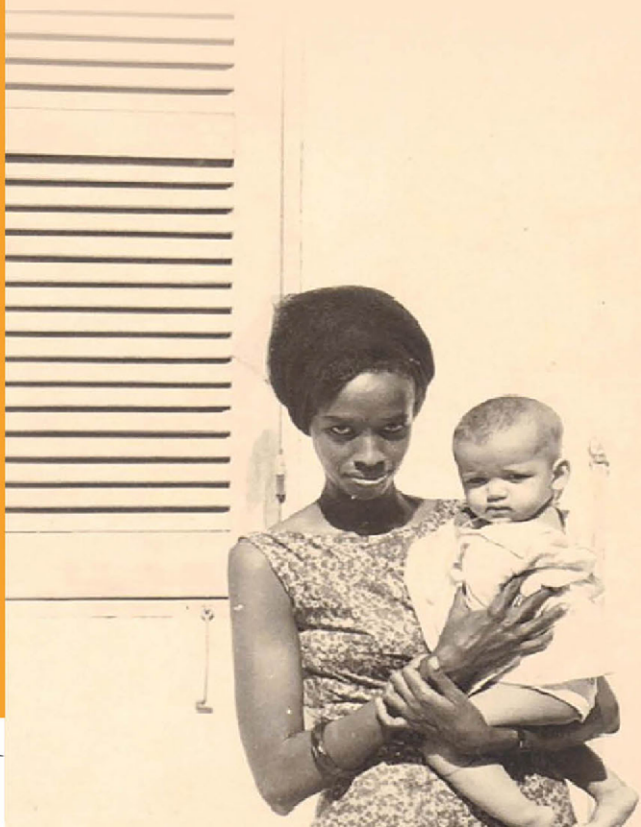
FASCIST HYBRIDITIES

Representations of Racial Mixing and Diaspora Cultures under Mussolini

Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto

ITALIAN AND ITALIAN AMERICAN STUDIES



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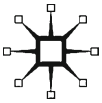

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Contents

Acknowledgments

The photograph on the cover of the book shows my mother and me in 1968 Mogadishu. I found this scene particularly appropriate for the theme discussed in this book because the absence of my father acknowledges how many men returned to Italy after their African *escapade,* abandoning the family that they created in the colonies. In reality, the picture was taken by my father who has been, and still is, a constant presence in our life. I owe my passion for the topic of this book to my Italian father's 1965 assignment to the Italian embassy in Somalia, where he met and married my mother, Haua. After graduating with a degree in Arabic Language and Civilization from the University of Oriental Studies in Naples, my father worked as a translator and interpreter for the National Assembly of Somalia and the Ministry of Justice, Attorney General's Office in Mogadishu. My mother was born in Belet Uen, a small Somali shepherding village. She was raised Muslim, though educated by Italian Catholic nuns from a nearby village, and worked as a staff member at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in Mogadishu until 1976. My family was an easy target for the oppressive Siad Barre military dictatorship (1969–1991) and the marriage between an Italian Catholic man and a Muslim Somali woman was harshly judged by the local community. My brother, my sisters, and I were raised Catholic within a Muslim environment, and our attitudes and opinions were the result of having parents of different ethnicities who maintained their individual religions and cultures inside and outside the home.

The gradual devastation of Somalia and the escalation of violence under Barre's rule led to my family's relocation to Italy in 1976, where I remained until leaving for the Unites States in 1999. We moved to a small village in southern Italy, where my father found a job as a high school teacher. Starting in the mid-1980s, Italy became host to an ever-increasing community of African immigrants, mostly Muslims, who moved to the peninsula in search of a better future. The arrival of thousands of immigrants forced Italy to confront the presence of different

cultures living in its territory, which led to a myriad of episodes of anger, fear, and intolerance in the defense of territory, power, and identity. Whether traveling, going away to college, or working, I constantly found myself at the center of this ethnic and cultural blaze. Now, in the United States, I have chosen to keep myself in this center, and through my book, I examine from an academic perspective the strenuous efforts of modern and contemporary Italian society to "whiten" its ethnic and cultural identity.

During the writing of this book, I have relied on the support and critical response of many scholars, colleagues, and friends, and I am profoundly indebted to all of them. Special thanks to my life mentors: Norma Bouchard, Franco Masciandaro, and Joseph Tusiani. I have been exceptionally fortunate to receive critical suggestions, wisdom, and support from Antonio Campobasso, Leonardo De Franceschi, Maria Frank, Paola Gambarota, Shelleen Greene, Jennifer Guglielmo, Charles Leavitt IV, Cristina Lombardi-Diop, Valerie McGuire, Àine O'Healy, Fulvio Orsitto, Caterina Romeo, Samia Spencer and Anthony Threat, and Renato Ventura. I cannot forget to thank my friends, the talented scholars Aria Cabot and Audrey Martinko, and Austin Spain, who helped me translate this study and were invaluably supportive at all stages of the project. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to all the faculty members of the Department of Literatures and Languages of Auburn University for their constant gestures of encouragement and support; first and foremost, my academic mentors Jorge Muñoz and Tom Nadar, Adrienne Angelo and Carolyn Fitzgerald, my departmental chairs Lourdes Betanzos and Robert Weigel, and the Associate Dean for Research Paula Bobrowski. I thank the editors and the anonymous reader of Palgrave Macmillan for insightful comments that helped refine my project. A shorter version of chapter 1 was published in *Border-Crossings. Narrative and Demarcation in Postcolonial Literature and Media* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012) and I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the editors of the volume, Justus Makokha, Russell West-Pavlov, and Jennifer Wawrzinek, for their support. I am indebted to my friends Natasha Andryianava, Claudia and Felice Beneduce, Ellen and Don Baubles, Antonella Bonfitto, Ryan Calabretta-Sajder, Pedro Cebollero, Anna Chiafele, Tina Chiappetta-Miller, Mariantonietta Cursio, Martina Di Florio Gula, Daniele and Marino Forlino, Ashley and Darren Kelly, Joshua King, Viviane Koua, Ben Lasalata, Makiko Mori, Kerri Anderson Muñoz, Claudia Peralta, Gianfranco Pazienza, Antonella Pia Rendina, Mark Rinaldi, Mariangela Soccio, Gilda and Yannis Socarras, Jane and Peter Vercelli, Anita Virga, and Susan Weigel. My deepest gratitude goes to my

American parents Margaret Spofford and James Benkard (1938–2014), for instilling confidence in me about dreams that need to be pursued. Finally, I dedicate my book to my husband Francesco, my daughter Eva Haua, my parents Vincenzo and Haua, my brother Napoleone, and sisters Romina, Annama Eva, and Andreina, for loving me unconditionally.

Introduction

Race to the End. *Meticci* and Levantines in Literary and Cinematic Representations of Colonial Experience in Africa

Africa[1]: The Solution to Italy's North-South Divide

The dream, pursued for half a century, of creating an Italian colonial empire in Africa was achieved in 1936 when the country, led by Benito Mussolini, conquered Ethiopia and reunited the African colonies of Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya in the Italian Empire of East Africa. With respect to the rest of Europe, Italy's presence in Africa was relatively short-lived. Having achieved national unification only in 1861, Italy had not participated in the "Scramble for Africa" and had to strengthen its fragile national unity before considering the possibility of colonial expansion. Claudio Cerreti, Mario Isnenghi, and Francesco Surdich are among the many historians who have extensively discussed post-unification Italy's pursuit of a foreign policy through which the country could assert its authority among the primary European powers, and the search for common traits by which Italians could distinguish themselves from other countries—but no longer from each other—in an effort to combat the social and economic tensions between northern and southern Italy that had resulted from industrialization efforts in the North and the decline of southern agriculture, exacerbated by the agrarian crisis of the 1880s (17–24; 74–77; 72–73).[2] The nation's domestic strife had also contributed to mass emigration to Europe, America, and North Africa (Egypt and Tunisia). In this context, Gigliola Dinucci explains, the colonial enterprise came to be viewed as a means of transforming the problem of mass emigration into an instrument for accelerating Italy's economic development,

and for reestablishing equilibrium between the Italian population and its resources (429; 467). By directing the flow of emigration toward the colonies, post-unification Italy sought to filter its excess workforce into new extensions of its own territory rather than provide labor to foreign economies (Dinucci 1979, 450).

