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The Italian postracial archive

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ABSTRACT

In conversation with recent works on the rise of right-wing populism, racism and crises across Europe and beyond, this article critically examines the ongoing reconfiguration of racism in Italy. By drawing on both quantitative and qualitative analyses, we argue that this reconfiguration is part of the emergent political and cultural reference of postraciality. Accordingly, we organize an archive of Italian postracial racism in two main chronological sections: from 2002 to 2008, the consolidation of a neoconservative block, openly anti-Islam and anti-migration, and fuelled by gender-based arguments; and from 2009 to 2018, the intensification of an “extremization” of racism and its postpolitical denial. In providing the first systematic analysis of postracial Italy, we aim to encourage both reflexive praxes tackling reconfigured racisms, and further national and supranational archives of the postracial present. Accordingly, in the conclusion we point at emergent race-conscious, anti-racist initiatives which oppose postracial racisms.

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Introduction¹

On 14 January 2018, Attilio Fontana, a Lega Nord (LN) politician and candidate in the upcoming elections, suggested during an interview on immigration that

Italy cannot accept everyone [...]. We have to decide whether our ethnicity, our white race, our society should continue to exist or, instead, it should become extinct. It is not about being xenophobe or racist; it is rather about being logical and rational.²

Soon afterwards, LN leader Matteo Salvini was asked to withdraw Fontana from candidate lists, but refused, stating, “Italians are the least racist people in the world”.³ A few weeks later on 3 February, 28-year-old Luca Traini, a white Italian man and former LN candidate, engaged in a shooting spree against black people in the streets of Macerata, leaving six wounded before

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turning himself in to the police, wrapped in the Italian flag, heralding, "Go Italy!". Interior Minister Marco Minniti then described the event as, "a fully random armed retaliation. The connection between the wounded persons is only skin color, hence there has been an evident manifestation of racial hatred". In an attempt to contradict Minniti, Traini said, "I do not feel any racial hatred, I just wanted to take justice into my own hands".⁴

These racist instances and the language relating to them seem to suggest a reconfiguration of raciality, in line with contemporary right-wing transformations and crises across Europe and the United States (Brubaker 2017; Narayan 2017; Sayyid 2017; Virdee and McGeever 2018; Brown and Littler 2018). Public reference to "white race" (Fontana), the racial violence in the streets of Macerata, and "least racist people" (Salvini) appear as partial rearticulations and extensions of the familiar "silence" (Lentin 2008) and "unspeakability" (Goldberg 2006) of race in post-WWII Europe. The "extreme" character of the first two expressions (a politician publicly mentioning "the white race", unprecedented in the country after Fascism (1922–1943), and an equally unprecedented anti-Black shooting spree) seems premised on self-deception of its racist standpoints. Moreover, Minniti's exclusive use of a legal expression "racial hatred", along with "random", and his silence on the actual "color" of the six wounded people's "skin", placed the shooting spree exclusively within the realm of episodic individual intentions, omitting to mention its most evident feature, i.e. anti-Black racism. Moreover, Salvini's axiomatic depiction of Italians as "the least racist people", and Traini's casual rejection of "racial hatred" in the name of "justice" seem to signal an additional layer to racist denial – not only is racism in particular circumstances disavowed, but the very possibility of naming it as such is implicitly deemed meaningless. This particular, self-deceptive configuration of raciality has been named post-raciality, whereby "racism expresses itself in the extreme because it is delinked from the constraints of its being named racial injustice" (Goldberg 2015, 79).

Against this background, in this article we analyze the consolidation of postracial racism in contemporary Italy, with a view of encouraging both reflexive anti-racist praxes, and further national and supranational analyses of postracial racisms. The postracial as a renewed articulation of racism has primarily been discussed in the context of the United States of America (USA) (St Louis 2015; Goldberg 2015; Terada 2015) and Latin America (Da Costa 2016);⁵ in this article we empirically expand and theoretically contribute to this scholarship by drawing on the first theorization of the postracial in Europe, the one proposed by Sayyid (2017). According to the sociologist, the European postracial is characterized by a deep-rooted history of racism as a means of constructing political subjects, highly influenced (in the last two decades) by the increased prominence of what Mouffe (2005) has termed "the postpolitical". Following Sayyid (2017), and drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, we identify two main phases that have

contributed to the consolidation of the postracial in Italy: the strengthening of a neoconservative historic block in Europe and the USA, which we locate between 2002 and 2008, and the slow consolidation of the postracial, chiefly sustained by the increase in popularity of a “postpolitical rejection of politics” (Sayyid 2017, 18), that we locate between 2009 and the March 2018 elections.

Importantly, far from marking a discontinuity, these two moments are strictly connected; analytically distinguishing them, we suggest, is functional to a detailed analysis of the evolution and consolidation of what may be called the Italian postracial contemporary. Moreover, while acknowledging the presence of several elements of these moments in pre-2002 political discourses, not least racism denial (Giuliani 2015) and a pervasive “cultural fundamentalism” (Stolcke 1995; Dal Lago 1999), we do not propose a historical account of racism in Italy, but a genealogy of its postracial rearticulation. Accordingly, we organize an archive of the most significant circumstances, policies, and public discourses that have contributed to such rearticulation. Our contribution is significant for two reasons: it tests Sayyid’s (2017) theorization against an empirical case, and it encourages similar empirical analyses, in conversation with a growing literature on authoritarianism and populism across the world.

