of the latter becomes meaningless, and this is the key to understanding how whiteness *works*, i.e. by continuously redefining itself as the polar opposite of non-whiteness,” (2006:262). He goes on to explain that “whiteness can best be grasped as a *contingent social hierarchy granting differential access to economic and cultural capital*, intersecting with, and overlaying, class and ethnicity...as well as gender and sexuality,” (2006:264, my emphasis). In order to understand the uses of whiteness theory in understanding access to resources and capital in the European context, a brief history of the field is in order.

### **A Brief History of Whiteness Studies**

In one of the most cited articles on whiteness, George Lipsitz, states that “in recent years, an important body of American studies scholarship has started to explore the role played by cultural practices in creating ‘whiteness’ in the United States,” (1995:369). However in the introduction to that very article Lipsitz opens with a quote from Richard Wright who, when asked about the ‘Negro Problem’ in the U.S. in 1946 famously responded, “There isn’t any Negro problem; there is only a white problem,” (ibid.). According to Lipsitz, “by inverting the...question, Wright called attention to its hidden assumptions – that racial polarization comes from the existence of blacks rather than

from the behavior of whites...and that unless otherwise specified, ‘Americans’ means whites,” (ibid.).

Lipsitz acknowledges that “Malcolm X and others used this same formulation [of a white problem rather than a ‘negro’ problem] in the 1960s,” (1995:385, my bracket). He also notes that the idea that American means white is, “also Toni Morrison’s point in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination*,” (ibid.) – the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature three years prior to the publication of Lipsitz’s article. Yet both of these acknowledgements were relegated to the footnotes, and so it would be easy to overlook these examples and think that the years around 1995 that Lipsitz identifies were the lexus of origination for whiteness studies. This is both true, in the sense that mainstream academics were slow to take up this issue as a legitimate area of scholarly concern, and also false, in that intellectuals, scholars and activists of color had long been grappling with whiteness, though they did so at the margins of academia.

In this sense, according to Garner, “whiteness studies follow a time-honoured pattern: originating in the cultural orbit of black America, then being adopted by radical elements within the dominant culture”<sup>43</sup> (2006:258). Such adoption does not arise organically, but rather, through what Pugliese (2002) calls a ‘belated analysis’ brought about only after (and through) pressure from “non-white cultural critics...[who] have insisted that white critics and academics turn their attention to whiteness as a culturally constructed racial category that has been conveniently neglected in their discussion of

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<sup>43</sup> Garner contends that this corpus “can be traced back through Baldwin (1955), Du Bois (1977[1935]), Ellison (1952), Hughes, (1947), Wright (1992[1945]), and latterly, in the colonial context, to Fanon (1967).” (2006:258).

race matters,”<sup>44</sup> (2002:149). Frankenberg agrees, noting that “for the most part, critical work on whiteness has emerged in the context of, and very frequently in direct response to, critique of racism and the racial order focused on positions of subordination,” (1997:2).

It is important to understand this history and identify how whiteness became a topic of current academic interest in order to both acknowledge, and pay homage to, the (mostly) non-white scholars who created the conditions for present analyses of whiteness through almost a century of producing work on this topic that went unrecognized. As Fine *et al* note in *Off White*, they “sought to pierce the silence Du Bois so tellingly described more than 80 years ago...in retrospect, it is now hard to believe that the topic managed to avoid scholarly study for so long,” (2004:vii).

Still, Lipsitz was not wrong when he discussed the proliferation of academic concern with whiteness in the 1990s. As Fine & Weiss note, in this era,

whiteness studies have proliferated through many disciplines and with a rippling effect. Whiteness has come to be studied as representation, ideology, performance, hegemony, science, media, consumption, a trope for colonialism and the new empire. Writings have swelled on the material bases of whiteness, discursive analyses of whiteness, and psychoanalytic treatment of whiteness in the imaginations of us all. These profitable works have not ‘ended’ whiteness studies; more accurately, they have demonstrated the power and impact of excavating and highlighting that which had previously been unnamed. [2004:ix<sup>45</sup>]

Given this history of whiteness studies some, like Garner, have posited that it could be

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<sup>44</sup> Among the non-white cultural critics Pugliese identifies are, “hooks 1990:54; Collins 1991:189–191; Carby 1992:192–193; Morrison 1992:52–53; Hill 1997:5” (2002:149).