Colonial propaganda drew support because it appealed not only to financial and social needs, but also to a larger historical and existential desire for national belonging, one that implicitly included a racial discourse in which the presumably whiter, northern Italian population remained the ideal model. Among others, John Dickie, Nelson Moe, and Vito Teti have eloquently discussed how, in the collective consciousness of the late nineteenth century, southern Italy had been described in terms of its deviance from the models of the North through dichotomies such as developed/underdeveloped and progress/regression. Positivist anthropologists had used racial theories to explain the social and economic discrepancies and liken southern Italians—who were characterized as dishonest and scornful of authority and civil rule—to Africans on the basis of both their lifestyle and physical traits (Dickie 1999, 100–110; Moe 2002, 164–183; Teti 1993, 44–48). Colonialism seemed to offer a way of bridging the gap between the North and the South by means of the larger contrast between Italians and Africans; the Italy/Africa and North/South dichotomies were appropriated, as the real Africa provided a stronger point of contrast in post-unified Italian society.

Moreover, colonization seemed to guarantee the preservation of the national identity, by encouraging emigration in a country perceived as being populated by racially inferior inhabitants (Dinucci 1979, 467). As Sandra Puccini, Barbara Sòrgoni, and Alessandro Triulzi have asserted, Italian colonizers were expected to uphold the image of a close-knit community in order to maintain their colonial authority (23–28; 53–56; Triulzi 1997, 270–271). In collecting information on the physical characteristics, lifestyle, and customs of the people they encountered, Italian explorers and colonial administrators compared and measured themselves against an otherness that functioned to exorcize the precarious image of an impoverished, divided, rural Italy (Puccini 24; Triulzi 1997, 270–271). In reality, however, the Italian colonists were soon to become the targets of similar discursive practices requiring them to likewise adhere to an ideal model of citizenship.

Reforming the Italian identity through and against the image of the ostensibly less civilized African population was not only a question of social and economic status, but also of race. An important factor in controlling citizenship rights within the colonies was the very notion of whiteness, although official definitions of race remained nebulous. As Gaia

Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop have discussed in *Bianco e nero,* skin color had not previously provided an explicit point of reference for determining racial or national belonging within continental Italy, but the contrast between lighter and darker complexions had certainly been an important element in determining social status during the Liberal period. Whiteness was used to categorize individuals in terms of their social and geographic belonging and to distinguish the 'real' Italians of northern Italy's wealthy bourgeoisie from the poor peasant classes of southern Italy, which were considered darker and racially inferior (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 42).

Fascism brought a number of changes with regard to definitions of Italian racial identity and social belonging. First, the new, ideal Italian identity promoted by Fascist Italy successfully blended the white racial prestige traditionally associated with northern Italy with the humble agricultural values traditionally associated with the South (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 41). Rather than repress the poverty of the South, the Fascist government exalted the social and moral customs and the agricultural background of its poorer populations (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 39). The new model Italian citizen was thus a fusion of stereotypical representations of northern Italians as racially superior and of southern Italy as a fertile, rural territory inhabited by humble farming populations devoted to their families, the Church, and Fascism (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 24; 41).

Moreover, in order to circumvent the physical differences between Italy's northern and southern populations and to include the darker, more rural and impoverished inhabitants of the South in the collective image of Italy's racial makeup, the role of physical attributes in determining racial identity was almost entirely negated in the early 1930s. Instead, national identity was discussed in terms of shared values and a common cultural heritage. In preference to the term 'race,' the Fascist regime initially favored the term *stirpe* (stock), and the *stirpe italica* united Italians in character and spirit rather than narrowly placing them amongst an anthropological race. Fascist propaganda reiterated historical ideals of unity and legacy, selectively tracing Italian roots from the earliest Italic peoples living in the Italian peninsula to the cultural heritage of the Ancient Romans, and finally to the moral values of the Roman Catholic Church.

The initial emphasis on shared cultural and spiritual traits as the defining elements of Italy's national identity and racial superiority did eventually give way to a greater emphasis on biological traits. The Fascist racial policies and laws of the late 1930s, most notably the 1938 racial laws, relied heavily on discriminatory language in outlining the legal, social,

and racial identity of the new Italian citizen in order to affirm Italians as belonging within the Aryan race. The 1938 *Manifesto della razza* repudiated definitions of race based solely on historical, cultural, and religious background, and provided the ideological foundation for a new means of defining and defending Italian racial prestige based on genetic traits. The document underlined the necessity of defending Italians, both at home and in the colonies, from the risks of biological contamination posed by miscegenation and by ethnic communities with whom Italians lived in close contact.

However, biological racism posed significant challenges to the legitimacy of the regime's claims because of the important social and economic role of minority groups and, in particular, Italy's large, influential Jewish population. Inaugurated by the 1938 racial laws, discrimination against Jews on the basis of their supposedly diverse biological makeup, cultural background, and moral values reveals the degree to which the regime continued to rely on historical and cultural factors—and on the myth of an Italic stock in order to define membership in the Italian community. Whereas the move toward Aryanism within Fascist discourse is still heavily debated among scholars, the tenuous premises of anti-Semitic discriminatory policies against Jews become especially evident when considered relative to the treatment of minorities such the African Italian *meticcio*[3] children and the Italian Levantines of Egyptian Alexandria. These two categories of Italian citizens, the offspring of interracial unions between Italian men and native women of Italy's African colonies, and the Levantines, white Italian immigrant merchants and craftsmen living in Alexandria, Egypt, who culturally intermingled with other immigrants, such as Greeks, Syrians, and Armenians, reveal the degree to which Italian national identity could not be defined on the basis of genetics or cultural homogeneity. *Meticci* and Levantines were problematic social figures, threatening—and difficult to place within—the stiff binary racial system in which superiority was genetic and race corresponded to specific moral behaviors and cultural lifestyles.

Fascist Hybridities examines how Italian literature and cinema of the 1930s are traversed by the hybrid figures of *meticci* and Levantines, and how these works ultimately reveal biracial offspring and Levantines as interchangeable characters who, in the historical scenario under which Mussolini's Fascist regime operated, present unique and specific threats to notions of Italian racial and cultural purity. My analysis focuses on the relationship between the narrative strategies and the political climate of the time, as devices were used both to hinder interracial unions and to stigmatize 'going native,' the tendency of the Italian residing in Africa to live the native way or in dangerous proximity to other ethnic

communities. I take colonial *meticci* and Levantines out of the literary and cinematic stock of propaganda, where they were depicted as outside the *stirpe* (stock) of the Italian people, to reveal the inconsistencies within Fascist ideals of racial and cultural purity. My book intends to bring to light how literary and cinematic devices used to stigmatize colonial *meticci* and Levantines often undermine themselves, calling attention to what was absent or different from what was in stock, in the works themselves, in the actual peoples depicted, and even in the motives of Fascist colonial enterprises.

The figure of the colonial *meticcio* originates in some precise historical developments. Prior to the creation of Mussolini's Empire of East Africa (1936), it was common for Italian male settlers and administrators to take on native concubines in the colonies, thus biracial children and racial and cultural hybridity were prominent features of many settler communities. This terrain, culturally, racially, and geographically liminal, united the experience of the colonial *meticci* with that of the Levantines. Although not the offspring of Caucasian males and African women, the Levantines were 'Italian' by birth who lacked most of the common values and attitudes of mainland Italians. Their presence, which harks back to the eastern Roman Empire, gained more visibility from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, when Alexandria's (Egypt) economic prosperity spread welfare and attracted workers from Europe and the Middle East. This cosmopolitan, lively, and refined city was a host to a high number of immigrants from various countries who, despite their ethnic, racial, and religious differences, lived in close contact with one another. Thus, both racially and culturally, the Italian Levantines and African Italian *meticci* threatened Mussolini's desire to promote the ideal of Italian genetic and cultural homogeneity.

As propagandist tools in the regime's service, most of the novels and films taken into consideration in this volume were intended to mold the opinion of Italian audiences in favor of Mussolini's policy and in accordance with the historical events under which Fascism operated. Yet, as Stuart Hall, Umberto Eco, and many others point out, what a text wants to say and what it actually says may not coincide. I examine how certain images pressed into ideological service escaped their initial purposes, releasing unintended meanings, and I present the figures of the *meticcio* and the Levantine as key factors in this discrepancy between original intention and final result. Deep racial and cultural anxieties about the Italian collective identity that authors wished to calm are instead provoked by the visual and textual presence of *meticcio* and Levantine characters, and despite propagandist efforts to claim an Italian cultural-racial superiority based on racial purity and cultural homogeneity, these figures

inevitably reveal social anxieties rather than mask them. Ultimately, they force the audience to anxiously examine, rather than confirm, its own identity.

The figure of the African Italian *meticcio* has not been the focus of extensive scholarship. Barbara Sòrgoni (1998), Giulia Barrera (2002), and Olindo De Napoli (2009) have written the most exhaustive studies on Italian colonial mixed-race subjects, and their works explore the *meticcio* from a primarily historical and anthropological perspective. My research builds on the work of these three scholars in retracing the historical circumstances and the gradual adoption of legal measures initially aimed at facilitating the colonial *meticcio*'s right to citizenship, but that eventually led to their exclusion from the Italian community.

