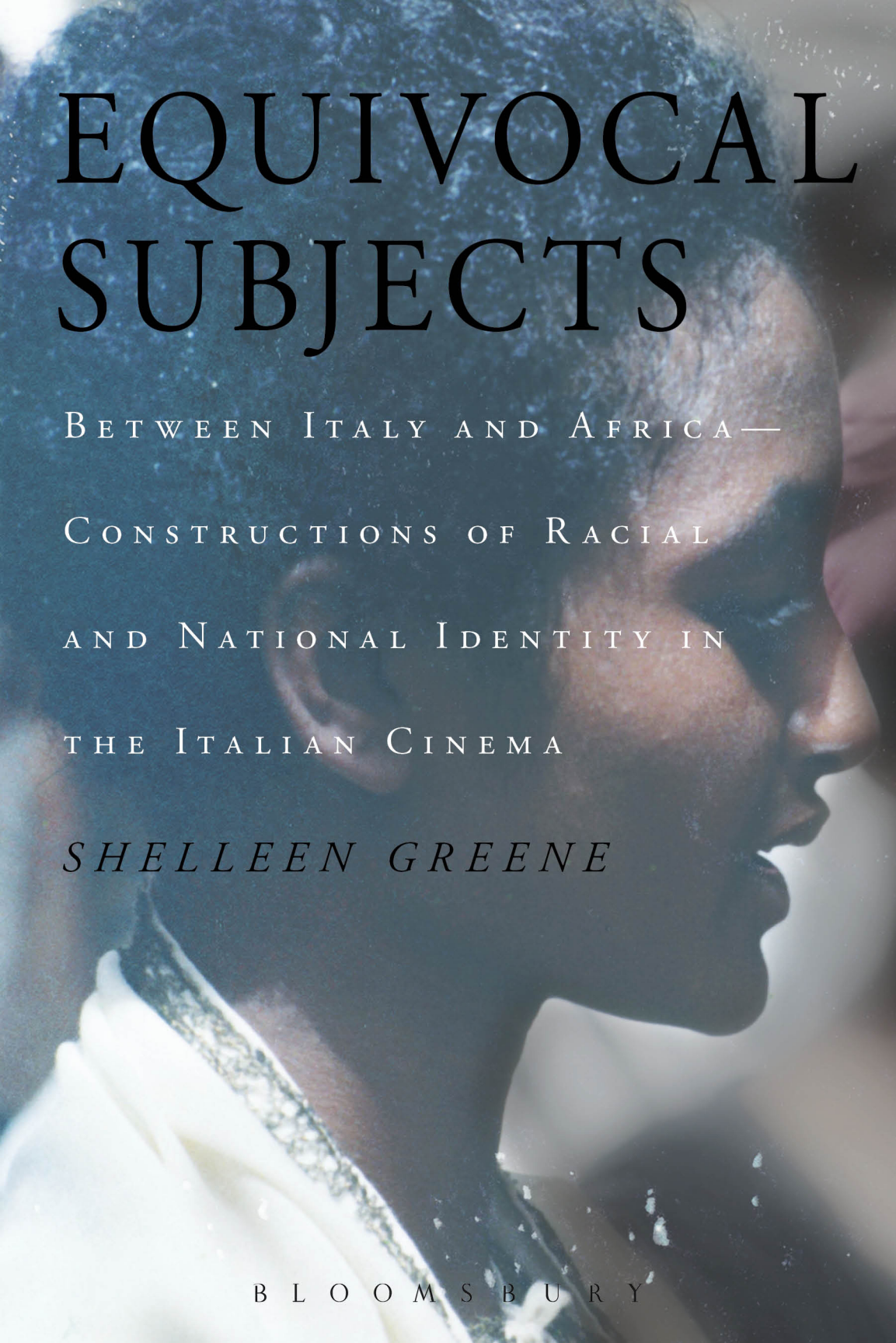

EQUIVOCAL SUBJECTS

Between Italy and Africa—Constructions of Racial and National Identity in the Italian Cinema

SHELLEEN GREENE

BLOOMSBURY

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To Roma Webb-Greene and to the late Mr Albert Hollander

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Introduction

As the first decade of the twenty-first century draws to a close, Italy is in the process of defining its "new" multiracial and multicultural society. The country's history of emigration is often referenced to highlight its present status as a destination country, a position garnered within a three-decade period that saw the rise of immigrants from Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe within its national borders. Italy's response to postindustrial migration is similar to that of other European Union countries contending with a highly competitive global economy that requires both skilled foreign workers and the cheap labor force provided by clandestine migrants. In Italy, the process of incorporating non-Western European and nonwhite immigrants has entailed legislative reforms both to manage the influx of new populations and to curb illegal immigration to the country and other parts of the European Union. While Italy has attempted to embrace a multiracial paradigm for the incorporation of non-Western European immigrants and their descendants, it has also seen a xenophobic backlash against migrants, who are viewed as a threat to a racial homogeneity that, for many, is central to the definition of Italy and "Europe" as a whole.

In particular, African migration via the shores of Sicily and southern Italy has not only prompted a reactionary response of increased border surveillance, detention facilities, and racial violence, but also a reevaluation of the relationship between Italy and Africa that extends beyond the most recent 30-year period of postindustrial migration from Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, and other north and sub-Saharan African countries.[1]

Italy's transition to a multiracial society can be seen in the April 2008 election of the country's first parliamentary member from sub-Saharan Africa, Jean-Leonard Touadi, a university professor and journalist originally from the DP Congo. The same election, however, gave a third term to Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, and his center–right coalition, *Forza Italia*, whose political appeal draws upon the perceived connection between illegal immigration and increasing crime rates, and whose proposed reforms included prison sentences for illegal immigrants and

DNA testing to verify blood relations for immigrants seeking to join family members already residing in the country.