European and Italian postraciality

Combining insights from media, politics and scholarship, Goldberg (2015, 4) theorizes the postracial as “a novel structure of raciological articulation”. One of the key conditions of its potential formation is the increasingly popular idea, across influential media and political discourses, that race as a politicized logic structuring the social is no longer relevant. Not only in Obama US, but also in Europe, as an extension of the proclaimed “dead of multiculturalism” (Goldberg 2015). As such, postraciality does not equal colorblindness: it actively erases not only the relevance of race (which colorblindness chiefly does), but the very possibility of naming facts, organizational logics, official discourses and circumstances as racist. One way in which postraciality operates is by shifting the focus from structural to individual explanations, considering only individuals responsible for their own social conditions. In so doing, it paves the way for racist expressions to arise and become explicit in their extreme: once racism is deemed totally ungrounded and racialized individuals are deemed responsible for their own social conditions, racism is set free to proliferate in the extreme and is rendered immune to any critique.

The accent on individual responsibility and the obfuscation of the terms through which racism is named underline the mutual articulation of the postracial and the neoliberal. As Hall (2011, 710) has discussed, neoliberalism is

made of a series of apparent contradictions: “progress, but simultaneously the need to contain any ‘threat from below’; tolerance, reform, moderation [...] colonial governmentality, discipline, violence and authority for recalcitrant ‘other’ native peoples abroad; emancipation and subjugation”. The persuasive allure that this series of opposites provides to neoliberalism speaks to postracial mechanisms of obfuscating the very terms for naming racial injustice.

Scholars working on race and racism in Italy have examined similar processes. They primarily did so by considering the chief relevance of the colonial past as the main condition for racism to structure (among other areas) labour migration (Mezzadra 2008; Curcio and Mellino 2012; Ponzanesi 2018) and legal and cultural production (Giuliani 2018). Two interventions have also focused on postracial racism. Lombardi-Diop (2012, 178) characterization of the postracial in Italy (and Europe as a whole) as “an emanation of racial amnesia linked to the demise of the colonial state and based on the false assumption that racial homogeneity is an internal condition of the nation-state while heterogeneity is a characteristic of the past, confined to the colonial period”; and Giuliani’s (2018, 11–12) deciphering of “post-racialness” in its everyday use as the claim that race is not relevant any longer. Both these characterizations seem to juxtapose colorblindness and postraciality in full, leaving aside the peculiarities of postraciality and their possible articulations and implications.

In the first systematic discussion of the postracial in Europe, Sayyid (2017) identifies three conditions for its emergence. The first is the rise of a neoconservative historic block in Europe and the USA, which claims that the West is axiomatically superior to everyone else; the second condition is the lesser extent of research on race in Europe than in the US, mainly due to the prevalence of the Civil Rights Movement as a reference for anti-racist groups in the USA and the strong influence of the US paradigm of race relations. The third condition is directly inspired by Mouffe’s (2005) work and entails the relevance of postpolitical rejection of politics (e.g. from Fukuyama to Trumpism), including a radical depoliticization of socio-economic and cultural issues such as racial inequalities and racist expressions. This triad is in line with both Goldberg’s (2015) theorization of the postracial and Hall’s (2011) characterization of the neoliberal, but it adds an important element to both – the centrality of the postpolitical, which seems to function as a twofold switch point, allowing complete market hegemony (which aspires to subordinate state politics – e.g. post-2008 austerity programs) to become the undiscussed regulatory doctrine, and dominant racist assumptions (presented as quintessentially emotional, innocently independent from both politics and economics) to become a popular ideology. From this perspective, the postpolitical can be viewed as an extension of depoliticization.

According to Brown (2009, 15–16), depoliticization has a twofold meaning: both the removal of power and history as constitutive of a political phenomenon, and the substitution of:

emotional and personal vocabularies for political ones. [...] When suffering as such is reduced to a problem of personal feeling, then the field of political battle and political transformation is replaced with an agenda of behavioral, attitudinal, and emotional practices.

This second meaning speaks directly to postraciality as the individualization of responsibility for racial exclusion, and once this agenda replacement is done, depoliticization may give rise to postpolitical expressions, for instance, the consolidation of so-called populist movements across Europe in the 2010s (Brubaker 2017).

The populist Five Star Movement (5SM), a political party established in 2009 by standup comedian Beppe Grillo, seems to fully embody Brown's depiction of depoliticization. As the third section of our empirical discussion will show, since its launch, 5SM has been mobilizing racialized emotions and racist tropes, in place of rigorous historical analysis, data and reasoning; this occurred within a view of "taking matters into one's own hands" by rebelling against a fabricated figure of a "state elite", construed as alien to a seemingly good and genuine population of (white) honest yet betrayed workers (see Ioanide 2015). In March 2018, as the postpolitical consolidated, 5SM became the country's first party with over 32 percent of the votes.