With respect to these studies on the subject, my research considers the intermediate position occupied by colonial *meticci* as an insurmountable obstacle for Fascist racism and its later attempts, vis-à-vis the project of creating a colonial empire in Africa, to consider race from a purely biological standpoint. By defining race in terms of cultural heritage, colonial *meticci* became eligible for inclusion within Italian society, and citizenship was determined not only by physical resemblance to their Italian fathers, as De Napoli explains, but also by lifestyle, upbringing, and their assimilation in Italian culture (22). Nonetheless, as Barrera, De Napoli, and Sòrgoni have asserted, it is impossible to ignore the general refusal of the Fascist authorities to speak openly of colonial *meticci* as citizens (353–361; 62–63; 151–152). The unwillingness to recognize the existence of Italian *meticci* led to their virtual invisibility in literary and cinematic works produced in the 1930s in accordance with Fascist propaganda, which attempted to hide the racial and cultural heterogeneity that had long characterized the Italian population, not only because of colonialism in Africa but also because of the country's long history of foreign domination.

Among scholars who have similarly focused on the representation of mixed-race offspring in the Italian context, Shelleen Greene's book, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012), is an important contribution to the scholarly examination of the presence of biracial individuals in Italian cinema from the silent era to contemporary films. My own research on the place of colonialism in postwar Italian culture has benefitted from this volume and from Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop's more recent *Bianco e nero* (2013). These three scholars argue that the desire to display a cohesive, homogeneous image of Italy and Italians became even more acute in the immediate postwar period when Italian society was entrenched in the country's difficult period of reconstruction (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop

2013, 67–116; Greene 2012, 116–184). The need to find ways of exorcizing the population's ethnic heterogeneity became more urgent as it was accentuated not only by the offspring of interracial relationships in the colonies but also by unions between Italian women and black or dark-skinned soldiers of the Allied troops.

Due to the anxiety elicited by the colonial *meticcio*, one cannot help but notice the lack of literary and cinematic works in postwar Italy that address ethnic intermixing. As found in the Fascist era, a concomitance of ethnic blending and efforts to deny such a social reality persisted. The reluctance to recognize ethnic diversity in post-Fascist Italy condemned the mixed-race offspring in the colonies and in Italy to a condition of invisibility. While the legal matter of the inclusion of colonial *meticci* in Italian society was resolved in 1947—when they once again became eligible for Italian citizenship—the problem of identifying and enacting an effective means of integration in Italy's society is one of the primary questions addressed in the final section of my book.

Aside from these publications on mixed-race individuals, there is a dearth of scholarly literature on the Italian-Levantine community in Alexandria, Egypt. My analysis draws on two of the most well-known studies, *Alexandria 1860–1960* (1997) edited by Robert Ilbert and Ilios Yannakakis, and Marta Petricioli's *Oltre il mito. L'Egitto degli italiani* (2007). My examination also builds on Lucia Re's discussion (2003) of the historical context which afforded colonial Alexandria the reputation of being a space that exposed the contradictions inherent in the essentialist conceptions of race, nationality, and culture that were used to assert colonial authority (174). I am likewise indebted to scholars such as Will Hanley (2008) and Deborah Starr (2009) who, in their re-evaluations of Egypt's cosmopolitanism, have pointed out that the historical representations of Alexandria as a flourishing metropolis populated mostly by a European elite are misleading, and that the historical documentation of the city's cultural and political development in terms of the experience of the European upper class fails to take into consideration the poorer masses (1351–1353; 35).

There are two principal reasons behind my decision to focus on the Italian emigrants in Alexandria. An Ottoman province until it was officially declared a British protectorate territory in 1914, Egyptian Alexandria was not an Italian colony but an Italian emigrant destination during the rise of Fascism in Italy and represented the alter ego of the Fascist project of strictly defending a national culture that, in the regime's intentions, should appear historically and spiritually homogenous. Contrary to other communities of Italian immigrants in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Alexandria became the host for a group of Italian intellectuals, including Tommaso Marinetti, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Enrico Pea, and Fausta Cialente. These prominent writers and poets, perhaps most notably Marinetti and Ungaretti, represented important literary and historical voices during the Fascist *ventennio*. Through the re-evaluation of cross-cultural contamination, such as the mixture of languages, backgrounds, customs and religions, the dissident literature of Italian writers living in cosmopolitan Alexandria challenged the dominant perception of culture and identity, and intended to create resistance against the Fascist regime's efforts to spread false ideals of racial and cultural homogeneity.

My analysis of literary texts portraying the Italian emigrants residing in Alexandria is unique in its intention to place the racial hybridity of the colonial *meticcio* alongside the cultural hybridity of the Levantine. The inclusion of the Levantines in my examination underlines the contradictions at the basis of the Fascist racial policy; Italians by birth, but lacking most of the common values and attitudes of their fellow citizens, the Levantines called into question the criteria according to which Italian membership was granted prior to the 1938 racial laws, and they further invalidated the conditions for the new orientations of Fascist racism after 1938. In the early 1930s, the Italian Levantines posed a threat to the definition of an Italic stock based on cultural heritage since it was cultural rather than racial mixing that changed their identity. This category of citizens lived in close contact with other ethnic communities and their lifestyles and beliefs did not necessarily adhere to social or economic doctrines of the Fascist regime or to Roman Catholic values.

With the gradual shift of Fascist racism from the emphasis on cultural and spiritual characteristics to a new insistence on biological traits, colonial *meticci* were officially excluded from the right to citizenship in 1940, on the basis of biological criteria, while the Levantines were again included in the Italian race thanks to their genetic belonging. At the same time, starting in 1939, the Fascist regime also began to seek proof that Jews were distinct, both biologically and culturally, from Italians. Given the difficulty of developing a coherent policy and definition regarding the Italian racial makeup, the regime was eventually forced to abandon its search for purely biological criteria and began to lean toward forms of racism based on socio-historical factors. It is this return to a concept of race partially dependent on cultural heritage that created contradictions in the foundation of Italian racism of the late 1930s because it undermined the legitimacy of Italian Levantines, who were genetically Italian but culturally "bastardized."

Mapping Africa: Exoticism, Mimicry, Levantinism, and the (Re)-Invention of Motherland

Tracing the changes in representations of Africa and the colonial enterprise between early Italian colonialism during the Liberal period and the creation of the Empire of East Africa under Mussolini's regime, I incorporate notions of both exoticism and mimicry. The term exoticism, which is formed by the prefix *exo-* meaning "outside" or "external" and is thus explicitly connected to that which is foreign or comes from other countries, has been the subject of several studies that, in identifying a variety of forms, functions and values of exoticism, all refer to the term's etymology. In Elena Ricci's article, "Sul paesaggio africano," exoticism is defined as an aesthetic practice that can be traced back to the logic of dominion. Gianni Celati's introduction to *Letteratura, esotismo, colonialismo*, Sandra Puccini's *Andare lontano*, and Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* likewise describe the use of exoticism as a strategy to conceal the political motives of European colonialism. That exotic discourse is a fictional construct becomes more evident if we consider that otherness in artistic representations is always relative and, as Ricci affirms, that "there is never absolute diversity in otherness because, to be communicated, it must be reconstructed according to conventional signs and functions that will be recognizable to the recipient," that is the person who should be captivated by this otherness (152).

My work focuses on the exotic discourse that was created as a result of the exploration and colonization of Africa by Italian and European powers. Specifically, Africa's otherness was described in terms of European discursive categories and was used to formulate a definition of "us" and "them" that, in the particular case of Italy, helped define national identity. The initial exoticization of Africa was a means of remedying the problems with which post-unification Italian society was struggling, most notably, its fragile national unity and questionable membership in white, northern culture. By collecting data on the physical features and lifestyles of African populations, explorers, anthropologists, colonial officials and administrators established a model for collective identity by means of the contrastive otherness of the supposedly savage and darker Africans from which Italians could be differentiated (Triulzi 1997, 270–271).