As the country's center–right coalition negotiates its immigration policies with calls from the European Union for nondiscriminatory legislation, Italy's current role in the maintenance of the "boundaries of Europe" can be evaluated in light of its geographic proximity to Africa, the country's internal racial heterogeneity, and its colonial legacy in North and East Africa. These aspects of its history shed light on the country's complex response to racial diversity domestically and internationally, from dealing with the plight of African migrants' desperate and often fatal attempts to reach Europe by way of Sicily and southern Italy, to Berlusconi's inimitable description of President Barack Obama as "young, handsome and tanned." The recent election of Italy's first black mayor, Sandy Cane (referred to as "Italy's Obama" due to her mixed African American and Italian heritage), on an anti-immigration platform as candidate for the ethno-regionalist Northern League Party, further complicates an analysis of contemporary Italian racial politics. The Northern League's assertion of the north's ethnic and cultural difference from central and southern Italy, which has been used as a platform for northern secession, ironically calls attention to the ethnic and racial heterogeneity that the nation-state formation subsumes. While Cane's inclusion within the Northern League speaks to the possible expansion of the criteria for Italian citizenship and national belonging, the party's xenophobic policies toward nonwhite immigrants and southern Italians disavow a longer trajectory of contact and cultural hybridity that are necessary to understanding modern Italian identity formation.

Central to understanding Italy's role in contemporary debates regarding African immigration to the European Union is an investigation of the development of Italy's racial consciousness and the ways in which racial ideologies are disseminated within the country. To this end, I examine Italy's national cinema and its role in the construction and circulation of ideas of race and national belonging from the silent to the contemporary period. *Equivocal Subjects* argues that the processes of Italian racial and national identity formation can be understood through representations of African Italian mixed-race identity in the Italian cinema.

My study poses three primary questions to the Italian national cinema: What role has the cinema played in the development and circulation of ideologies of race within the country? How does the representation of "mixed-race" identity—either through the interracial subject or the Italian national subject's encounter with "blackness" at different moments within the history of the national cinema—mark shifts in conceptual

paradigms of race and nation? How do these previous enactments of racial and national identity influence contemporary representations of non-Western European migration, Italian and European citizenship?

By mixed-race, I speak primarily of persons who are of both Italian and African heritage, including those who emerged from Italy's colonial enterprises in North and East Africa beginning in the nineteenth century, and persons of Italian and African American descent born during the World War II period. Although a country familiar with racial heterogeneity given its history of foreign invasions, including the Germanic and Asiatic invasions of Rome beginning in the fifth century and the Arab conquest of Sicily in the ninth century, racial mixture has also served as a metaphor for the internal division of Italy between north and south. After the completion of the *Risorgimento*, Italy's nineteenth-century struggle for unification, the racial heterogeneity of the population came into question as the country sought to define itself as a modern European nation.

The internal division of Italy into a literate, prosperous north and a "backward," impoverished south is a historical formation that allowed for the development of analytics such as the "southern question," the assemblage of discourses in the social sciences, medicine, and the humanities that sought to address the socioeconomic and political disparities between northern and southern Italy. Southern question discourses racialized the south by conflating the region with negative stereotypes associated with Africa and the Middle East. As the nation's internal other, the south's reformation and incorporation into the newly unified nation-state was central to the nation-building project.

My study looks at mixed-race as a trope for the country's negotiation of its internal racial heterogeneity that continues to the present day. The representations of mixed-race subjects in the Italian cinema not only mark shifts in the definition of "race" and "nation" that have circulated within the country since the late nineteenth century, but also reveal the failure of these categories to secure stable racial and national identities for a given historical period.

One reason for a particular focus on Italy for this study is that due to its late unification process the country did not take part in the "scramble for Africa" until the 1880s, by which time other European countries had claimed the majority of the continent. Soon after national unification, Italy began its modern imperialist endeavors in North and East Africa, but when it finally did attempt colonial occupation of Ethiopia (Abyssinia), it initially suffered defeat (notably at the battle of Adwa in 1896), which not only derailed the country's imperial ambitions but also demonstrated

that an African country could successfully defeat a European power, thereby signaling the decline of the era of European imperialism.

Despite the importance of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance to Western Europe, by the nineteenth century, Italy's greatness was deemed in its past, and the entire country was seen as "southern," a region that threatened to destabilize the boundaries that separate Europe from Africa and the Levant. In the context of nineteenth-century imperialism, Italy's inability to fulfill its imperialist ambitions is also significant in that, according to Marxist scholar Étienne Balibar, Western imperialism allowed European nations to transfer borders (originally emerging with the transition from Christendom to Europe) and place Europe at the "center of the world," thereby maintaining their hegemony while the colonies operated as "periphery" areas.[2] However, Balibar comments:

> But one could say that in a certain sense it was never completely achieved—that is, the formation of independent, sovereign, unified, or homogeneous nation-states at the same time *failed* in a very large part of the world, or it was *thrown into question*, not only outside Europe but in certain parts of Europe itself. (emphasis added)[3]

Italy's claim to nationhood status was in many ways tied to its ability to take part in Western imperialism. The failure to enlarge and sustain the "second Roman Empire" marks the country as one of the "periphery" areas described by Balibar. The cultural representations of the mixed-race body figure the country's peripheral status.