Therefore, understanding the ways in which postracial racism played out immediately before and during the march 2018 elections requires analyzing how emotions, myths and beliefs have been (post)politically mobilized. We trace the early signs of the current postracial moment back to the 2002 Bossi-Fini immigration law, predicated upon a combination of long-lasting and post-9/11 anti-Islam and anti-migrant thinking, and show how the subsequent decade saw an increase in the explicit mobilization of race while denying racial injustice. We acknowledge that Berlusconi's political power (he served as Prime Minister from 1994 to 1995, from 2001 to 2006, and from 2008 to 2011) was equally predicated on entrepreneurialism and the narrative of the self-made man, rather than rigorous historical analysis (Ginsborg and Asquer 2012), but we also recognize that Berlusconi's first and most impactful racist policy was the 2002 immigration law. From 2013 to 2015 there has been a rapid intensification of racist attacks and public discourses that expressed racism in the extreme while bluntly denying it, by appealing to empty formulas such as "common sense", "rationality", and "respect for your own people"; the ultimate consolidation of the postracial happened from 2015 to 2018. Hence, within the relatively limited space of a journal article, we trace the gradual evolution and consolidation of a phenomenon that has been in the making for decades, at least since 1945 (see Wekker 2016, 1–29).

Sources and methods

In order to analyze the rearticulation and consolidation of racism in its renewed postracial fashion, we adopt two methods. Firstly, we analyze the

only available quantitative data set of racist manifestations in Italy, produced by Lunaria and disaggregated in a) verbal violence; b) physical violence; c) discrimination and d) harm to property;⁶ secondly, we analyze key events and media discourses that we selected according to both the yearly changes of the four types of racist manifestations in the quantitative data set, and the six available Carta di Roma yearly reports on media coverage of immigration in the country from 2012 to 2018.⁷ Hence, both our periodization (2002–2008, and 2009–2018) and our choice of the events to be included in our archive directly draw on both kinds of reports. In addition, we refer to a large body of academic works documenting the changing faces of Italian racism in the 2000s and 2010s.

The consolidation of a neo-conservative block (2002–2008)

We trace the beginning of the consolidation of a neoconservative block back to 2002, the year when the current immigration law passed. The law was drafted in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and appeared to directly respond to various racial fears concerning migrants and Islam escalating on both sides of the Atlantic (Fassin and Fassin 2006; Fekete 2009; Palidda 2010), which gave public accolade to the USA and allies' military invasion of Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003. At this conjuncture, the legitimacy of racist expressions became consolidated, rendering Islamophobia, anti-migrant, anti-LGBTQI and anti-Roma practices and discourses more acceptable across the political spectrum in Europe (Brubaker 2017, 1205). While the reinforcement of a neo-conservative block continued well after 2008, we locate in the 2008 election campaign explicit evidence of the consolidation of a well-known and deep-rooted racist disposition all over Western Europe and beyond, i.e. denying racism (see Giuliani 2015).

Why should we give respect to someone who does not respect us? Why should we defend their so-called culture, when they despise ours? I want to defend our culture, and I want you to know that I prefer Dante Alighieri to Omar Khayan.⁸

This comment, clearly referring to the Muslim world, was made by the famous journalist and writer, Oriana Fallaci, soon after the 9/11 attacks, and appeared with the elucidatory title "!" in the most widely read national daily, *Corriere della Sera*. In her three subsequent best-selling books, the journalist proposed ideas such as "The Death of the West", "Islamic Reverse Crusade" and "Womb Politics", suggesting that ancient crusades were being supplanted by an Islamic plan of demographic replacement, turning Europe into something the author named "EurAbia" (Bialasiewicz 2006).

Fallaci's stand on the so-called "immigrant invasion" was coterminous with the new immigration law, passed in 2002 and still in force. The law made the concession of a residence permit to *extracomunitari* (i.e. non-EU citizens)

contingent upon a work contract, in absence of which, after six months, the person is obliged to leave the country. Consequently, the Law threw the most vulnerable migrants into a spiral of exploitation, blackmailing and various forms of extortion in informal transactions and employment. Moreover, the Law doubled the detention period in “Temporary Reception Centers” for undocumented migrants from one to two months, thereby exacerbating already precarious living conditions inside; finally, it introduced the immediate imprisonment of foreigners who, after receiving an order to leave the country, failed to comply. The Law had a significant impact, on foreigners (Bartoli 2012) especially on people coming from Central African countries: from 2002 to 2004 the number of detainees from those countries increased by 12 per cent.⁹

Importantly, the Law was named after the two ministers who proposed it, Umberto Bossi, the leader of the openly anti-immigrant and nationalist Lega Nord, and Gianfranco Fini, the leader of Alleanza Nazionale (AN), the main successor of the Fascist party. AN was founded in 1993, and while it publicly renounced its legacy, it never openly criticized fascism, ending up embracing what has been called “democratic fascism” (Griffin 1996, 142). In 2002, at the start of the second Berlusconi government (2001–2006), AN and LN proposed a conservative stand on social and economic issues, including a flat taxation system, and opposed policies of civic and social inclusions of “minorities” such as women, LGBTIQ and migrants.