It is worth noting that, when discussing exoticism in relation to Italian colonialism, the Fascist period represents something of an exception. According to Maria Pagliara, Adolfo Scotto Di Luzio, and Giovanna Tomasello, in direct contrast to what had occurred during the earlier period of exploration and Italian colonization in Africa, during the 1930s

the exotic discourse was suppressed from Fascist propagandist colonial films and novels. Because the appeal of the exotic to western audiences seemed always to be dictated by an eagerness to get outside of their own world and experience other, more authentic and uncontaminated lands in which it was possible to achieve one's natural potential and escape the repression of western society, exoticism was seen as contrary to the image of Italy and Italians that Mussolini wished to propagate, and was incompatible with the desire of the Fascist regime to represent Italy as a young, vital nation (Tomasello 1984, 103). To do so, Italy's colonies in Africa were not represented as places in which one could escape the confines of western society, but rather as new territories into which western civilization could be transplanted and nurtured (Tomasello 1984, 103). The African landscape was no longer characterized as dark, strange, or impenetrable, but rather, was depicted as a familiar and hospitable place that had been transformed by hard work and modern infrastructures, including the roads, towns, and hospitals of the Italian colonists (Ricci 1998, 154; Scotto di Luzio 1996, 207).

While Tomasello and Scotto Di Luzio offer accurate and insightful observations on the ways that the Fascist regime rejected the exotic discourse, my readings of propagandist novels and films of the 1930s instead focus on the often inadvertent persistence of exoticism in cinematic and literary works. While the African landscape is certainly described as a transformed space, it is also true that Africa's previous representation as a primitive, wild territory is often invoked in order to emphasize the degree of progress and civilization brought about by colonization and Italy's civilizing mission. It is in these descriptions of Africa's previous conditions and in the contrast between the "before" and "after" of Africa's equatorial landscape that the exotic discourse endures. Similarly Charles Burdett illustrates that, while exotic Ethiopia during the mid-1930s needed to be portrayed in such a way to become familiar to Italian audiences, it also could not completely lose its element of oddity (122).

Puccini refers to Pratt's definition of "anti-conquest" to describe the various strategies of representation that mask the hegemonic discourse of Italian explorers and travelers who, in the apparently innocent process of cataloguing, sectioning, and describing a foreign territory through maps, drawings and photographs, hide an intrinsic act of appropriation (23). For Pratt, the aestheticization of the civilizing mission is an artifice that the Occident used to define the Other as an individual in need of its help (205). While the author or narrator manipulates the space until it becomes, whether positively or negatively, a promising and hospitable land or a hostile land in need of European intervention, descriptions of the aesthetic characteristics of the landscape acquire a specific value for

the reader, who enjoys the story comfortably at home (Pratt 1992, 205; Puccini 1999, 65–70). In both cases, the representation makes use of aesthetic devices that justify the territory's occupation to the reader (Pratt 1992, 205; Puccini 1999, 65–70).

Celati takes a similar stance when he describes the modes of operation of exoticism. The scholar claims that once a new land to be explored or colonized has been reached, the deterritorialized individual (having left the land to which he belonged) "finds himself as a solitary foreign body in the new land," no longer surrounded by the social structure upon which his prior location was founded (15–17). Exoticism plays a fundamental role in the process of reterritorialization that follows, and in which the narrator attempts to reterritorialize himself by dividing the new territory according to the categories and criteria already known to him (Celati 1978, 17). Because the western foreigner to this new land creates hierarchies and alliances of otherness, selecting those that might eventually prove useful to him and discarding those he fears, Celati posits exoticism as a process through which Self and Other become more clearly demarcated but also through which diversity and the differences of the Other acquire greater value (22–24).

I would argue that Celati's view of the relationship between exoticism and the construction of otherness is related to the phenomenon of mimicry. While exoticism strategically manufactures difference in a reappraisal of the Other, mimicry, as both the tendency of the subjugated to imitate its subjugator in the hope of acquiring some of its power as well as the desire of the colonizer to establish itself as a model to be copied and admired by the colonized, attempts to strategically manufacture a resemblance between Self (European) and Other (colonized). The notion of mimicry as theorized by Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, is particularly useful for my analysis because it brings to light the moments in which the colonial discourse fails to reinforce the dominant role of the colonizer and instead reveals that the anxiety caused by the attempt to adhere to an ideal model does not pertain solely to the dominated but also and above all to the dominator (85–92).[4] Bhabha demonstrates how, in seeking to exercise his superiority, the colonizer desires that the colonized should be very much like himself, but not identical (86).

Mimicry is therefore a means of surveillance that protects against an absolute equivalence between the colonizer and the colonized, since the superiority of the former ultimately depends on its difference from the latter (Bhabha 1994, 86). In propagandist films and novels of late 1920s and 1930s, the laughter elicited by the *askari* (the indigenous soldier) in Western uniform, or the pronunciation of Italian turned ridiculous in his mouth, maintains the distance between "copy" and "original." However,

in order for the well-disciplined black to remain a copy, I explore whether or not narrative strategies in novels and films ensure that a constant awareness of both the Italian characters' and the audience's own superiority remains intact.

My analysis also focuses on how Africa is made to act as a reassuring place for Italian societal anxieties in the move from the post-unification period to the Fascist *ventennio* when the Dark Continent loses its exotic charm. In terms of Italian literature and cinema produced in the 1930s, I discuss how transformed by progress, Italian colonies come to resemble the motherland in Fascist propagandist literature and films and, as the equatorial landscape gradually loses its exotic traits, a parallel transformation occurs in its inhabitants. Rather than lead the audience down mysterious African paths, or depict amorous adventures between Italians and exotic native women, the narrative strategies found in literary and cinematic works of the 1930s attempt to set boundaries, limit erotic desires and train Italian characters and audiences to master the sexual urges that conflict with societal demands (Pagliara 1991, 382; 441).

In my examination, Levantinism further relates to the concept of mimicry in terms of both the colonized peoples' unintentional imitation of western manners and the colonizer's unwitting adoption of eastern traits. Levantinism, as discussed by Gil Hochberg in her volume *In Spite of Partition* and her earlier work titled *The Dispossession of (Cultural) Authenticity*, is a mental state caused by the loss of a relationship with one's culture. French and British colonizers were the first to adapt the term Levant to designate a process of cultural blending that in turn came to connote a condition of lost national identity or cultural authenticity, of flirting with a culture without necessarily belonging to it (Hochberg 2002, 8; 2007, 46). The Levantine, as both an Orientalized European and a westernized Oriental in my analysis, was believed to lack any clear national affiliation and was often characterized as a manipulative and morally depraved individual (Hochberg 2007, 46). Hochberg traces the development of the terms *Levantine* and *Levantinism* from the derogatory connotations they inherited during the colonial period to their acquisition of a more subversive meaning as mediators between eastern and western cultures (2007, 45).

Hochberg's understanding of Levantinism is influenced by, among many, the writings of Egyptian-Israeli writer Jacqueline Kahanoff. Kahanoff views Levantinism as a cultural stance that promotes political openness and provides a means of confronting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In *From East the Sun*, she argues that Levantinism reveals culture to be only a set of learned, performed actions, since anyone can

imitate western or eastern manners, and thus ultimately the question at hand regards deciding "who is a better performer," or rather who can pass for the authentic possessor of a specific culture (qtd. in *The Dispossession* 16–17). Hochberg likewise proposes an understanding of Levantinism as the means through which rigid boundaries between countries, populations, races, and religions can be elided (2007, 70–72).

Starr's *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt* and Hanley's *Grieving Cosmopolitalism in Middle East Studies* are two studies on Egyptian society between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that influenced my decision to focus on the concept of *Levantinism* rather than cosmopolitanism as a theoretical category through which I might analyze the literature produced by Italian writers in Alexandria. Both works underline the limits of prior European scholarship whose examination of Egyptian cosmopolitanism during the period between the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and Egypt's entrance in the sphere of European influence is tainted by a eurocentrism that mistakenly conflates the cosmopolitan lifestyle of a European elite with that of the autochthonous population and the various immigrant communities of diverse social classes (Hanley 2008, 1351–1353; Starr 2009, 35). For Starr, Egypt's cosmopolitanism derived from the Millet System of the Ottoman Empire, which was created to aid the foreign minorities who were considered fundamental to the economic growth of the Turkish Empire (9; 13–14). Such cultural tolerance toward foreign minorities was further developed through British and French investments in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century and by Europe's political influence (Starr 2009, 13–14). In this context, "cultural interactions" flourished, leading to what, Starr argues, scholars define as Alexandria's cosmopolitanism (13–14).