Peoples of African and African Italian mixed-race descent have appeared and been portrayed in Italian national cinema throughout its history, from the black American GI in neorealist films as performed by Dots M. Johnson in *Paisà* (*Paisan*, 1946) and John Kitzmiller in *Senza pietà* (*Without Pity*, 1947), the figures of modernist primitivism in the films of Frederico Fellini *Le notti di Cabiria* (*Nights of Cabiria*, 1957), the alluring beauty of Eritrean Italian Zeudi Araya in *La ragazza dalla pelle di luna* (*Moonskin*, Luigi Scattini, 1974), the portrayals of contemporary African migration in *Pummarò* (Michele Placido, 1990), and *Waalo Fendo* (*Where the Earth Freezes*, Mohammed Soudani, 1999), to the recent vision of the African diaspora in Italy in *Bianco e Nero* (Cristina Comencini, 2008). Somewhat less apparent are figures of mixed-race identity such as Angelo Maggio in Francesco De Robertis' postwar melodrama *Il Mulatto* (1949) and Italian Eritrean actress Inez Pelligrini in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Il fiore delle mille e una notte* (*Arabian Nights*, 1974).

Today, African Italians residing in Italy are primarily migrants from African nations formerly colonized by Italy and other European countries and Italian citizens born of African migrants who settled in the country or were brought to Italy at a very young age. Out of the documented immigrants currently residing in Italy, ranging between 6.5 and 7.2 percent of the population, only a small number are from north and sub-Saharan Africa.[4] The recent political upheavals in north Africa, particularly in Libya, once part of the Italian East African empire, raise not only the memory of the Italian colonial presence in North and East Africa, but also serves as a reminder that within the last century, Italian citizens of African descent have resided in the country for decades prior to the wave of immigration that began in the mid-1970s.[5]

My examination of the Italian national cinema through the trope of racial mixture has been informed by several studies devoted to the representation of African immigrants in Italian visual culture, as well as analyses of the representation of the black body during Italy's late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century colonial campaigns and in the post–World War II period. *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (University of California Press, 2003) includes essays that explore how fascist colonial narratives set in Africa register anxieties regarding racial hierarchies and the relation between colony and metropole.[6] These studies have brought attention to the presence of black subjects in Italian film, offering a historical context (Italian colonialism in North and East Africa, World War II) by which to examine these subjects and their possible signification in the Italian colonial imaginary. *From Terrone to Extracommunitario: New Manifestations of Racism in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (Troubador Press, 2010) examines the legacies of Italy's racialized north/south division, exploring how the construction of the south and its populations as an internal racial "other" informs the reception and representation of nonwhite, non-Western immigrants to the peninsula in the present era.

Equivocal Subjects also examines the changing signification of "blackness" in Italian visual culture from its modern colonial to postcolonial periods. As Karen Pinkus notes, the representation of the black body during the Liberal and fascist colonial eras was informed by earlier discourses of "blackness" that predate the nation's modern colonial era. Pinkus writes:

> Of course, one finds many more images of the black body during the late thirties than at any other time, but to suggest that blackness

> springs fully grown into the consciousness of the Italian public is to ignore a long and complex iconography that dates back at least to romantic notions of savagery; to nineteenth-century sexology; and to a whole range of allied discourses.[7]

As seen in the popular literature, travel magazines, anthropological journals, commercial art design, and reoccurring types from marketing campaigns, "blackness" was operative in Italian visual culture from the late nineteenth century through the establishment of the *L'Africa Italiana Orientale* (the Italian East African Empire) under the fascist regime during the 1930s, and continues to manifest in fashion marketing advertisements that use types established during the fascist era. In an era of commodity multiculturalism, Italy has yet to come to terms with the historical legacy of its colonial past. Hence, contemporary images, such as seen in clothing designer Benetton's controversial campaigns, are invested within, but not readily interpreted as arising from the economic and libidinal investment in the black body from preceding eras.[8]

Of particular relevance to my study is scholarship examining the representation of mixed-race subjects in Italian film, though there is little exclusively devoted to the topic. This may be due to a lack of distinction made between African and mixed-race subjects, but I suggest that the mixed-race subject is a unique and particularly effective identity through which to investigate ideologies of race and nation in Italy due to the above-mentioned factors of Italy's north/south division, racial heterogeneity, and European citizenship.[9]

A national cinema, argued Andrew Higson, does not represent a homogeneous and stable geographical entity, but rather is a "history of crisis and conflict" in which the indigenous film product is impacted through its insertion and circulation within a global economy.[10] Central to this is Higson's reconsideration of the term *national*, asking what is entailed in the assignation of this term to a body of films. Rather than taking the concept of the nation as given and presumably understood by the constituents it would hail as national subjects, Higson writes:

> Cinema never simply reflects or expresses an already fully formed and homogeneous national culture and identity, as if it were the undeniable property of all national subjects; certainly, it privileges only a limited range of subject positions which thereby become naturalized or reproduced as the only legitimate positions of the national subject. But it needs also to be seen as actively working to construct subjectivity as well as simply expressing a pre-given identity.[11]

Following Higson's suggestion, I approach the Italian national cinema not only as an institution that disseminates ideas regarding the Italian "race" and the national subject, but as one that also participates in the construction of these identities.

My study of the construction of Italian racial and national identities also incorporates the theoretical interventions made by studies in the cultural production of "whiteness" and attempts to denaturalize and make visible the category through examination of its status as a social, cultural, and political construct deployed for particular effects at a given historical moment. Central to my argument is the assertion that "white" is a contingent category for the various European identities it can define. Further, a group's inclusion within the category must be continually reinforced. The category creates conditions that separate whites from nonwhites, and at the same time organizes "internal hierarchies of whiteness" that these groups continually negotiate.[12] I argue that the representation of the mixed-race subject operates to resolve the ambivalence surrounding Italian racial identity at specific historical moments such as during the post-unification colonial endeavors, the fascist colonial period, and the establishment of the postwar Republic.