<sup>45</sup> In particular, Fine *et al.* identify psychology and education as the primarily fields of contribution, noting also that, “both fields have generated vexing and debilitating internal contradictions within race studies,” (2004:vii-viii). In contrast, Frankenberg argues that “the fullest and best developed area of work [on whiteness] is in historical studies,” (1999:2).

possible to imagine this paradigm as “specific to America’s largely bipolar racialized arena...with little to bring to Europeans’ knowledge of themselves,” (2006:258). Indeed, Garner identifies a relative discursive absence on whiteness in studies of Europe<sup>46</sup>.

According to Garner, “much of the work [on whiteness] produced by academics based in Europe either focuses elsewhere (Back and Ware 2001; Bonnett 1999), or on a historical relationship (McClintock 1995; Ware 1992) without explicit engagement with the contemporary,” (2006:258<sup>47</sup>). Lombardi-Diop echoes this sentiment, noting that “studies on the construction of modern Italian identity have paid little attention to the impact of racial self-definitions and self-perceptions,” (2012:176). Yet exploring contemporary forms of whiteness in Europe in general, and in Italy in particular, is crucial.

### **Whiteness & Italy**

In their introduction to *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, Lombardi-Diop and Romeo review work on race in Italy with the “aim to understand how race is tied to wider social and cultural processes of racialization...[and] interrogate how such processes affect the condition of migrant communities in Italy and the very idea of national belonging and *italianità*,” (2012:14). Later in this edited volume, Lombardi-Diop notes that, “[s]cholars, with few exception, have not interrogated the racial assumptions that have structured and supported the idea of Italianness as racially coded,” (2012:176). Yet, she argues that,

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<sup>46</sup> Garner argues that, “whiteness is a relevant paradigm for European social worlds by highlighting how it can be understood, and what use it is as a distinct sub-field *within* study of racist phenomena,” (2006:257, emphasis in original).

<sup>47</sup> Further, Garner notes that, “the writing that does address contemporary matters does so indirectly via the question of labour migration” (2006:258).

whiteness has constituted for Italians a form of representational cohesion at different historical moments, providing an ideological and discursive tool for national identification and self-representation before, during, and after colonialism. Notwithstanding a ‘self-reflexive color-blindness’ (Portelli, 30), race has been a pivotal element in Italy’s cultural discourse. Theories on and references to the racial identity of Italians as white have cemented the project of nationhood since Unification, while the idea of the racial superiority of Italians, in scientific and mainstream literature, has been a *leitmotif* in Italian nationalist discourse during the interwar period, as well as in colonial propaganda. [2012:176]

For Lombardi-Diop, it is this “neglected aspect of national history” (ibid.) that brings to the forefront the “highly ubiquitous yet invisible nature of whiteness” (2012:176), a dichotomy that allows contemporary Italians to “view themselves as racially unmarked,” (ibid.) even while reaping the benefits of a racially coded system. She continues, drawing from Alessandro Portelli who,

...argues that Italians deny their own whiteness and [that] such an act of denial constitutes the basis of the national discourse on race...Portelli identifies in the historical lack (at least until contemporary migrations) of a sizable black community and in the forgotten dimension of Italian colonialism some of the reasons why Italians ‘do not see themselves as ‘white’ but rather as ‘normal, as human by default’. [Lombardi-Diop 2012:175-176]