Tracing the historical development of cosmopolitanism in Egypt, Starr draws in particular on Amanda Anderson's definition of cosmopolitanism as "a cultivated detachment from restrictive forms of identity" and on Walter Mignolo's emphasis on the interdependence between colonialism and cosmopolitanism (10–12). Furthermore, Starr adheres to David Holliger's distinction between pluralist and cosmopolitan models of society; while the former respects "inherited boundaries" and attempts to place "individuals within a series of ethno-racial groups to be protected or preserved," cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, "favors affiliations" and "promotes multiple identities" (14). It can be said that cosmopolitanism and levantinism coincide, especially insofar as both encapsulate multiple identities and are products of the colonial context. Nevertheless, Hochberg understands Levantinism as a mental state that resists all forms of parochialism, and goes beyond the lifestyle made possible by the

economic wellbeing that allowed cosmopolitan individuals in Egyptian urban centers to immerse themselves in diverse cultures and thus develop multiple identities. Levantinism succeeds in obviating the fundamental requirements for belonging to a privileged social class that was, according to Starr's analysis, a *sine qua non* for Egypt's cosmopolitanism. In my analysis, Levantinism refers to the adoption of multiple cultural identities on the part of individuals belonging to diverse social classes (including destitute Italian immigrants), who subversively resist the notion of cultural homogeneity heralded by the Fascist regime.

Within this framework, I discuss how writings by Fausta Cialente and Enrico Pea, Italian writers living in Alexandria, challenged the false ideals spread by the dominant literature under Fascism, which promoted representations of Italy as racially and culturally united. Much in the same way that the Fascist program of societal renewal discouraged lifestyles and behaviors that had been imported from abroad, 1930s Fascist propagandist literature portrayed characters that defended Italy's cultural renewal and its claimed racial superiority. In direct contrast to this trend, Italian literary works produced in Alexandria portrayed the diversity and heterogeneity of a society in flux. Compared with Fascist propagandist novels, I explore how Cialente and Pea's novels offer unique historical and literary representations of the figure of the Levantine that undermine the binary oppositions between white Europeans and black Africans, and between the colonizer and the colonized. Rather than uphold such dichotomies, Cialente and Pea's narratives expose the multifaceted nature of an Italian identity that had developed over centuries as a result of countless cultural encounters and exchanges.

The imposition of a relationship between self and other, original and copy is further complicated by cultural notions of masculinity and femininity. Building on studies by Barbara Spackman, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi regarding masculine ideals during the Fascist period, my discussion of the function of black women during Fascism draws in particular on the notion of "invention" discussed by Robin Pickering-Iazzi in her introduction to *Mothers of Invention*. According to the scholar, the notion of invention is polysemous and initially refers to the process of (re)inventing the female role during the Fascist period, during which propaganda strategically (re)proposed the traditional role of the woman with an emphasis on her domestic and familial duties (Introduction x–xi). At the same time, the notion of "invention" also has an unwittingly subversive connotation, since women were included in the life of the Fascist nation and were encouraged by the regime to become agents of morality and to safeguard Italian customs; hence, as Pickering-Iazzi notes in her citation of Victoria

De Grazia, "as patriotic citizens they were to be modern, that is combative, public, and on the call" (Introduction xi).

In this perspective, the Italian woman was subjected to the role of mother and wife that had been reinvented for her, but she was also the "subject of invention," Pickering-Iazzi points out, insofar as she could use the ingenuity requested of her by the regime to find a degree of agency within a historical and cultural context that limited her emancipation (Introduction xi). This second connotation of invention created a space of resistance for women that allowed them to free themselves from the established female role. Like mimicry with regard to the colonized, invention is not only a strategy of domination used to subjugate women, but also becomes a weapon that she might use to her advantage because, as Pickering-Iazzi reminds us in her citation of Foucault, "resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real [. . .] it exists all the more by being in the same place as power" (Introduction xiii). My investigation applies this subversive connotation of "invention" to the colonial context to show how, for example, black femininity that was equally invented by the regime's propaganda with the goal of reinforcing the domestic role of Italian women, often undermines the implied qualities of Fascism's ideal masculinity.

Since sexual intercourse was the cause of miscegenation, discourses of racial identity, sexuality, and national belonging were closely tied to politics of gender. At this juncture, the Italian colonial occupation was a phenomenon that initially involved mainly male Italian emigrants, whose liaisons with native women offered them sexual service. As the 1930s legislation against interracial unions was paralleled by a move away from representations of the black woman as beautiful, sensual enchantress, the native woman's sexual appeal was portrayed as a serious threat and was used to reinforce the gender roles tailored by Fascism. As guardians of racial purity, Italian women were called upon to join their spouses in Africa and oppose the black woman's charm with submissive and obedient behavior in order to ensure his faithfulness (Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233). At the same time, the conflation of sexuality, race, national belonging, and prescribed gender roles made it difficult for the Fascist regime and for the writers and filmmakers who adhered to its precepts to establish a coherent ideological position, and many authors ended up conveying contradictory messages even when their political intent was initially compatible with Fascist doctrine. For example, racial discrimination against mixed-race offspring was contradictorily encouraged alongside the idea that Italian fathers were able to shape their children's identity, as "paternal authority played a central role in Fascist idea of order" (Barrera 2002, 262).

The theoretical approaches adopted in the first three chapters thus come together in the final chapter as I examine the memory of Italy's colonial past and the ways in which postwar literature and cinema allow the audience a chance for redemption and release from the sense of guilt for the unedifying experience of nearly 60 years in Africa. Several Africanist scholars, including Angelo del Boca and Nicola Labanca, have discussed the overall "amnesia" and the lack of a debate surrounding Italian colonialism and have noted the steadfastness with which Italians during the 1940s and 1950s denounced Fascism without expressing an equivalent position with regard to colonialism (Del Boca 2003, 17–19; Labanca 2005, 29–30), which would explain why, in the immediate postwar period, it is difficult to find works that attempt to debunk the legend of benevolent Italian colonialism. My analysis here is particularly indebted to the studies of Alessandro Triulzi on the "ritorni di memoria coloniale" (the returns of colonial memory) and to Ruth Iyob's definition of *mal d'Africa*, which the scholars use to explain the artificiality of colonial memory that resurfaces in moments of societal crisis and nostalgically recovers only reassuring facts and individuals (Iyob 2005, 258–263; Triulzi 2008, 6–10), turning colonial history into a kind of fantasy.

Italy's repressed colonial memory has also been discussed by Áine O'Healy and Karen Pinkus, who examine the unexpected resurgence of Italy's colonial past in the form of black women in Italian cinema during the 1950s and 1960s. For these two scholars, colonial history reappears in the cultural panorama of these years in the guise of the indigenous female character who becomes a specter that subtly torments the Italian conscience and serves as a reminder of a repressed history (O'Healy 2009, 178–182; Pinkus 2003, 308–313). My examination also builds on Cristina Lombardi-Diop's discussion of hygiene as a means of purifying or redeeming the past in my interpretation of the ways in which the colonial past reemerges in Italian literature and cinema of the 1940s, often with the theme of expiation. Lombardi-Diop interprets the attention to hygiene and cleanliness in postwar Italy as a subliminal attempt to purify the collective Italian conscience and memory of the experience of Fascism and colonialism (Lombardi-Diop 2011, 2). Through my analysis, I attempt to demonstrate how the desire for expiation regarding the guilt and lack of open discussions concerning colonialism coexists alongside an egoistic desire to refute personal responsibility. The continuous interplay between guilt and guiltlessness, recovery and repression in the works that I analyze lead their respective authors to offer instances of divine intervention in order to circumvent this paradox and provide a resolution to the problems that are unearthed in the structure and action of their storylines.

Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 1 of this book, I analyze the representation of *meticcio* characters in three normative novels of the Fascist regime: Rosolino Gabrielli's *Il piccolo Brassa* (1928) and Arnaldo Cipolla's *Balilla regale* (1935) and *Melograno d'oro. Regina d'Etiopia* (1936). All three novels indirectly address biracial children of the colonials, and reveal how Fascist propagandist literature filtered out the elements beyond its actual control in order to soften reality. I focus on the narrative strategies adopted by Gabrielli and Cipolla to prevent Italian readers from identifying or becoming emotionally invested in the African characters in the plot. The Italian characters in the novels themselves are likewise presented with circumstances that inhibit their admiration or sympathy for the well-disciplined colonial subjects, whose intermediate position make them hybrid figures, not unlike *meticcio* characters. These strategies, both within and outside of the text, are employed to emphasize the distinction between dominant and dominated, superior and inferior. The specific aim of this chapter is to show how, in response to specific political demands, propagandist novels during the Fascist period changed the skin color of the native protagonists, lightening their black or olive complexions, and replaced the historically hybrid figure of the *meticcio* with constructed hybrid figures.

I argue that in works belonging to the Fascist propagandist repertoire, the actual historical figures of the *meticcio* appear only rarely, since making them visible would have raised the problem of their classification. Instead, they emerge only indirectly through disciplined hybrid figures such as the *askari* (the native soldier who is 'almost' an Italian soldier) or the *passer*. The *passer* is often a black character whose skin is light enough for him/her to pass for white or who appears to become 'lighter' as he is reformed by colonial society and becomes more refined and polite or begins to adopt a white military uniform. The *passer* might also be a darker-skinned character that is eventually revealed to be white, for example when his or her dark skin is revealed to be the result of sunburn. Whereas the historical reality and intermediate position of *meticcio* offspring complicated the binary structure of colonial society, the use of disciplined hybrid figures in these narratives exposes the desire to control social realities and public opinion through fiction.