Within the past two decades, Italy has also been examined through the lens of postcolonial theory, allowing not only a reconsideration of the country's nineteenth- and twentieth-century external colonial endeavors—once considered a footnote or historical aberrance—but also a reconceptualization of Italian unification as the colonization of the south by the north. In terms of Italian colonization in Africa, this renewed interest also shows the extent to which the Italian colonial administration and policies were similar to that of other major European empires, particularly in the management of indigenous, settler, and mixed-race populations in Eritrea, Ethiopia, and other colonial territories. However, a full acknowledgment of the country's colonial past is still emergent, and scholars have remarked upon Italy's "historical amnesia" to account for the lack of scholarship that approaches Italy from a postcolonial perspective. As Miguel Mellino writes: "Rarely does one see attempts to trace or reflect on connections between the problems and approaches developed within postcolonial studies and the specific history of Italy, its cultural dialectics and struggles and internal politics."[13] The "postcolonial" is seen as applicable to only the major colonial powers such as Britain and France, and it is only within the last 15 years that translations of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty have circulated within Italy.[14] As one book title suggests, Italy is still imagined as "the least of the great powers" and consequently as not having enacted an expansive and coherent colonial policy in the manner

of the larger European imperial countries. However, as I will discuss in later chapters, Italian colonialism was as methodical and brutal as that of the more extensive Western empires. I consider how the representation of mixed-race identity in the films under discussion speaks to the country's enduring and unresolved colonial legacy.

In my analysis of mixed-race subjects in Italian cinema, I draw on the work of Homi Bhabha who considers the notion of a destabilized colonial discourse that can serve to challenge the fixed identities such a discourse seeks to maintain. As Vetri Nathan argues, due to Italy's geographical location, its history of immigration and emigration, internal and external migration, as well as its racialized north/south division, Bhabha's work is particularly useful for examining processes of racial and national identity formation in Italy, a country that has been rendered: ". . . Europe's historical internal Other . . . chronically ambivalent and permanently hybrid."[15] In "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," Bhabha argues that within colonial discourse the stereotype, like the fetish object that staves off the threat of castration, allows for the recognition and disavowal of the other's difference. Bhabha calls the stereotype a "discursive strategy" that embodies the notion of ambivalent fixity—stable and unchanging—yet characterized by "degeneracy and daemonic repetition."[16]

Further, the stereotype constitutes a body of knowledge or what is "known" about the colonial subject, but also what remains unproven, what Bhabha calls the "probabilistic truth" of the other. The stereotype is "anxiously repeated," creating an excess and ambivalence that marginalizes the colonial subject and serves as the basis of colonial power.[17] However, the repetitive nature of this discourse also links it to mimicry, which entails patterns of repetition, excess, and failure within the process of signification.[18] For Bhabha, it is where this "ambivalent identification" can occur that the colonial subject can undermine the objectifying discourse of the colonizer.[19] I argue that the recurrence of the mixed-race figure operates in a similar fashion. In the films considered in this study, the interracial subject puts into question the stability of Italian racial and national identity, and are returned to and re-presented in an attempt to maintain racial boundaries.

My study argues that another site of postcolonial consciousness within Italy can be found in the cinematic presentation of the mixed-race Italian citizen such as in *Il Mulatto* (1949/1951) and *Arabian Nights* (1974) and through the trope of racial mixture as seen in the southerner's encounter with the African American in the cinema of the "economic miracle"

(*Mafioso*, 1962). These representations are read as a means of working through the country's colonial legacy, its postwar entrance into the Western economic bloc, and its ongoing unification process.

Equivocal Subjects is also concerned with the rethinking of the European "nation" and its borders brought about by new patterns of migration that have emerged in the last 30 years. The Italian south can be considered what Étienne Balibar has described as a "peripheral zone" where "secular and religious cultures confront one another."[20] It is in these zones that the nation and its people are defined. The body of the mixed-race subject operates as a kind of border, an idea that is furthered by Balibar's contention that Europe is and has always been "multiple," neither pure nation-states nor unmixed population. Hence, the use of internal colonialism to deal with the threat of difference, such as in the case with the Italian south, creates "an insurmountable border for its own populations, who it will place indefinitely in the situation of the metics (free noncitizens or "half-breeds") and it will reproduce its own impossibility."[21] The acknowledgment of racial heterogeneity as the result, not of the recent entrance of "illegals," but rather, of centuries-long movement and contact among European, Middle Eastern, Asian, and African peoples in the space of the Mediterranean is what Iain Chambers suggests through his concept of an "uprooted geography." He writes:

> An *uprooted geography* articulate[s] the diverse currents and complex nodes of both visible and invisible networks, rather than one that merely follows the horizontal axis of borders, barriers, and allegedly separated unities. This, of course, is to consider the Mediterranean before, between, and beyond the self-serving objectifying logic of European humanism, its modernity and its nationalism. It is to register, even if it cannot fully recover or remember, the interrogative complexity of a diversified and multilateral space.[22]

In a similar way, the "equivocal subjects" I trace throughout the Italian cinema can offer another trajectory for this rediscovered history of modern European identity formation.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 examines the role of the early silent historical epic film in disseminating ideologies of race and nation during the late Liberal

period. The central figure of racial hybridity is Maciste, the strongman icon of Italian cinema who first appears in *Cabiria*, the 1914 historical epic that commemorated Italy's victory in the Italo-Turkish war (1911–12). As the loyal slave of Roman patrician Fulvio Axilla, the Maciste role is performed in blackface (director Giovanni Pastrone referred to the character as a "mulatto"). We can see how the Maciste character collapses racial difference onto the Italian lower classes and the south, and further, serves in an instructional capacity, teaching the lower classes their place within the racial and economic hierarchy of Italy, as well as their role in the present and future colonial empire. But ultimately, the blackface performance fails in establishing a clear racial hierarchy between the Italians and their future colonial subjects in Africa. Rather, race is revealed as an arbitrary marker of difference, serving as a temporary and insufficient mechanism to maintain both racial and sexual normativity.