It should be noted that neo-conservatism has not been a prerogative of supposed “extreme” right-wing parties. In 2006, the President of the Italian Senate, Marcello Pera, additionally a member of Forza Italia (FI), the Berlusconi-led party that combined populist rhetoric and neoliberal economic views, published a manifesto entitled “For the West: The Strength of Civilization” (*Per l'Occidente Forza di Civiltà*). In the text, it is claimed that the West is under attack from Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism, and it thus calls for a return to the “greatness” of an alleged “European Christian Civilization”. Pera’s arguments ranged from Fascist references such as God, Nation and Family to “exalting the values of conservative liberalism”, highlighting how “those who forget their tradition can be neither free nor respected”.¹⁰

This rhetoric of Islam being inferior to Christianity clearly echoed Fallaci’s views and enables us to highlight a fundamental process within the consolidation of a neoconservative block. As Farris (2017, 52) discussed, during the first decade of the 2000s, across left- and right-wing parties and movements in France, Italy and the Netherlands an explicit instrumentalization of feminist discourse was directed against the mainstream image of Islam circulating in the Western media: “Italian feminists predominantly associate[d] the Muslim veil with submission, violence, passivity and suffering”. FI championed this view, particularly emphasized by MPs Pera and Santanchè, making it the party’s main stance on women and gender issues and thereby enabling a

comprehensive platform combining economic neoliberalism, Islamophobia and moral values to be normatively applied to women's behavior and family.

In spring 2008, following a two-year left-wing government, the Conservatives led by Berlusconi were elected again, still in coalition with the right-wing, nationalist and anti-immigration parties AN and LN. During the election campaign, Berlusconi called for "zero tolerance towards Roma, illegal migrants and criminals".¹¹ Only one month into office, he turned his claims into policies, by signing a decree ordering the collection of fingerprints of people "also of minor age" living in so-called "nomad camps", namely dilapidated settlements hosting poor Romani families in urban peripheries across the country. In July, while addressing numerous accusations of racism from various institutions, not least the European Parliament,¹² Interior Minister Maroni (LN) gave a justificatory speech in the Parliament denying racism by stating that the decree did not target one ethnic group but rather unauthorized "camps" across the country (Picker and Vivaldi 2019, 185–86).

It was during those years that "legality" became a central category in political jargon on both the right and left, and largely juxtaposed with "security" (Maneri 2013, 300). On 14 September 2008, Abdul William Guibre, a 19-year old black resident of Milan who had been born in Burkina-Faso was beaten to death in the streets by two men who shouted, "Dirty nigger, we are going to kill you all!" It emerged during the court case that the men murdered "Abba" (the victim's nickname) because they thought that he was stealing biscuits in a grocery store. The event sparked reactions across the political spectrum, and while some leaders explicitly mentioned "racism" in their comments, the President of the Senate, the highest state authority after the President of the Republic, maintained that "[s]uch violent facts belong neither to the culture of civic and proper living together, nor to the respect of legality".¹³ In such a context of growing securitization and criminalization of people of color, the expression "respect of legality" might have been interpreted ambivalently, including with reference to not stealing biscuits in stores.

These events happened during a consistent political attack against non-EU citizens, i.e. primarily people of color, that was epitomized by the 2008 and 2009 security laws; as with the 2002 immigration law, the two laws, both called *Pacchetto Sicurezza*, further criminalized migration by, among other measures, introducing the crime of irregular entry and stay in the country (fined from 5,000–10,000 Euros) legalizing citizen patrols, and tripling the maximum detention time of "illegal migrants" in Identification and Expulsion Centers from two to six months.

During the first phase of the "archive", from 2002 to 2008, a powerful conservative block consolidated around sexist, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant values. These were articulated primarily within a context of fear, anger, economic interests and lack of historical rigor, and best epitomized by a 2008 LN anti-immigrant electoral poster; the poster portrayed the stylized figure of a

Native American and read: “They have passively received immigration: Now they live in reserves!”. Identifying Italians with Native Americans, a purposely paradoxical and confusing gesture, is consistent with “conceptual confusion [...] and mixing of categories accompanying the massive demographic movements of globalization” that Goldberg (2015, 95) identifies as key expressions of the postracial.

Building the postracial (2009–2018)

Between 2007 and 2014, the number of racist incidents in the country doubled (Lunaria 2011, 2014).¹⁴ This exacerbation began to increasingly been coupled with either upfront or taken for granted denial of racism, accompanied by an increased presence of emotions in the political space, reinforcing postpolitical sensibilities, of which the 2009 establishment of the Five Star Movement (5SM) was one of the most evident signs. The Movement was founded in the aftermath of the “Fuck off Day” (V-Day - *Vaffanculo* Day), a demonstration held in Bologna in 2007 and directed against the deemed corrupt national political elite. Headed by standup comedian Beppe Grillo, 5SM’s positions on migration have since largely been predicated upon post-raciality. Grillo’s 2010 comment on the Rosarno revolts is a telling example.

In January 2010, about 200 workers in the orange harvest in Rosarno (Calabria), almost all coming from African countries, took to the streets to protest a kneecapping assault suffered by three black workers the day before. The protest, during which cars and rubbish bins were damaged, concluded with numerous injuries and the forced relocation of the workers to Identification and Expulsion Centers across the country. The media coverage of the event hyperemphasized workers’ violence, with only five percent of national newspaper articles on the event mentioning either racism or xenophobia (Bollani and Bottacin 2011). Interior Minister Maroni maintained that what had happened in Rosarno was the result of excessive tolerance towards undocumented migrants.