Chapter 2 of this volume focuses specifically on the Levantines and traces the historical factors that favored Egypt's late-nineteenth-century economic prosperity and Alexandria's growth as a cosmopolitan center that welcomed to a great number of foreign immigrants. Given the coexistence of several different ethnic communities in the city, I

am interested in how Alexandria's social hierarchy and the social status of the Italian immigrants were determined. Whereas in colonial society, light skin color determined upper-class standing as much as darkness denoted lower-class status, my analysis of the reasons for which social class did not necessarily depend on ethnic identity in Alexandria's society provides a framework for the chapter's core analysis of the Levantine literary characters. Specifically, I compare the normative novels of the Fascist era analyzed in the previous chapter to the dissident literature of Fausta Cialente and Enrico Pea, two Italian writers who lived in Egypt.

In Cialente's *Pamela* (1935) and *Cortile a Cleopatra* (1936) and in Pea's *Il servitore del diavolo* (1929) and *Rosalia* (1943), Egypt is a space without a definite national identity or culture, containing different ethnic groups. This hybrid space reflects the status of the Levantine, whose nature cleaves the dichotomies of African/European, colonizer/colonized, Occidental/Oriental, and white/black. I am particularly interested in these authors' subversive portrayal of Italians living in Africa who are often depicted in realistic conditions of economic hardship much like those faced by members of the lower classes who immigrated to Italy's African colonies in search of a better life.

In Chapter 3, I return to the body of works produced in apparent accordance with Fascist ideals of national belonging in my examination of two feature films subsidized by Mussolini, Augusto Genina's *Lo squadrone bianco* (1936) and Guido Brignone's *Sotto la croce del sud* (1938). The foreign enemy in both films, Libyan rebels and *meticcio* characters respectively, is a façade for the problems jeopardizing the unity and cohesion of the Italian society at home. The "white squadron" refers to the well-disciplined squadron of *askari* soldiers that fight and successfully defeat a group of Libyan rebels. Compared with the rebels, who are scattered in the battlefield and lack a leader, the white-shirted squadron of *askaris* oddly resembles Mussolini's actual crowd of passive, orderly followers, as Cecilia Boggio has argued (2003, 280–283). *Sotto la croce*'s villains are two *meticci,* called "Levantines" throughout most of the film, who are sent away from the Italian community. The film, by explicitly linking the *meticcio* characters to the 'Levantines,' reminds the audience of its fellow countrymen who chose to be 'almost' African. My main concern is with the discrepancies within the films' narrative structure and multiple meanings and the contradiction between the intended message of the films and the viewers' potential response to or interpretation of the films' meaning. We might ask if Genina's white squadron fully averts the dangers presented by the Libyan rebels or if viewers are left with a sense of uncertain victory.

Likewise, we can examine the *Sotto la croce*'s female *meticcio* character, who strategically replaces the early figure of the black concubine, in terms of how propaganda often unintentionally breaks down the ideals that it means to uphold. The film attempts to stigmatize interracial unions, as the initial association between sexual and colonial conquest was eventually replaced in 1930s literary and cinematic propaganda by the image of the Italian male as disgusted by women of inferior racial status. The female role is that of evil seductress, racially and morally tainted. But Brignone, in order to depict black/biracial female sexuality as dangerous, must place the Italian male character in the sexually victimized role. This tactic, effective on one hand, also means betraying Fascism's myth of the Italian as the embodiment of virile strength, capable of suppressing his own instincts and mastering those sexual desires in conflict with societal demands.

The final section of this book focuses on Italian culture in the immediate pre- and postwar periods, as the country confronts its colonial history. More specifically, I explore the transformation of both fictional and journalistic representations of Italian soldiers. In literary contexts, I analyze how the image of the brave, loyal Italian soldier of the African campaigns disappears in the novel *Tempo di uccidere* (1947) by Ennio Flaiano, and is replaced by the figure of the inept and physically or mentally ill Italian who recovers only by means of divine intervention. The Fascist propagandist magazine, *L'azione coloniale*, published until 1945, contributes to my analysis because its article on the heroic actions of the lieutenant Amedeo Guillet, published in 1941, documents changes in representations of real Italian soldiers compared with the image diffused in earlier Fascist works. Despite his unconventional adoption of Arabic language and clothing and his conversion to Islam, the lieutenant Guillet drew the interest of the Italian press of the 1940s when he led a group of Amhara *askaris* in the attempt to slow the advance of English troops in Libya and Ethiopia.

The themes addressed in this chapter, including representations of race, physical and mental illness, black women, and the ex-colonizer's judgment of himself all incited anxiety in the Italian public, which consequently sought ways of exorcising these fears during the postwar period. My examination of Amedeo Guillet's portrayal in *L'azione coloniale*, of Flaiano's novel and of Francesco De Robertis's film, *Il mulatto* (1949), highlights several interesting points of intersection between the magazine, the novel, and the film whose narratives are characterized by exploitative representations of black, mixed-race or Levantine characters as the means by which Italian audiences confronted the violence of colonialism and were metaphorically cleansed of colonial guilt.

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I

Art of Darkness: The Aestheticization of Black People in Fascist Colonial Novels*

Black Venuses and *Meticci*[1] in the Italian Colonial Context

Propaganda about race and racial identity in Italy is most commonly discussed in the context of the Fascist regime's 1938 race laws, which asserted the superiority of the Italian race on the basis of biological differences between Italians and the black colonial subjects and Jewish minorities living on Italian territory. In reality, racial propaganda appeared much earlier. As early as the 1880s, indigenous black women began to appear in illustrated pamphlets depicting Italy's exploration of Africa, and the extensive photographs, drawings, and written accounts of African women indicate that colonialism had found a powerful instrument for capturing the Italian imagination through depictions of African females as dark, large-breasted black Venuses. Beyond increasing sales and promoting territorial conquests, the eroticization of native women as nude or semi-nude black Venuses emphasized a desire to be subjugated. As Sandra Ponzanesi has suggested in her analysis of the relationship between race and gender as well as politics and colonialism, native women were shown as possessing a sexual allure and willingness to be conquered that was not permitted for European women, or that European women were seen to have lost (166).

Literature likewise became invested in shaping relationships between whites and blacks as early as 1896, the year of publication of Emilio Salgari's novel, *I drammi della schiavitù*, set aboard slave ships headed to America. Salgari, one of Italy's most prolific and widely read authors

of action and adventure novels during the period of the Italian colonial campaign, wrote numerous novels and hundreds of short stories, fifteen of which were set in Africa and almost all of which feature dangerous or mysterious settings. As a popular writer of mass literature, Salgari has often been viewed by scholars, such as Margherita Botto, as "thriving parasitically on topoi rooted" in Italy's collective unconscious (86). In fact, Salgari's literary career, spanning the period between 1884 and his 1911 suicide, coincides with several significant events in Italy's early colonial period, including the landing at Massawa in 1885 after the acquisition of the Bay of Assab, and the onset of the 1911 Italo-Turkish war. With its focus on the African slave trade, *I drammi della schiavitù*, published in the period following Italy's exploration travels in Africa and its consolidation of colonial possessions in Eritrea, was historically relevant, as it was published less than a decade following the 1889 Congress of Vienna's formal condemnation of the African slave trade in Europe.

Even while lacking explicit references to the events related to Italian colonialism, *I drammi della schiavitù* incorporates issues of a larger topical interest in the colonial discourse, predicts a spectrum of mixed races, and attempts to subtly influence the reader's opinion. Salgari's novel focuses on the beautiful biracial character Seghira, who falls in love with the ship's captain, Alvaez, a fundamentally honest man if not for his profession as a slave trafficker. Before the rise of Fascism, depictions of sexual conquest and sexual exploits with native women were common and provided a less explicit means of alluding to the colonial enterprise and promoting domination in the new territories. Yet, in Salgari's novel, the entire crew of the slave ship is distracted by the presence of the beautiful mixed-race slave, and any possibility for a lasting relationship between Seghira and Alvaez is preempted when he is murdered by the jealous Second Captain. Alvaez's death prevents Seghira from ascending the racial and social scale. Rather than permit her union with the white character, Alvaez, Salgari has Seghira marry the African King, Niombo, who was captured by Alvaez but agreed to aid Seghira in avenging the captain's death. The novel's cover emphasizes this resolution by depicting Seghira with Niombo rather than with Alvaez.