The chapter then continues with a reconsideration of historical narrative undertaken in Haile Gerima's 1999 documentary *Adwa: An African Victory*. Set in both Italy and Ethiopia, Gerima offers a translation and retelling of one of Italy's first imperialist endeavors that challenges the triumphal metaphors of the second Roman Empire offered in Italian silent historical epics. Gerima's film proposes that the writing of Italian colonial history remains unfinished, and further, the arguably yet-to-be-written history of postcolonial Italy has significant ramifications for African diasporic communities within the country. Gerima's documentary also serves as a model for the work undertaken in this study, a return and reevaluation of the country's complex relation to its racial heterogeneity and its status as a European nation as debated in its cultural production. This reevaluation of Italian colonialism in light of the country's complex history of racial identity formation lays the contextual groundwork for the subsequent chapters that deal with the portrayal of African Italian mixed-race identity in Italian film.

In Chapter 2, I examine the representation of interracial relationships within the Italian colonial and postcolonial imaginary, exploring the ways in which mixed-race relationships trace the shifting constructions of Italian racial and national identity as well as the country's reckoning with its colonial legacy. I begin with a discussion of Mailù, the mixed-race protagonist in Guido Brignone's fascist colonial melodrama, *Sotto la croce del sud* (*Under the Southern Cross*, 1938), and then turn to Giorgio Moser's *Violenza segreta* (*Secret Violence*, 1963), one of the earliest expressions of an Italian postcolonial consciousness in film. In an interview, Moser describes his film as not only a direct response to *Sotto la croce del*

sud, but also to fascist-era colonial narrative films. Although a moral condemnation of Italy's role in the colonization of Africa, the film is reflective of a period in which the country, after a period of postwar recovery and entrance into the "First World" economic bloc, is only beginning to come to terms with its colonial legacy and the relation between the nation and its former colonial territories.

This chapter concludes with a consideration of films from the 1960s to the present that use cross-racial desire as a platform for investigating the Italian postcolonial condition. Marco Ferreri's *La donna scimmia* (*The Ape Woman*, 1964) and Bernardo Bertolucci's *L'assedio* (*Besieged*, 1998) are films that have staged interracial relationships in order to reevaluate Italian colonialism. Heralded as the first mainstream Italian film to deal with interracial relationships, Cristina Comencini's *Bianco e Nero* (2008) is one of the most recent films to reflect upon Italy's colonial past by way of its representation of Italian multicultural society at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Chapter 3 examines the representation of African Italian mixed-race subjects in Italian postwar narrative film. Francesco De Robertis' *Il Mulatto* and its US distribution version *Angelo* (1949 and 1951 respectively) is a social problem narrative concerned with the birth of mixed-race children in Italy during World War II. Through a comparative reading of *Il Mulatto* and the selectively edited *Angelo*, I argue that this postwar narrative finds recourse for the ejection of the mixed-race Italian citizen through the US legal doctrine of "equal, but separate," severing the child's Italian maternity, and thereby deeming him non-Italian and foreign. Relegating the problem of the mixed-race subject to the United States, the mixed-race child is removed from the postwar Republic at the moment it reincorporates an indigenous southern identity into the national fold. The film accomplishes this displacement of the mixed-race Italian citizen and a reassertion of Italian national autonomy through the use of Italian neorealist conventions. Having defined and set the limits of Italian citizenship, the country then begins its transformation into a "First World" nation and eventual full entrance into the Western European economic bloc.

I then turn to Spike Lee's 2008 film, *Miracle at St. Anna*, an adaptation of James McBride's novel of the same name. The story of the first African American combat troops in the Allied forces also returns us to the appearance of the African American GI in neorealist films such as *Paisà* (*Paisan*, Roberto Rosellini, 1946) and *Senza pietà* (*Without Pity*, Alberto Lattuada, 1948). Lee's *Miracle at St. Anna* offers a revisionist history of World War II

Italy by way of a return to and commentary upon Italian neorealism, a movement that will influence Lee's *oeuvre* via Third World and the L.A. School of African and African American filmmakers. Finally, I return to the postwar era, mixed-race identity, and questions of national belonging through an analysis of Kym Ragusa's *fuori/outside* (1997). Ragusa's examination of her Italian and African American heritage will serve as a basis for interrogating alternate modes of identity formation outside of patriarchy, the nation-state, and hierarchies of race.

In Chapter 4, I use the concept of whiteness to explore the representation of Italian racial and national identity formation in the *commedia dell' italiana* (comedy Italian-style) genre. In Alberto Lattuada's 1962 film *Mafioso*, the trope of mixed-race offers insight into the nation's cultural reflection on processes of subject and national identity formation. *Mafioso* represents Italy's transition into the new global economy through the main character's painful negotiation of his Sicilian roots and his adopted life in the north. I argue that *Mafioso* can be read as not only a narrative of geographical displacement due to transformations within the Italian economy, but also as a reckoning with racial identity on the level of the psyche, one that is approached by returning to the neorealist period—a formative moment for Italian cinema.