It is the unmarked quality of whiteness that allows those inhabiting this subject position to see themselves as racially neutral or just ‘human’, to remain unaware “of their position of race privilege in relation to foreigners and nonwhite Italians,” (Lombardi-Diop, 2012:176). Yet whiteness theory allows us to unpack this idea and to see this neutral, unmarked, ‘default’ position as a form of privilege. According to Frankenberg,

[i]n examining whiteness, in seeking to account for its variable visibility, one must recognize how continual processes of slippage, condensation, and displacement among the constructs ‘race,’ ‘nation,’ and ‘culture’ continue to ‘unmark’ white people while consistently marking and racializing others. [1999:6]

But if whiteness theories allow us to explore power, privilege and passing, it also has come under fire from scholars for some of the perceived limitations of this framework.

One of the most vocal critiques is provided by Joseph Pugliese (2002) who, in his article “Race as Category Crisis: Whiteness and the Topical Assignment of Race” takes to task the, “marked tendency in many examples of contemporary whiteness studies towards an ‘atopicality’ in the discussion of whiteness,” (2002:150). As he explains,

I invoke the term ‘atopicality’...to underscore the manner in which the study of whiteness often manifests a startling lack of geopolitical location and an indifference to the critical differences of historically situated and discursively embodied subjects. [2002:150]

In other words, Pugliese points out the necessity of locating whiteness within a specific historic and geographic moment rather than assuming that ‘whiteness’ functions as an essentialized universal. As Winant notes, “(c)learly, there are many varieties of whiteness,” (2004:3). For social scientists, this means interrogating the plurality of whiteness and bringing context to bear on any exploration of this topic rather than seeing whiteness as a “transhistorical category that over-rides different spatio-temporalities...[and] continues to signify the same regardless of the specificities of physically embodied subjects,” (2002:151). Or, in the words of Frankenberg, the task is to show “how whiteness operates in particular locales and webs of social relations,” (1999:3).

This involves an “exposure” and critical analysis of “whiteness masquerading as universal,” (Frankenberg, 1999:3). This is necessary in order, “to resituate whiteness from its unspoken (perhaps unspeakable?) status; to displace and then reemplace it..to show how whiteness operates in particular locales and webs of social relations,” (1999:3).

Social scientific, and I would argue, ethnographic, explorations of whiteness could result in:

whiteness unfrozen, whiteness viewed as ensembles of local phenomena complexly embedded in socioeconomic, sociocultural, and psychic interrelations. Whiteness emerges as a process, not a ‘thing’, as plural rather than singular in nature. [Frankenberg 1999:1]

The process Frankenberg is referring to is one that is both “historically constructed and internally differentiated...contested and contestable,” (1999:4). Because, according to Frankenberg,

[t]o view whiteness as ‘unmarked marker’, as empty signifier, is to universalize a particular, and rather recent, historical moment. I...argue that a range of processes of inclusion and exclusion have gone into the making of the version of whiteness that has been handed down to many of us – whiteness as norm, as transparency, as national/natural state of being. It is only when the processes of constructing dominance are complete that whiteness enters the realm of the apparently natural, of doxa...Rather, I would argue that whiteness is always constructed, always in the process of being made and unmade. Indeed, its characterization as unmarked marker is itself an ‘ideological’ effect that seeks to cover the tracks of its constructedness, specificity, and localness, even as they appear. [1999:16]

In the same vein, Winant contends that, “it is no longer possible to assume a ‘normalized’ whiteness, whose invisibility and relatively monolithic character signify immunity from political or cultural challenge,” (2003:3). In regards to Europe, Garner argues that “the historical distinctiveness of Europe’s imperial past...must be critically analysed in terms of its role in producing whiteness,” (2006:268). Garner continues,

[t]he objective of doing such research in Europe (taking into account its necessary focus on the way host country nationals construct their identities) is to juggle the intellectual and political stakes whose parameters are on one side, a *structure* of overarching power relations in which *generally*, white dominates black, with, on the other, a sociological imagination refusing to conceptualize whiteness as an unchanging essence. [2006:269]

Using Italy and Italian emigrants as examples, Pugliese contends that taking a context-specific and situational approach to whiteness makes possible, “an understanding of the anxiety to stabilize and secure a category, ‘whiteness itself’, that is at risk in those corporeal borders and coloured margins that refuse to signify self-evidently as white,” (2002:153).