Thirty years before the 1938 race laws and the 1940 law that denied citizenship to Italian biracial offspring, the novel's representation of a mixed-race character provides a blueprint for later writers affiliated with the Fascist regime, and anticipates ethical and political themes that became pertinent during the height of the Italian colonial period. The character of Seghira becomes a precursor of *meticcio* characters in Italian colonial literature and film. This chapter will provide a historical, legal, racial, and cross-cultural perspective of the *meticcio* from the early Italian

colonial period through the Fascist propaganda literature of the 1930s, before the 1940 law barring citizenship to biracial children. Drawing on the theoretical concept of mimicry discussed by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, this chapter analyzes the narrative devices used in Fascist colonial novels to discourage interracial unions. One of the main problems faced by the Fascist regime was how to define the biracial offspring and the place of this mixed-race group in Italian society, given that these subjects were born to one Italian and one African parent. Interracial unions forced the Italian government to define the social and legal status of biracial progeny whose mixed identity complicated the desire to establish Italy's racial supremacy over black colonial subjects.

The reality that mixed-race individuals challenged notions of racial purity, and destabilized the assumptions that would form the grounds of the 1938 race laws, led to the attempt to control the public perception of colonial *meticci* through fiction. In the Fascist propagandist repertoire, historical *meticci* appear rarely, since making them visible would have raised the problem of their classification. Instead, other hybrid figures are carefully constructed to make only oblique references to colonial *meticci*. In popular novels affiliated with Mussolini's regime, the skin color of the native protagonists is often lightened, or the historical hybridity of the *meticci* replaced with constructed hybrid characters. One example is the *askari*, the native soldier whose status as 'almost' Italian allows him in certain circumstances to pass, socially if not physically, as white. Another example of hybrid character is the passer, the black passing for white. Black characters are disciplined, becoming 'lighter' when refined or polite, when adopting a white military uniform, or when their dark skin is revealed to only be the result of sunburn or genetic defect. At the base of these narrative strategies lies a will to control. Where in reality colonial *meticci* complicated the racial hierarchy with their intermediate positions, it was hoped nonetheless that they could be controlled through fiction.

With the advent of Fascism, the role of the black woman was given a new political scope and, as it became politically necessary to discourage interracial relationships in the 1930s, depictions and perceptions of the black Venus changed radically without disappearing. Representations of the black female's exotic appeal and willingness to be dominated, previously used to attract Italian men to the colonial enterprise, were replaced by depictions of her supposedly inferior racial status intended to provoke disgust and repulsion. Even comic representations revealed the view that black women, as potential procreators of a mixed-race progeny, threatened to irremediably dilute the Italian racial fabric. Enrico De Seta's famous series of commercial posters and comics, collected by Adolfo Mignemi in his *Immagine coordinata per un impero*, transformed the African woman

into a caricature, occasionally depriving her of human characteristics and equating her with consumer products such as cattle.

In other cases, the black female's sexual appeal was exploited to reinforce the gender roles tailored by Fascism, as illustrated by Barbara Sòrgoni's volume *Parole e corpi*. As a guardian of racial purity, the Italian woman was called to join her spouse in Africa to oppose the native woman's charm with submissive and obedient behavior and ensure his faithfulness (Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233). This is true of Guido Brignone's 1938 Fascist propagandist film, *Sotto la croce del sud*, which focuses on a young engineer, Paolo, whose eventual success in overcoming his attraction toward a female *meticcio* character is intended to exemplify a capacity for self-control and discipline that prevented male Italians from yielding to women of inferior racial status. Brignone adopts the common practice of substituting the image of the black Venus with lighter skinned *meticcio* characters, whose erotic appeal was justified by their greater resemblance to white Europeans. *Sotto la croce del sud* also provides a good example of how black and *meticcio* characters were used to provide a negative contrast to the Italian characters, as evident in the editing of one of the most crucial scenes in the film, in which the image of naked Abyssinian women performing a fertility rite is contrasted with scenes of colonial family life in which Italian settlers are seated at the table attended by their wives.

Although a few scholars have focused on the tradition of skin color lightening in Italian Fascist cinema,[2] Giorgio Bertellini's study on the westernization of the popular character of Maciste discusses one of the earliest and most outstanding examples. Maciste first appears as a black slave in the 1914 film *Cabiria*, and goes on to become the protagonist of a series of films between 1914 and 1930 that gradually eliminate his African characteristics and move him into an increasingly European appearance (Bertellini 2003, 256). Already in 1916, in the film *Maciste alpino*, the character is portrayed as a member of the Italian alpine troops (Bertellini 2003, 260). The practice of lightening skin color continues in later Fascist propagandist films, such as Augusto Genina's 1936 film, *Lo squadrone bianco*, the title of which refers to the indigenous *askari* (Arabic for "soldier") who fought on behalf of the Italian colony during the African campaigns. Cecilia Boggio explains in her "Black Shirts/Black Skins" that, in the film, the *askaris* are referred to as the "white squadron" because of their white uniforms, which were usually paired with red or leather accessories, such as the typical cylindrical tarbush hat. As the film concludes with the white squadron's victory in battle against a group of Libyan rebels, the *askaris* are represented through the typically Fascist image of orderly followers (Boggio 2003, 284).

The phenomenon of lightening skin color or suppressing non-European traits was by no means unique to the Italian context. In Italy, the process of recognizing the social and political status of mixed-race individuals and of accepting their position in a positive light followed a different historical path with respect to Latin and North America. Yet, a comparison with the situation in the Americas, where cultural representations of mixed-race individuals played a significant role in the anti-colonial nationalist movement in the Caribbean and in the abolitionist movement in the United States, can help to clarify the specific function that black and *meticcio* characters acquired in Italian film and literature. Suzanne Bost's *Mulattas and Mestizas* provides an invaluable analysis of how and why the question of racial identity was more complex in the Spanish-speaking American colonies than in North America's rigid white master/black slave binary. Socially and economically, segregation was impossible. Europeans relied on natives for labor, business, and communication with Caribbean locals and, unlike in North America, "the small European population on the islands was insufficient to establish a separate, independent white culture" (Bost 2003, 91).

Interracial unions, according to Bost, were always part of the Spanish colonial project. Since the earliest stages of colonization, intermarriage between Spanish men and native women was supported by the Church and viewed by Spain as a means of facilitating the Hispanization of the natives and promoting domestic stability in the colonies (Bost 2003, 27). Michael Meyer and William Sherman's volume on the conquest of Mexico, *The Course of Mexican History*, illustrates how marriage with women from noble native families provided Spaniards with jurisdiction over a given number of native laborers through the legal system of the *encomienda* (209). Given the long history of intermarriage within the context of Spanish colonizers, interracial unions were considerably more common in the Hispanic Caribbean than in the British Caribbean or in North America (Bost 2003, 99). In discussing representations of blackness in Latin American literature, Richard Jackson highlights in *The Black Image* that intermarriage was viewed as a means of gradual racial purification in the Spanish Caribbean. It was expected that the natural inferiority of the indigenous populations would gradually be filtered out as the superior and more dominant white traits were passed on to new generations (Jackson 1976, 3–4). Although intermarriage or racial intermixing was to some degree considered an acceptable practice, the underlying discourse was no more or less positive than in the North American context, since in both instances European racial purity remained the ultimate goal (Jackson 1976, 3–4).

Racial hierarchies dominated Caribbean history as well, and European origins remained synonymous with racial superiority. Skin color alone did not, however, determine social standing since so many inhabitants of nineteenth-century Cuba and Puerto Rico were descendants of interracial unions (Bost 2003, 29). The impossibility of using skin color as a basis for classification created a caste system rather than a racial binary and other elements, such as religion, education, fluency in Spanish, lifestyle, and behavior, were associated with race (Bost 2003, 29). Spain's colonies had a system of meticulous racial classification that paid close attention to cultural components and the percentage of indigenous and African blood. Terms such as *terzerón, cuarterón, octoroon* identified points on a scale ranging from blackness to whiteness.

Eventually, in Spanish colonial literature and history, the mixed-race individual, whether classified as *mestizo* or *mulatto*, became a symbol of national resistance, an ethnic and cultural medley opposed to notions of *limpieza de sangre* and European colonialism. Biracial women appear as important figures in nineteenth-century Cuban novels about slavery. Claudette Williams, in her extensive research on racial identity in Spanish Caribbean literature, looks closely at novels of this period and cites, as examples, Bosmeniel's novel, *Petrona y Rosalía* (1838), and Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1839), as having contributed to the development of the *negrismo* literary movement that flourished in Cuba and Puerto Rico (11). Even among writers in the Caribbean, however, attitudes were split. Some writers of the French Caribbean, such as Aimé Césaire, "rejected the European heritage and promoted black cultural autonomy" (Williams 2000, 14). This position was to some degree against the ethnic crossing between different groups, since it associated mixed-race individuals with the bourgeois ideology of the white colonizers (Williams 2000, 14). On the other hand, writers of the Spanish Caribbean saw mixed-race individuals as a symbol of a new, harmonious national identity based on an African-European synthesis (Williams 2000, 14).