Franco Brusati's *Pane e cioccolata* (*Bread and Chocolate*, 1974) explores the Italian immigrant experience in Switzerland. Like *Mafioso*, *Bread and Chocolate* interrogates Italian racial and national identity formation via the concept of whiteness. The main character attempts to challenge racial discrimination in Switzerland while resisting stereotypes of southern Italian identity as performed by his fellow displaced countrymen. Mingling the nostalgia and homesickness of the immigrant with a desire to surmount prejudice and take advantage of the economic and social advantages offered by the host country, *Bread and Chocolate* speaks to the difficult process of identity formation undergone by members of the Italian diaspora. *Bread and Chocolate* is a poignant reminder of the history of Italian emigration and of what Jennifer Guigliemo refers to as the racial "in-betweenness" of the Italian migrant, or the ability to occupy both a "white" and "nonwhite" racial identity, depending upon national context. The film was released just prior to the mid-1970s' rise of non-Western European immigrants and the country's shift from a country of emigration to one of immigration.

The fifth and final chapter explores the subproletariat body as represented in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Il fiore delle mille e una notte* (*Arabian Nights*, 1974), the third film in his *Trilogy of Life* series. Pasolini documented the

loss of the Italian subproletariat in his novels and films such as *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962). With the disappearance of *diverso*, or linguistic, cultural, and racial heterogeneity, Pasolini began first to look to the precapitalist past to reclaim a body that existed prior to its ruination in consumer society and second, to explore the Third World as a space that was not overtaken by the capitalist paradigm, retaining a revolutionary potential that could revitalize the West. Pasolini's film adaptation of the Middle Eastern and African tales written between the tenth and fourteenth centuries combines both these explorations.

Filmed partially in the former Italian East Africa, *Arabian Nights* evokes Italy's colonial past through the selection of Inez Pelligrini, an actor/model of Italo-Eritrean descent who plays the role of Zumurrud, a central character who begins the series of interwoven stories. The circulation of Pelligrini's image in the film and the Italian press of the 1970s is a reemergence of the "Faccetta Nera," a popular advertising icon used to sell coffee and chocolate products during the Liberal period. Although not explicitly stated in his theoretical writings or artistic productions, Pelligrini's body and the history it evokes operates in tandem with Pasolini's critique of the loss of *diverso* and the rise of neocapitalism. I argue that Pasolini attempts to challenge boundaries of race, gender, and class through the use of the free-indirect subjective, a mode of narration in which the author relates with a character by adopting their language (or in the case of film, the character's gaze), offering a prophetic and visionary statement regarding Italy's still unresolved relation to Africa, and the consequences this will have for the nations that comprise the European Union.

As a means of reevaluating Pasolini's filmic works and statements regarding the Third World and the rise of advanced global capitalism, I turn finally to Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra* (*Gomorrah*, 2008). An adaptation of Roberto Saviano's muckraking exposé, the film offers a vision of Italy, particularly the Italian south, in the early-twenty-first-century era of global capitalism. *Gomorrah* imagines a "global south" that while not achieving the radical political awakening of the global subproletariat does reveal the complexity of immigration to Italy and its emerging multiracial society, raising ongoing questions regarding nation-state borders and citizenship that Pasolini approached decades earlier.

Chapter 1

From "Making Italians" to Envisioning Postcolonial Italy

The silent historical epic *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914) begins on the island of Sicily. The island's geographical position between Italy and North Africa and centuries-long history of invasion and colonization have problematized its relation to and inclusion within the Italian national community. The modern Italian nation-state was unified in 1861 through a process of internal colonization by which the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia incorporated the southern peninsula and Sicily. However, even prior to national unification, the island was constructed as the liminal point of Italy, the location where the country seeks to erect borders and define itself as part of Europe. As its current status as a major point of entry for African immigrants attests, Sicily continues to trouble the boundaries between Europe and the African continent.

Sicily's heterogeneity and enduring liminality in relation to peninsular Italian can be seen in the island today, which hosts one of the largest Tunisian communities outside of North Africa.[1] In their study of the two cities, La Goulette in Tunisia and Marzara del Vallo in Sicily, the Milan-based research collective *Multiplicity* documents interactions among fishermen, domestic workers, and temporary migrants whose movements between the two cities challenge sovereign borders that attempt to construct a strict demarcation between "Europe" and "Africa." One commentator even states that Tunisia is "just like Europe" and should be considered for membership in the European Union.[2]

When *Cabiria* was released in 1914, Italy had ended its national unification process a little over 50 years prior. Viewed by northern Western European countries as the "south" of Europe entire, Italy's newly established borders and nation-state status helped to construct a fictitious, homogeneous "Italian" population to distance the country from Africa and the Levant. *Cabiria*, the story of a Sicilian girl captured and enslaved in Carthage (present-day Tunisia), is read as a celebratory document

that marks both the fiftieth anniversary of Italian unification and the country's conquest of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania (present-day Libya) in the Italo-Turkish War of 1911–12.

The film takes as its historical backdrop the struggle between Rome and Carthage, the North African city and mercantile empire established in the ninth century BC. During the first of the three Punic Wars (third and second centuries BC), Rome, still an expanding power, captured Sicily from the Carthaginians, and sought possession of Carthage's lucrative Mediterranean trade routes.[3] After the final conquest of Carthage in 146 BC, the city was rebuilt as the capital of the Roman province of Africa, and became the major agricultural center of the Roman Empire.[4] Just as Rome captured Sicily from the North African city-state during the First Punic War, so the Italian south and Sicily were incorporated as part of the modern nation-state by the Italian north. Through *Cabiria*, Italy's conquest of Libya is constructed as the recurrence of the ancient Punic War toward the destined fulfilment of the "second" Roman Empire. As a nationalist document, *Cabiria* also narrativizes the inextricable connection between internal and external colonialism in the founding of the Italian nation-state.