If Winant’s contention that “an alternative perspective is demanded” (2003:3) and if it is true that whiteness’s “borders are unclear and its status is unstable,” (Pugliese, 2002:153) then the project of understanding the policing of those borders and the selection of who is granted such status (i.e. through citizenship) becomes all the more important. I contend, as other scholars have, that the situated and context-specific nature of ethnographic investigation may be uniquely suited for this kind of interrogation.

Garner notes that,

[t]he challenge in research terms is to find a set of foci that capture the ways in which power and disempowerment are lived by people with differing relationships to social, economic and cultural capital. This approach further underlines the need to combine empirical studies with those concentrating on mapping the actors’ constructions of their life worlds. [2006:268]

Ethnographic research can do just what Garner calls for; it combines a theoretical framework for understanding access to material and cultural resources with the lived experiences of people navigating that terrain in their daily lives.

One of the ways in which whiteness may be explored ethnographically is through a focus on how individuals access these resources or how they are restricted from that access, as I attempt to show regarding the differential ordering of immigrant groups. This is the work of exploring privilege, as a key component of the privilege of whiteness is access to material and cultural resources. As Garner notes,

Du Bois' 'psychological wages' can be cashed in a variety of ways: from McIntosh's 'knapsack' (1988) of free rides, through to Lipsitz's 'possessive investment' (1995) via Paynter (2001), who characterizes whiteness as primarily cultural capital. [2006:262]

Given the myriad ways that white privilege may be "cashed in," Garner contends that divorcing "analyses of whiteness from the power relationships that frame it is to commit a cardinal error," (2006:262). Yet it is easy to overlook the relationship between whiteness and power, as Wildman and Davis point out that, "the invisibility of privilege strengthens the power it creates and maintains," (1995:645). Given that "the invisible cannot be combated, and as a result privilege is allowed to perpetuate, regenerate, and re-create itself," (ibid.) the first step is to make privilege visible. Then we must realize that "privilege is systemic, not an occasional occurrence," (ibid.) and attend to it appropriately.

It is through an exploration of this inherent and pervasive link between whiteness, access to resources and power that we come to see that "whiteness demands and constitutes hierarchy, exclusions, and deprivation," (Fine et al, 2004:ix). In other words, "the production and maintenance of white privilege is a difficult task," (ibid) and so I contend that the ways in which such privilege is produced and maintained warrants our attention.

Again, the "Albanian Question," can be viewed as the attempt to bound privileges for certain groups rather than as the creation of the "other", which whiteness allows for.

Anthropologist Enoch Page defines whiteness as:

[A] learned and behaviorally enacted cultural assertion about the naturalness and rightness of European (also American, Canadian, Australian, South African, New Zealander...) hegemony...propagated by routine white cultural practices strategically and historically designed to secure white privilege. [1997:561]

Page's definition of whiteness may help uncover the reason for the distinction between Albanians and Italians. The firm boundaries applied to Albanians in Italy (and increasingly to other 'white' non-nationals such as Romanians, Ukrainians, Moldovans etc) may then be similar to how 'white' groups (such as Jews, Irish, Italians) were racialized and dubbed as non white when they first came to the US in order to protect the interests of the elite (Ignatiev 1995). Because Albanians threaten to a larger extent, the distinction between Italian and other, the boundary that exists may protect Italians, and Italian society, from 'diluting' not only their 'Italianness', but their whiteness as well.