Right after these events, Grillo wrote a piece comparing Rosarno workers with Spartacus, the enslaved soldier who in Ancient Rome organized a revolt of the slaves, concluding that Italy did not “need new slaves: [there already are] enough of them among natives”.¹⁵ This parallelism had a twofold effect. It first inscribed the contemporary exploitation of seasonal workers from the African continent within a pre-capitalist dimension, creating a fictitious continuity with Ancient Rome, and suggesting that the Rosarno case of exploitation was not necessarily a racial issue, but merely a refraction of the allegedly eternal war between the powerful and the powerless. Second, it fuelled “ethnic competition” between (white) Italian and (non-white) foreigners, something that would increasingly permeate political discourse as the financial crisis unfolded (Oliveri 2018). Such ahistorical and postpolitical

perspective matched Grillo's criticism, in the same article, of "the overly good ones" (*buonisti*), a sarcastic way of describing those who have tolerant positions on migration: clearly, deploying the adjective "good" locates the critique in a moral as opposed to a political register. This type of jargon, full of neologisms, vaguely evocative and deeply infused with emotions, while not unprecedented, would proliferate in the years to come, and directly recalls Brown's (2009) considerations about depoliticization that we discussed in the theory section.

Rapid intensification (2013–2015)

A close look at the data shows that during the 2007–2014 rapid intensification of racism, the most significant yearly jump occurred from 2012 to 2013, when the number of racist acts almost doubled, going from 511 to 901 (Lunaria 2014, 158); moreover, from 2007 to 2017 the overwhelming concentration of racist acts can be found from 2013 to 2015 (Lunaria 2017). While LN politicians authored the majority of racist public statements, LN leaders regularly denied racism – LN Secretary Matteo Salvini, for example, declared that "Only an idiot in 2014 can discriminate on the basis of skin color or race!".¹⁶

According to both Lunaria (2014) and Carta di Roma (2014), one of the events of this period is the Calderoli-Kyenge case. In 2013, during a political rally, Senator Roberto Calderoli (LN) said that the Minister for Integration, and of Congolese origins, Cécile Kyenge (Democratic Party - DP) had "the appearances of orangutans".¹⁷ The Senate initially denied authorization to the court case, which then took place and in January 2019 Calderoli pleaded guilty with the aggravating circumstance of racism. Lamenting the lack of support of her own party, Kyenge publicly reiterated the importance of institutional actions on the use of language in order to curb a racist climate at a time when "racism against immigrants is increasing".¹⁸

The Calderoli-Kyenge case highlights a form of racism denial that suggests a rapid intensification of postracial racism. Calderoli's casual contempt was indeed in line with expressions of racial animalization, directed at black people, especially women (e.g. Michelle Obama), emergent in political and media discourses since the early-2000s. Animalization, ad Goldberg (2015) observes, serves as a transposition of the discourse of raciality on a level of at once mystification and hyperdehumanization, acknowledging "the unacceptability of racist expression while denying the implication" (Goldberg 2015, 56).

While in this phase LN and so-called "extremist" voices mostly contributed to the upsurge of racial violence, the Left also contributed to the rapid intensification of the postracial by purposely refusing to challenge racism on two key occasions.¹⁹ Firstly, 81 Democratic Party (DP) senators voted against aggravating circumstances of racism in the Calderoli-Kyenge case.²⁰ And

secondly, in 2013, the Democratic Party presented a proposal to Parliament to change the citizenship law from *ius sanguinis* to a tempered *ius soli* and *ius culturae*, meaning access to citizenship for the children of migrants who were born in Italy and/or went through primary education in the country, a population amounting to almost one million people (De Franceschi 2018). This would have constituted a very significant step towards a more multiracial society, effectively facilitating black Italians' upward social mobility, allowing them to play a more effective role in political and social arenas. However, in order to fulfil electoral interests DP politicians postponed the reform for over five years, essentially enabling a process of dismissal that eventually resulted (in the summer of 2018) in the complete failure of the proposed reform.²¹

The debate about removing the word race (*razza*) from law books is illustrative of the intensification of the postracial. In 2011, anthropologist Rivera (2011) authoritatively argued that because Christian anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism, anti-Slavic racism and anti-Gypsyism represented the main forms of racism in Italy, adopting "race" as a category of analysis would immediately suggest a pre-1945, biological understanding of racism. In the subsequent years, the debate became very intense, and in 2016, the Italian Anthropological Association (AAI) and the Italian Institute of Anthropology (ISITA) wrote a joint letter to the highest state authorities, asking to remove the word "race" from the Constitution, arguing that the word be not appropriate for describing human biological diversity. This Apart from some authors who argued against the removal of the word (e.g. Bontempelli 2015; Petrovich-Njegosh 2015; Milicia 2016; Faloppa 2017), the letter's point was by far the prevalent position in the debate, being additionally supported by authoritative geneticists and academics in other disciplines,²² and ultimately converging in a law proposal aimed at replacing the word "race" with "nationality".²³

Ultimate consolidation (2015–2018)

In 2013, the M5S ran for the first time in the national elections and obtained over 25 percent of the votes. Since its debut in politics, 5SM has always advanced a political agenda of the "honest people", ready to take back control of their own national destiny, by capitalizing on class-based claims, coupling issues of material disadvantage with explicit references to the global financial crisis and the moral values of "honest workers" whom the Movement has consistently identified with "the normal people". Such explicit depoliticization of lexicon and contents, adopting a post-ideological approach predicated upon the "common sense of the honest people" against both "corrupted elites" and *buonisti*, suggests a self-ascribed ideological neutrality. Further evidence of this is the way in which 5SM contributed to the failure of the citizenship law proposal in 2017. According to the party, the law was

unnecessary because citizenship for second generations could already be acquired at the age of 18. In neglecting the strict conditional requirements of the existing law, 5SM's official reason for refraining from voting upon the proposal was published in the party blog:

We said many times that migrations need to be addressed by the EU, and all EU countries must participate in reception (...) On the one hand the threat of ethnic substitution or terrorism will be stirred; on the other side the faces of children and the dead at sea will be used to generate the strongest emotions. In the middle, crushed between anvil and hammer, common sense, *responsibility* and *intellectual honesty* remain. (...) What they propose to us is an Italian pastiche that wants to give a political sop to those who still feed on ideologies. (...) For these reasons, the 5SM, in line with what has already been done in the Chamber, on the issue of *ius soli* will express a vote of abstention.²⁴

The proposed reform was clearly not about migration, but about the Italy-born "second generation", a large number of whom are young black people. Yet, conflating the political status of the second generation into that of migrants had twofold obfuscating effects: first, it inscribed the former in the register of the latter, by conflating an issue of rights for those who already informally belong to the national system, with an issue of perceived "refugee emergency"; second, it reiterated the already mainstream discourse, so popular across European right-wing parties, according to which migration represents a threat to the national body of the "honest people" (see Ioanide 2015, 1–26).

The winter and spring of 2018 saw the simultaneous increase of racial violence and upfront denial of both the violence as such and its conditions of possibility. The February 2018 shooting spree against black people in the streets of Macerata by LN militant Traini, mentioned in the Introduction, was followed by a declaration by Interior Minister Minniti (PD) that "I stopped the disembarking of Africans arriving in Sicily by boat because I had foreseen Traini [i.e. the Macerata shooting]", implicitly suggesting that racism is largely caused by uncontrolled immigration from the African continent.

About a month later, the day after the elections, Idy Diene, a 54-year-old black Italian citizen of Senegalese origins was shot dead in the centre of Florence by a white Italian man, Roberto Perrone, who was immediately declared "mentally disturbed". Twenty-four hours after the killing, the state prosecutor ruled out racism as rationale, because no signs of explicit affiliations to the extreme right were found in the killer's flat. Outraged by prosecutor's conclusion, members of the Senegalese community took to the streets and happened to damage two flowerpots. Referring to these events, Florence Mayor Nardella (PD) tweeted,

The murder of Idy Dienec [*sic*] at the hands of a mentally disturbed person, now under arrest, has affected all of Florence. We understand the pain of the

Senegalese community but tonight's protest is unacceptable. The violent, of whatever provenance, needs to be entrusted to justice.

This case echoed Abba's murder in 2008, and political leaders' "blame of the victim" tone, by resorting to a rhetoric of legality understood as security, bluntly silencing the racial charge of the whole situation.

This recalls a previous event that both Lunaria (2017) and Carta di Roma (2016) consider crucial in the intensification of racism. In July 2016, Emmanuel Chidi Namdi, a 36-year-old man of Nigerian origins, seeking asylum, was walking with his wife (also from Nigeria) through the streets of Fermo, in central Italy. When a white man, Amedeo Mancini, called Ms Chidi Namdi "African monkey", Emmanuel approached the man and the two began to quarrel. Later Emmanuel started walking away, but was joined by Mancini who punched him to death. In the trial, while extenuating circumstances such as self-defense were ruled out, the aggravating circumstance of racism was considered; and yet, instead of a prison sentence, which is most common in case of murder, Mancini was given four years of house arrest with the possibility of going to work eight hours every day.²⁵

The 2018 elections resulted in a 5SM-LN government coalition. Instead of a "government alliance", the two parties established a "government contract", removing in this way the usual institutional idiom of alliance and embracing the postpolitical language of personal relationships. Rather than a negotiation of each programmatic issue, the contract resulted in a number of 5SM issues and a number of LN issues. Calling itself "the government of change", the coalition was based on a series of compensations between the two parties, whereby every provision that benefits one was the prelude to the success of the other. In the name of government stability, each of the two parties was ready to accept, without negotiating, what the other did.

Such a "postpolitical rejection of politics" (Sayyid 2017, 18) gave LN absolute freedoms on migration politics once its leader Salvini became, in May 2018, Interior Minister. A month into office, Salvini prevented two rescue ships from disembarking asylum seekers in Sicily. The first ship, the humanitarian Aquarius, was forced to remain at sea for eight days, before the city of Valencia (Spain) allowed it to disembark rescued people; the second, Diciotti, an Italian Coast Guard vessel, was authorized to disembark 177 people after five days of permanence in the port of Catania. 5SM remained either silent or largely complicit with Salvini's anti-asylum seekers politics. The principle of governability and "compensation" between LN and 5SM later paved the way for the so-called Salvini Law Decree, which among other things removed the possibility of granting humanitarian protection status, increased the fee for citizenship applications by 25 percent and doubled the maximum time of permanence in Reception and Repatriation Centers.

Postracial racism has been pervading various government actions. In August 2018, the Minister for the Family and Disability, Fontana (LN), called for the abolition of the Mancino Law, which sanctions the conduct attributable to racism and fascism. According to the Minister, the law had been used as a form of “reverse racism” against Italians.²⁶ Although the Minister’s proposal has not been accepted, connections between the attempt to remove the term “race” from the Constitution and Fontana’s statement on the Mancino Law seem to draw the boundaries within which the racial question is publicly debated in Italy.