In this chapter, I approach *Cabiria* as a text that manifests anxieties surrounding the nation-building project and the construction of Italian racial and national identity during the country's Liberal era (1876–1914). For this discussion, I turn to the character Maciste, a figure of racial ambiguity in the film. *Cabiria* marks the first appearance of Maciste, who would later become a popular strongman icon of the Italian cinema through a cycle of films released over the next two decades.[5] First portrayed by Bartolomeo Pagano, a Turin dockworker originally from Genoa, Maciste remained a popular film icon, appearing as late as the 1950s and 1960s in the peplum films of the era.

In a recent retrospective of the Maciste film cycle starring Pagano, curators Stella Dagna and Claudia Gianetto refer to Maciste as the "Numidian slave" of *Cabiria*'s protagonist, the Roman patrician Fulvius Axilla.[6] His designation as "Numidian" makes him North African. It is the first and last Maciste screen appearance in which he is portrayed as a nonwhite, non-Italian national subject. In subsequent Maciste films starring Pagano, Maciste is portrayed as having a stable, "white" identity, as a defender of the nation, and as the model of a virile, Italian masculinity, an image later adopted by Benito Mussolini.[7] As Giorgio Bertellini explains, "[Maciste's] racial otherness is rapidly tamed not only ideologically—he appears fully integrated into Italian society—but also physically: his blackness is utterly erased."[8]

Although not frequently mentioned in discussions of *Cabiria* or the Maciste icon, the film's director, Giovanni Pastrone, originally conceived him as non-Italian. In a 1913 letter to the most prominent *fin de siècle* Italian writer of his day, Gabriele D'Annunzio, who penned the intertitles for *Cabiria*, Pastrone compliments D'Annunzio's creation of the Maciste character, but adds that in the film the character will be of "another nationality."[9] In the second half of this brief note, Pastrone writes of a further change to the Maciste character: "I made him mulatto."[10] Pastrone's note suggests that the status of "mulatto," of mixed Italian and African descent, already designates the subject as non-Italian. With such brief commentary on the character, we cannot know the full extent of Pastrone's intentions, or confirm Maciste's racial and national identity in *Cabiria*. However, both Pastrone's suggestion that the character of Maciste be a nonwhite, non-European subject, and that Maciste is performed by Pagano, a "white" Italian national subject, are both significant to my discussion. The character is not "white" European (neither Mediterranean nor Aryan), and was not conceived, at least by the director, as fully Italian. Pastrone's statements are given further credence by Maciste's physical appearance on screen; Pagano is cosmetically darkened to perform the role.

Based on the discussion above, we can begin considering how Maciste's mixed-race status operates as a metaphor for Italian nation-state building and colonial expansionism during the Liberal era. The representation of raced subjects and racial hierarchy in the silent Italian historical epic film speaks to the connections between Liberal Italy's nation-building project and its colonial endeavors in Africa. These constructions of national identity, based on the legacies of the ancient Roman Empire, were a means of imagining a unified Italian nation, one that, as Bertellini comments, covered over "deep internal tensions and divisions (for example the southern question and brigandage), mass emigration, repeated military defeats on international fronts, and weak cultural practices of mass politics and national bonding."[11] Rather than looking at the transition from the "black" to the "white" Maciste, my study focuses on *Cabiria*'*s* mixed-race Maciste, as well as other cinematic representations of mixed-race subjects in the subsequent fascist and postwar periods. While *Cabiria* is a nationalist text, in its construction of Liberal Italy as the second Roman Empire, the film also expounds a racial discourse that seeks to reconcile the relation between the Italian south as internally colonized "other," and the newly acquired North African territories. More than simply constructing "bad" Numidians, *Cabiria* points to Italy's own racial

ambiguity, both within its national borders and in relation to Western Europe and Africa.

As a mixed-race subject, *Cabiria*'*s* Maciste can be read as figuring the post-unification division of Italy into north and south, one that constructed the nation as composed of two racially distinct regions. Beginning in the mid-1870s, in order for the recently unified country to rationalize the persistent economic disparity between northern and southern Italy, the southern question emerged as a collection of discourses that constructed the nation as divided into two racially distinct regions. As Eliza Wong explains, southern question discourses "described a duality between northern and southern Italy and what was perceived as the social, economic, moral, cultural, and biological/racial inferiority of the south."[12]

Introduced by Neapolitan writer Pasquali Villari, notably in his 1875 article "Lettere meridionali" ("Southern Letters") for the Roman journal *L'Opinione*, the southern question, as circulated among northern academics, socialists, social scientists, intellectuals, and social reformers collectively known as *meridionalisti* (southernists), was an attempt to address and resolve the economic, political, and social problems of the Italian south. During the pre- and post-unification periods, the southern regions and Sicily were imagined as places of land-owning elites that ruled over farmer-peasants in a system similar to feudalism, as a land of brigandage, mafia, illiteracy, political corruption, and poverty. This south was juxtaposed to a more industrious, profitable, and morally superior north. In "Some Aspects of the Southern Question" (1926), Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci provides insight into how southernist discourses were framed and deployed in the later part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He argues that the negative depiction of the south served to divide the industrial workers of the north from joining with the agrarian southern laborers in order to prevent these two forces from overthrowing the bourgeoisie. Gramsci writes:

> It is well known what kind of ideology has been disseminated in innumerable ways by the propagandists of the bourgeoisie among the masses of the North: the South is the ball and chain that prevents a more rapid progress in the civil development of Italy; Southerners are biologically inferior beings, either semi-barbarians or out and out barbarians by natural destiny; if the South is underdeveloped the fault does not lie with the capitalist system, or any other historical cause, but of the nature that has made Southerners lazy, incapable, criminal

> and barbaric . . . The Socialist Party gave its blessing to all the "southernist" literature of the clique of writers of the so-called positivist school, such as Ferri, Sergi, Niceforo, Orano, and their lesser followers, who in articles, sketches, stories, novels, and books of impressions and memoirs, repeated the same tune in different form. Once again "science" was used to crush the wretched and abused, but this time it was dressed in the colours of Socialism, which claimed to be the science of the proletariat.[13]