As it relates to my research, this means attending to the larger project of constructing and policing whiteness and "Italianness" and exploring the ways in which it is done so in relation to immigration and belonging. I argue in Chapter 6 that it is primarily through a discussion of Italianness, Europeanness and citizenship in Italy and in Europe that the larger project of Italian and European whiteness is made visible.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION: CITIZENSHIP, WHITENESS AND BELONGING IN/TO ITALY AND EUROPE

Examining this history makes clear, indeed, why it is that race, culture, and nation slide so smoothly one into another in the present, providing alibis for each other in contemporary social, cultural, and political discourses about race, nation, identity, ownership, and belonging. [Frankenberg, 1999:9]

In late fall of 2008, when I was teaching an Introduction to Cultural Anthropology course at a small liberal arts college in New England, I noticed the discomfort and unusual silence of the students in class one day as I tried to get a discussion going about race. Inspired by an article I'd just read, and in an attempt to jolt them into a conversation, I wrote the following sentence on the board: *Americans are still prejudiced against blacks*. "So," I said, "what do you think? Is this a true statement?" A few students nodded in agreement, but I also saw a few students roll their eyes, as if to say "here we go again, another white liberal female instructor who is going to lecture us about our complicity in racism." And I got a few challenges, most notably about the recent election of Barack Obama, and although I agreed with them that things had changed since slavery and segregation, I also asked, "Despite whatever progress we've made, would you agree that this sentence 'Americans are still prejudiced against Blacks' is still generally true, or somewhat true, or at the very least, is a sentence that makes sense?" They all nodded in agreement. Then I wrote another sentence on the board: *Americans still get paid less than whites*.

This time the silence seemed to be less uncomfortable and more confused, judging by the look on my students' faces. "Does this sentence also make sense?" I

asked. And some students “got it” and so began a classroom conversation (that I have tried and failed to reproduce as successfully) about how race is often conflated with nationality, and that the ways in which national identities are “raced” often goes unnoticed. It is a useful exercise discussed by anthropologist Brackette Williams (1989) which unmask “American” as a white category. For Williams, such an exercise illustrates the ways in which nation-building is impossible without a simultaneous race-making.

Following Williams, we can make the case that “Italian” and indeed “European” also contain hidden racial identities, and substitute the sentences used in the above example with the following ones: *Italians are still prejudiced against Blacks* and *Italians still get paid less than whites* and, *Europeans are still prejudiced against blacks* and *Europeans still get paid less than whites*. The effect is curiously the same. So what does that tell us? Because both statements are true, but seem, at first glance, to be illogical, one is confronted with the underlying (white) racial identification of supposedly neutral categories: “American,” “Italian” and “European.”

But, are Italians white? As I discuss in Chapter 5, there has been resistance around the use of the label “racism” to frame the (mis)treatment of immigrants in Italy, and speaking of Italians as homogenous and white can also be seen as problematic given the racialization of southern Italians and other internal divisions, as well as the diversity of thought, language, and culture that exists among and between regions. However, the term “whiteness,” like ethnicity, is contextual and situational. In this chapter, I address how the presence of the immigrant “other,” especially the non-white immigrant, is the context where whiteness is made visible. I do so by discussing of the keywords “nationality,”

“citizenship,” “Italian” and “European” which reveal how whiteness and white privilege in Italy and in Europe is produced and reproduced.

### **On Citizenship, Nationality and Italianness**

The terms “citizen” and “citizenship” have broad and varying meanings depending upon context; at the broadest level, to be a citizen of a certain space/place confers a kind of relationship of belonging and beholden-ness and may or may not imply a political rights relationship. The term “citizen” can mean, variously, an inhabitant of a city (in which case illegal and non-naturalized immigrants are citizens), as much as it can refer to people who have full political privileges as members of a state (in which case ‘illegal’ and non-naturalized inhabitants of a state are not citizens). The term citizen can also refer to anyone who is affected by governmentality of any kind, so that citizen becomes synonymous with “subject,” in which case, everyone is a citizen of some kind, regardless of his/her actual political rights.