Conclusion: politicizing race and emerging anti-racism

Following the first characterization of the European postracial (i.e. Sayyid 2017) and in line with analyses of the rise of right-wing xenophobic populism across Western Europe and the USA, in this article we have offered a systematic repository of facts, debates and ideas concerning the Italian postracial, and organized this material into an archive. The Italian postracial archive we propose comprises two phases. The first phase, from the 2002 adoption of the Bossi-Fini Law to the 2008 electoral campaign, was the consolidation of a neoconservative block, openly anti-Islam and anti-migration, and fuelled by gender-based arguments, cutting across political boundaries on both sides of the Atlantic. The second phase, from 2008 to 2018, characterized by the emergence of the most visible postpolitical expression, the M5S, saw a three-year period (2013–2015) of rapid increase of racist manifestations and their simultaneous deception, and an ultimate consolidation (2015–2018) which hosts the remarkable racial violence of the 2018 electoral campaign.

As Hesse (2011, 155) succinctly put it, “[t]he postracial is the political horizon of racism’s depoliticization”. We have primarily based our discussion on theories of the postracial and on their transposition to Europe via Sayyid’s (2017) first analytical suggestions. This has allowed us to build an archive which is also a genealogy that provides a historical and theoretical perspective on the reconfiguration of racism in Italy. In line with other studies of similar racial reconfigurations in the US under Obama and especially Trump, as well as in Brexit UK, we hope to encourage further analyses of the postracial contemporary as well as anti-postracial anti-racist thinking and practice.

In doing this, we take inspiration from and point at a series of anti-racist initiatives in Italy that have foregrounded the politicization of race. A critique of the segregated migrant reception system gave rise to the *LasciateCIEntrare* campaign, committed to the abolition of the Refoulment Centers (*CPR-Center Centri di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio*). There have also been asylum seeker-led struggles within the broader mobilization against the poor management of the reception system. In winter 2017, three marches led by asylum seekers

and supported by solidarity activists took place. The demonstrators walked away from the overcrowded and dilapidated centers of Cona and Bagnoli (Veneto) to claim their rights to dignified accommodation. Migrant-led struggles did not only concern the reception system, but also involved the dimension of labor and labor rights. Three examples are particularly telling: the national strike of migrants called on 1 March 2010; the two-week strike of African laborers in Nardò, Puglia in 2011; and the 2016 strike of over 2,000 sick Indian farmworkers in Latina, Lazio (Oliveri 2018).

Inspired by the 2010 Rosarno revolt discussed above, in 2018 Aboubakar Soumahoro, a trade union leader of Ivorian origin, became the voice of migrant agricultural workers' struggles. He directly opposed LN's Trump-inspired "Italians first" slogan with "the exploited first; refugees first; agricultural laborers first; domestic workers and care workers first, migrants first".²⁷ Soumahoro has proved able to unmask the key power dynamics on which racial hierarchies are constructed and unveil the processes that govern the reproduction of racial capitalism in contemporary Italy and Europe, by stressing the importance of dignity of all laborers, above all black and migrant workers. As one of the leaders of the "Base Trade Union" (USB - *Unione Sindacale di Base*), he also represents a bridge between black Italians' struggles and other struggles across black Europe. The international scope of his politics is mirrored in initiatives such as "Race, Labor and Freedom" at Cambridge University, in which Soumahoro discussed his political and social struggles.²⁸

The 2013 *ius soli* law proposal aimed at reforming citizenship law (which, as discussed, was rejected in 2017) was sustained by a number of collectives struggling against the normative principle of white Italianness. From *L'Italia sono anche io!*²⁹ ("I too am Italy!") promoted by Rete G2 ("Second Generation Network") to *Italiani Senza Cittadinanza*³⁰ ("Italians without Citizenship"), people of color in Italy have been fighting for recognition for their belonging to the nation, meaning to be visible and represented in politics, the media and society.

Music is historically a site of resistance for minorities, and even more so for black diasporas. It is no surprise that some of the most radical stances are being expressed in this field. Rapper Tommy Kuti summarized the situation perfectly in his pro-*ius soli* slogan: *Non sono straniero* (I'm not an alien), *sono solo Stra Nero* (I'm just very black)!³¹ The meaning is twofold: being black and Italian is not mutually exclusive, and being black is beautiful, pride in blackness being stressed by the word *Stra* ("very"). Tommy Kuti has written a song named *Afroitaliano* (Afro-Italian),³² an ode to black Italianness, which became the soundtrack of *Senza Muri*, an anti-racist, pro-refugee demonstration held in Milan on 20 May 2017.³³ Within a genre with inherent racial connotations, Ghali, an Italian artist of Tunisian origin, has been writing songs about everyday racism, including lyrics about racial profiling such as

Perquisa ma per cosa? Perché sempre me? ("Stop and Search – for what? Why is it always me [getting stopped and searched]?").³⁴ He has also produced a hit single entitled *Cara Italia* ("Dear Italy"), with lyrics such as "To those who tell me go home, my answer is: I'm already here, I love you dear Italy, you're my sweet half", thus playing with the taboo of racial mixing in postracial times: "Because I'm still a kid, a bit Italian, a bit Tunisian / She's from Puerto Rico / If something happens [i.e. a pregnancy] for Trump it'll be a mess".³⁵

One of the ways in which young Italians of color are fighting to overcome their structural invisibility is cinema, as shown in the short film *Io sono Rosa Parks*³⁶ ("I am Rosa Parks"), which was first screened during the 2018 Venice Film Festival. The result of a collaboration between *Italiani senza cittadinanza* and the collective *Arising Africans*,³⁷ *Io sono Rosa Parks* is a reflection on the "separation line" – the "color line" and the "nationality line" – that divides Italians into more and less worthy citizens. Indeed, it is an invitation to pose a question to contemporary Italy: "Who could be, here and now, Rosa Parks?". This important question, we hope, triggers renewed politicizations of race by way of an all too necessary anti-postracial anti-racism.