Although the peninsular south and Sicily were constructed as liminal or non-European spaces prior to national unification, it is only after unification and the emergence of the southern question that the north/south division was formally examined as a problem of racial difference between the Italian northern and southern populations.[14] Anthropologists such as Enrico Ferri, Cesare Lombroso, and Alfredo Niceforo attributed the economic, political, and social strife of the peninsular south and Sicily to the populations' racial inferiority, placing them on level with peoples from Africa, Asia, and the Levant.[15] In fact, the economic disparity between the two regions was exacerbated in the post-unification era by a central government that favored northern business interests. The north, because of its vicinity to European markets, became Italy's industrial center, and government financial resources were directed toward economic development in these regions. The south suffered from a lack of government and industrial development, leaving it at an economic disadvantage in relation to the north, a disparity that in many ways still persists.[16]

Second, *Cabiria's* mixed-race Maciste—a Numidian slave who becomes a hero for the Italian working classes by serving as a faithful servant to Roman Fulvius Axilla—speaks to the intrinsic relation between the internal colonization of the peninsular south and Sicily by the north, and the country's external colonial enterprise in North and East Africa. Several scholars have argued that Italian unification can be read as a form of internal colonization, an occupation of the peninsula's southern regions and Sicily (ruled by the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) by the northern Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia.[17] As Bouchard notes, after the 1861 unification, "the Savoy turned the Kingdom into a supplying base of natural resources and cheap human labor by way of a liberalized agenda that severely weakened the southern economy through trade blocks and tariff structures while impoverishing the peasantry in the erosion of collective land-use rights."[18] By the 1880s, internal colonization of the south and Sicily became an external colonization program in North and East

Africa that sought to alleviate the economic and political exploitation that resulted from national "unification."

Beginning in the 1880s, advocates for African colonization, among them Italy's first Sicilian Prime Minister Francesco Crispi, argued that the colonial enterprise offered new territories that would alleviate overpopulation and high unemployment in the south.[19] In this manner, African colonization can be interpreted as a solution to the social, political, and economic crises stemming from the internal colonial occupation of the south and Sicily by the Italian north, including massive emigration to the Americas, other parts of Europe, and Africa, and anti-unification resistance, particularly in the form of brigandage. As Verdicchio explains:

> In the final analysis . . . Crispi's imperialist program was but an extension of the Piedmontese expansion into southern Italy. Unification, though not officially sanctioned as such, was nothing if not colonialist in nature. Resistance to it was represented as criminal and was therefore discounted as having no sociopolitical validity. Further, the annexation and repression of southern Italy belongs chronologically to a period of colonial expansion.[20]

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Italy attempted and failed to establish itself as a European imperial power. Because Italy had just ended centuries of foreign domination and only recently established a unified kingdom, the financial and material resources were not available for a campaign that would serve Italian interests. Gramsci provides some insight into the colonialist impulse at this moment in the post-unification period:

> Capitalist Europe, rich in resources and arrived at the point at which the rate of profit was beginning to reveal its tendency to fall, had a need to widen the area of expansion of its income-bearing investments; thus, after 1890, the great colonial empires were created. But the still immature Italy not only had no capital to export, but also had to have recourse to foreign capital for its own pressing needs. Hence there was lacking any real drive behind Italian imperialism, and it was substituted for by the strong popular passions of the peasants, blindly intent on possessing land.[21]

According to Gramsci, colonial expansionism further concealed the economic disparities between the north and south. Due to the promise of

land, the people of the Italian south supported the colonial project overseas. The rush to stake a claim in the African continent was partly driven by Italy's desire to become a European imperial power and the potential for economic gain, but also to alleviate internal problems caused by unification.

Although colonies were established in Somalia and Eritrea beginning in the 1880s, Italy's imperial ambitions were stunted after their defeat in the 1896 Italo-Abyssinian war. Thus, along with celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of unification and the country's acquisition of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania in the Italo-Turkish war, *Cabiria* also served as a narrative of redemption for the 1896 defeat and the reemergence of the destined second Roman Empire. The nationalist rhetoric of *Cabiria* suggests that national unification and external colonization remained inextricably linked during the late Liberal era.

As metaphorically represented in *Cabiria*, by way of the mixed-race Maciste, external colonization of Africa helped resolve (albeit contingently and temporarily) the racial otherness of Italy's southern populations as constructed through the north/south divide and southern question discourses. Through the colonial enterprise, Italian southerners could claim racial superiority over the nation's African colonial subjects, yet remain in a subordinate relation to the north, which through unification, systemically exploited the south's natural resources and disenfranchised agricultural laborers.[22] The relation between the mixed-race Maciste and the Roman patrician Fulvius Axilla serves to reinforce stereotypes of northern superiority and southern subservience, putting forth models into which southern and northern Italian audiences could position themselves as subjects of the same nation.[23]

As opposed to the racial hierarchy of early silent cinema in the United States, which was influenced by the blackface minstrel tradition, Bartolomeo Pagano's Maciste and the other "blackface" performances in the Italian silent historical epics can be read in relation to the racial schemas developed in the positivist sciences in Italy, primary among them being criminal anthropology. A body of literature in the medical and social sciences was devoted to establishing Italian racial identity in the immediate post-unification period. Exploring the mixed-race subject in *Cabiria* reveals the centrality of racial discourse in the conceptualization of the Italian national body. Through reference to the US early cinema, the first part of this chapter will examine how *Cabiria* as a cultural text participates in the conceptualization of racial and national identity in Liberal Italy, providing the basis for subsequent chapter discussions