Here, I refer specifically to the meanings and notions conveyed by the keywords “citizen” and “citizenship” and “nationality” as they relate to the creation of political and social ingroups and outgroups in Italy. The terms, “ingroup” and “outgroup” are borrowed from Linguist Teun van Dijk (2001) who views the two groups as resulting from any ideologically-based discourse which polarizes the representation of “us” and “them.” The keywords citizenship and nationality, certainly *are* related. They both refer to identities (as well as legal statuses) that are both embraced by, and bestowed upon, populations. The discourse, and legal/political apparatuses, surrounding nationality and citizenship, help make the nebulous matter of populations, into nationals, citizens and non-citizens; into *de facto* “ingroups” (those who are conferred the rights and obligations

of belonging) and “outgroups” (those who exist outside the nexus of belonging).

Culturally, however, citizenship and nationality have different nuances *especially* in the context of immigration in Italy. It is therefore important to distinguish between them.

In a culturally pluralistic society, nationality can have a similar connotation to ethnicity, which exists entirely outside the issue of citizenship. For instance, in the United States, ethnicity is used more than nationality to refer to someone’s country, or people, of origin. While the use of ethnic can reveal a person’s deviation from the norm of whiteness in the United States,<sup>48</sup> a person who is labeled ethnic, is not necessarily assumed to be a non-citizen. The reverse seems to be true in the context of immigration and the existence of more culturally diverse populations in Italy, where one’s assumed nationality becomes a means of differentiating not only “Italian” from “non-Italian,” but by extension, also “citizen” from “non-citizen.” In this way, being “Italian” is more than an identity, as it also, in this context, implies a political citizenship.

The benefits of political citizenship are numerous, and overall, citizenship can be seen as “membership of an exclusive club- those who make the key decisions about the collective life of a given political community” (Bellamy 2008:12) and has three linked components:

Membership of a democratic political community, the collective benefits and rights associated with membership, and participation in the community’s political, economic and social processes-all of which combine in different ways to establish a condition of civic equity. [ibid]

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<sup>48</sup> Contrasting the United States with Italy here is to show that, due to different histories regarding immigration etc, an ‘ethnic’ (non-white) person in the United States, while still seen as a racial/ethnic other, may still be assumed to be a citizen of the United States. The potential to be categorized as “ethnic” and also as a citizen, however, does not negate the ongoing struggles around racism in the United States, as well as the contingent belonging that characterizes the experience of many “ethnic” Americans, such as Latinos and Arabs.

Therefore, regardless of the degree of participation chosen by a citizen, s/he is afforded the right of participation and the possibility to influence state policy, furthermore, having such rights entitles a citizen to “civic equity” which includes the right to be treated fairly, and to have a means of recourse if those rights are violated. But citizenship also functions ideologically, as it:

Not only defines individuals in terms of a particular rationality and set of norms, but more importantly, seeks to infiltrate their subjectivity and consciousness so that they collude, as active and self conscious agents, in the constitution of themselves as subjects of power. [Shore 2000:71]

Citizenship is not only about political rights; it is also an example of a ‘Mauss-ian gift’. In that there are “no free gifts,” the gift of citizenship bestows differential benefits to different populations, and has conditions, such as the existence of citizenship’s necessary by product, the non-citizen and, perhaps even, the acceptance and (mis)treatment of non-citizen others as common-place and natural.

This is further complicated by the argument I make earlier, that to be seen as “Italian” is to be seen as someone who is also a citizen, and to be seen as a person whose belonging cannot be questioned. This is of course, a huge advantage for those who look and act Italian, whether or not they have actual citizenship. And so the opposite is true, that disadvantage and non-belonging is attached to those who do not look/pass as Italian, even if they are citizens of the Italian state and even if, in the differential ordering of immigrant groups, they are allocated a higher status than someone from another immigrant group. Here then we can see the racial identities embedded in the terms “Italian” and “citizen.” Furthermore, despite theories of a “new” racism that views “nationality” and “culture” as taking the place of biology (or phenotype) in defining difference and inequality, we can see that phenotypes associated with “looking Italian”

confers an obvious advantage. And so, being an Italian citizen has advantages, as does merely “passing” as an Italian citizen.