Notes

1. Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau' wrote the three empirical sections and the conclusion. Giovanni Picker wrote the introduction, the theoretical section and the methodological section.
2. <https://www.lastampa.it/2018/01/16/italia/la-razza-bianca-a-rischio-fontana-choc-poi-le-scuse-zB3WTgSOSCOMsM39suDPLP/pagina.html>
3. <http://www.secoloditalia.it/2018/01/salvini-gli-italiani-sono-il-popolo-meno-razzista-del-mondo-e-sui-vaccini-vi-dico/>
4. In the trial, Traini declared that he went on a shooting spree against black people in reaction to the murder of a young lady in Macerata, once local media had reported that the only suspected murderer was a Nigerian man.
5. Goldberg (2015) wrote one of the few studies of the postracial that provides insights beyond the USA, including Brazil, South Africa and Israel/Palestine.
6. lunaria.org/cronachediordinariorazzismo/archivio. See Appendix 1 in the text for a schematic view.
7. cartadiroma.org.
8. «!», "Corriere della Sera", 29 settembre 2001. https://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2006/09_Settembre/15/rabbia1.shtml
9. Elaboration by the authors on data retrieved from <http://www.ristretti.it/areastudio/statistiche/>.
10. <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/manifesto-pera-polo-l-occidente-ritrovi-l-identit.html>
11. <https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/politica/articoli/articolo400125.shtml>
12. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52008IP0361> (11/11/2018).
13. <http://www.repubblica.it/2008/04/sezioni/cronaca/milano-razzismo/aggredito-sprangate/aggredito-sprangate.html>

14. The number went from 1,311 to 2,566. Racist incidents include verbal and physical violence, damage to property, and discrimination via policy.
15. <http://www.beppegrillo.it/gli-spartacus-neri-di-rosarno/>
16. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIHUm2hnFEM>, 0'06"; 10/8/18).
17. Calderoli:

I routinely check the Italian government website, and when I notice Kyenge, I get killed. I love animals, for goodness sake. I have owned tigers, bears, monkeys, and all the rest. Even wolves I have owned. But when I see the appearances of orangutans, I get upset. <https://www.la7.it/in-onda/video/calderoli-vs-kyenge-08-08-2013-81747>
18. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/09/16/calderoli-e-lorango-alla-kyenge-per-il-senato-non-ce-istigazione-allodio-razziale/2039501/>; (10/8/18)
19. While social inclusion and anti-racism are typically closer to left-wing than right-wing agendas, Colombo (2013, 166) has persuasively shown that "The emphasis on legality and control that characterizes most political debates [on migration] has been shared not only among right-wing parties, but also among left-wing supporters".
20. This was driven by political interests. Following parliamentary immunity rules, senators voted upon the Calderoli case. After 81 DP senators rejected the option of racist aggravating circumstances, Calderoli withdrew half a million amendments that he had drafted to the constitutional reform, which was supported by the Democratic Party that year (Sebastiani 2017).
21. <https://www.panorama.it/news/politica/ius-soli-il-finale-mancato-della-legislatura-pd/>; 10/8/18)
22. https://www.repubblica.it/scienze/2017/10/14/news/carlo_alberto_redi_razza_via_dalla_costituzione_per_la_scienza_non_esiste_-178277135/
23. Proposta di Legge del 31/3/2016, PDL0040250
24. http://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2017/06/il_movimento_5_stelle_non_vota_lo_ius_soli.html
25. "Viaggio nella zona grigia che ha portato all'omicidio di Fermo" *Internazionale*, 18/3/2017 - <https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/alessandro-leogrande/2017/03/18/emmanuel-chidi-nnamdi-fermo-omicidio>
26. https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2018/08/03/news/razzismo_fontana_legge_mancino-203291231/; (10/8/18)
27. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDH-cHojjM0>
28. <https://cambridge.carpe-diem.events/calendar/8415137-race-labor-freedom-a-conversation-with-aboubakar-soumahoro-at-keynes-hall-kings-college/>
29. <http://www.secondegenerazioni.it/2017/02/20/italia-sono-anchio/>
30. <http://www.italianisenzacittadinanza.it/>
31. <https://video.repubblica.it/dossier/riforme-da-non-tradire/un-rap-per-lo-ius-soli-tommy-kuti-non-sono-straniero-sono-stranero/279975/280569>
32. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-WhDMUmYMc>
33. <https://www.agenpress.it/notizie/2017/05/17/milano-20maggiosenzamuri-tutti-colori-del-mondo-diretta-radio-popolare/>
34. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlDoGxiNF0g>
35. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-WhDMUmYMc>
36. <http://iosonorosaparks.it/>
37. <https://www.arisingafricans.com/>

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