Italian citizenship laws also play a role in creating white privilege. As discussed in Chapter 3, Italian citizenship laws privilege those who might have no current ties to Italy, except for ancestry, whereas immigrants, even those whom are legal, those who have lived, worked, paid taxes, given birth to and raised children in Italy can have an exceedingly difficult time becoming naturalized. The same is true even for children born in Italy (depending on the legal status of their parents), who for all intents and purposes *are* Italian *except* for phenotype and/or their parent’s county of origin. While Italy is not the only European country to base most of its pathways to citizenship through *jus sanguinis*, this fact of citizenship reifies the category “Italian,” not as a term signifying membership to a Nation-State, but as a term signifying membership to an ethnic group. This, I argue, legitimizes “Italian” (as opposed to “Roman” or “Calabrian”) as a cultural (and racial) identity, one that is bolstered by the presence of non-Italian non-citizens.

### **On Italianness, Whiteness and Europeanness**

I use the adapted metonym at the beginning of this chapter to also expose the whiteness of the term “European.” What then should be made of the legal category “European citizenship” that was created in 1993 by the Maastricht Treaty, which extended European Citizenship to any (legal) citizen of EU-member countries? Etienne Balibar, in, *We, the People of Europe?* exposes the problems associated with basing European citizenship on older definitions of national belonging, which necessarily excludes non-national residents of member EU countries. While at one point, the status of being European was imprecise, Balibar notes that EU citizenship has taken on an

“effective content (voting rights, recourse to appellate courts that in some cases are superior to national tribunals, materialization of the status of *civus europeanus* by a common passport, access to social and cultural services such as scholarships)” (2004:171). He argues that the transnational resident in Europe is therefore subjected to ever-increasing internal exclusions, excluded from political rights but included in the European economy in the form of exploited labor.

Cris Shore, in *Building Europe*, is also concerned with EU citizenship as a cultural identity and outlines efforts on the part of the EU policy makers to create a European citizenry/identity that relies on cultural notions. He states, “there can be little doubt that European citizenship was inserted...as an instrument for instilling European consciousness among the masses” (2000:77). Whether or not “European Citizenship” has resulted in a pan-European identity is up for debate (see Pederson 2008 etc...-will add more here cite). In fact, Shore argues that the creation of the EU and the development of European citizenship has not undermined the national and regional identities of Europe and notes the renewed popular support for separatist and regionalist movements across Europe. He does argue, however, that in relation to non-EU nationals, European identity has been bolstered, partly through “EU policy statements [which] consistently conflate issues about immigrants, foreigners, and border controls with fears about drugs, terrorism and crime” (2000:80).

The legal existence of the category “European citizen” is significant then in material *and* ideological ways and it alters and complicates the term “European”; like the term “Italian”, it contains an assumption of belonging that is not extended to those who look don’t look, or “pass” as, European (white). Steve Garner, in discussing the use of

whiteness theory in Europe, writes that whiteness has “a quality of invisibility on one hand on one hand, and that it actually has a very distinct content on the other...where ‘the content of whiteness’ might be understood as a set of norms of values, as resources, and as a contingent hierarchy” (2006:258-9). To highlight the importance of addressing and dismantling European whiteness, I conclude with a warning from Etienne Balibar, who argues that unless Europe recognizes the rights and contributions of all its communities, “the exclusions proper to each of the national citizenships united in the EU will invariably produce an explosive effect of apartheid, in flagrant contradiction with the ambition of constituting a democratic model on the continental and world scale” (2004:43).

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