The North American scenario was completely different, as racial prejudice operated according to a binary system, thus anyone with the so-called "one-drop of black blood," regardless of the shade of his/her skin color, was considered black. In *Neither Black nor White yet Both* Werner Sollors defines biracial offspring as a "living challenge" in a civil structure based upon birth and lineage (241). For those who had left Europe because of persecution and oppression, the mixed-race individual was reminiscent of the failed good intentions to establish a civil structure in the new continent that would respect the freedom of man regardless of his lineage (Sollors 1997, 241). This explains to some extent why the adoption of the generic term *mulatto* was originally rejected, because it would

have implied recognizing the existence of miscegenation and providing official status to individuals born out of taboo relationships (Sollors 1997, 7–9; 16–24). Mixed-race progeny was finally acknowledged by the United States Census in 1850 and for nearly a century was considered as an intermediary class, neither white nor black, before their official equation with blacks in 1920 (Bost 2003, 39).

Since the term *negro* included anyone with black ancestry, passing for a white person was a secretive process. Sollors discusses the phenomenon of passing[3] in great detail, noting how disguising one's physical traits, such as hair and skin color, allowed the passer to see without being seen and pervade the enemy's side unnoticed (253). North American abolitionist literature argued that passing as white citizens not only protected individuals from discrimination and allowed them to advance socially and economically, but that it was also a political strategy that could be used to subvert white power (Sollors 1997, 250–251). It is not difficult to imagine the degree to which passing created anxiety within the white community, as the passer circumvented the discriminatory policies against blacks, used to guarantee white hegemony (Sollors 1997, 253).

The so-called "tragic" *mulatto* and passer characters first appear in mid-nineteenth-century North American abolitionist literature. Physically more similar to whites, the *mulatto* figure was used to inspire feelings of compassion in readers who might even be moved to the point of recognizing slavery's cruelty. Judith Berzon's book, *Neither White nor Black*, provides an insightful analysis of why, beginning in the 1920s, the literary *mulatto* character in American fiction assumes a new role. Having enjoyed a privileged condition with respect to blacks, the *mulatto* character often decides not to pass as white, but rather to return to the black community in order to defend them against further subjugation (Berzon 1978, 214). To use a term coined by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, the *mulatto* character comes to represent an *organic intellectual* within the African American group, becoming the natural, organizing element behind the group's progress. In both North American and Latin American literature, one finds a gradual reevaluation of the *mulatto* figure as an icon for colonial resistance and a symbol against the discrimination perpetrated by whites. Responses to the evolution of the social and ideological domains spurred changes in the popular perceptions of people of African descent.

In Italy, although we find similar conflicts and artistic expressions of the tension surrounding racial identity, the situation is considerably different given the confluence of two distinct historical situations: Mussolini's desire to establish an Italian empire in Africa that included Ethiopia, and the period of racial tension during the height of Fascism.

These conflicting factors dictated how and why to "aestheticize blackness," to borrow a term from Karen Pinkus' analysis of advertising during the Fascist period (37). Africa was to provide a location of otherness that would foster a sense of national identity and community in mainland Italy, and native colonial subjects provided the means of comparison necessary to demonstrate that Italians belonged to a superior, noble race, not unlike the Aryan ideal. The dream of a colonial empire was thus strongly bound to the politics of the forthcoming Fascist race theories. Nonetheless, the discrepancies between the ideology of the race laws, which were in the making, and Italy's decision to invade Ethiopia in 1935, remained. Both the Ethiopian colonial Campaigns and the race laws were related to Mussolini's desire to assert Italy's national identity, but to admit to some of the subtle reasons behind the colonial expansion in Ethiopia would risk collapsing the entire racist theory, revealing Italy's membership in the white race as questionable. If Africa and Ethiopia were inhabited by black savages, it did not make sense for Italy to allow its emigrants to be exposed to presumably inferior races and the risk of interracial unions with native women that was already considered a major problem in the colonies.

To this end, the comments of the historian Olindo De Napoli shed light on the contradictions at the base of the regime's promotion of the attack on Ethiopia. On one hand, the campaign was promoted as part of a civilizing mission that reinforced the ostensible ties between Fascist Italy and Imperial Rome (which was synonymous with the birth of western civilization in the Fascist conception of history), but it also relied on a politics of differentiation whereby the colonial subjects were separated, on the basis of racial difference and legal standing, from the Italian citizens (De Napoli 2009, 36–37). As De Napoli explains, the regime justified the contradictory view of colonization as both a process of uniting (as a civilizing mission) and of dividing (as a legal and social system of segregation) by claiming that the different legal standards to which African subjects and Italian citizens were subjected were only provisional measures that would be reviewed, adapted and perhaps eliminated, in accordance with the native population's economic and social advancement (36–37). Yet, following the conquest of Ethiopia, the regime promulgated a series of overtly racist legislative acts and, as De Napoli notes, the possibility of bringing such progress into effect was explicitly refuted as the creation of a colonial empire consistently emerged in official documents as one of the reasons behind the introduction of the racial laws (36–37).

Numerous scholars, including Giulia Barrera, Barbara Sòrgoni, and Gaia Giuliani have shared the view that the imperialist ideology and the creation of the Empire of East Africa provided the foundations for

Italian racism. In 1936, the year of the *Legge organica per l'impero* (or *regio decreto legge* n. 1019), which limited the requisites for granting Italian citizenship and defined the penal violations that would lead to the revocation of citizenship rights, one finds a clear instance of the new rigidity of racial definitions. The creation of Italy's Empire of East Africa provided the means for the rhetorical justification of the subsequent persecution of Italian Jews, since for the regime the integrity of the Italian race required protection from contamination, both within the colonies and the motherland.

Literature offered a subtle and yet powerful alternate view of reality and provided a means of circumventing the contradiction inherent in desiring and conquering a new African land while also rejecting its population as inferior. Through novels, the image of Ethiopia was bent to fit several ideological purposes and was westernized in order to show the potential of its native population to become civilized and 'less' African thanks to the intervention of the Italians. As native Ethiopians were depicted as fair-skinned blacks in order to emphasize both their African identity, as well as their potential to become more like Europeans, blackness became a character trait that could be altered through discipline, culture, or the willingness to adopt the white uniform of the Italian army. In making blackness more appealing to the Italian public, white dominion could be justified. Foreseeing the potential of the Italian civilizing mission in Ethiopia, literature envisioned how Ethiopians would become well-disciplined, well-reformed individuals.

Yet, because the colonial *meticci* straddled the line between rulers and ruled, the Fascist government, and those writers and filmmakers who adhered to its values, were faced with the difficult task of making Africans appealing, while simultaneously discouraging interracial unions. In fact, the biracial children of such unions destabilized the very grounds of the 1938 race laws, since their intermediary position undermined the very notion of Italy's racial purity. In climactic or revealing moments of novels, black protagonists are occasionally revealed to have been 'white' all along, their dark skin color having actually been the result of a sunburn or genetic defect. This form of passing as a literary and cinematic device legitimized the exoticism and eroticism of black characters who were, in reality, white.

Historically, the figure of the ethnic *meticcio* originates with Italy's colonial occupation of Eritrea (1890), Somalia (1890), Libya (1911) and Ethiopia (1935). Sòrgoni and Barrera are two of the foremost scholars on the subject of Italian colonialism, especially in Eritrea, and their respective studies provide a useful framework for investigating the construction of racial hierarchies during this period. In its early stages, the colonial

enterprise was a phenomenon mainly involving male Italian immigrants who often took on native concubines. The phenomenon of the *madamato,* the cohabitation between an Italian colonizer and an indigenous woman, unsanctioned by marriage, was widespread and tacitly accepted before the 1936 *Legge organica per l'impero* (or *regio decreto legge* n. 1019). Such unions, according to Barrera, in the past helped to cope with the shortage of Italian women in the colonies and provided authorities with a means of collecting information about the local population that would make governing the colonies easier (93–94). Biracial children thus became a prominent feature of many settler communities under Liberal Italy and, although marriage was strongly discouraged, Italians residing in the colonies were given the power to legally recognize their *meticcio* children, who could therefore become citizens. Numerous anthropological arguments supported the notion that biracial progeny in the colonies should be given a place in their Italian fathers' society. For example, in the 1910s, it was held that male features were dominant in an interracial union, and thus children born of a white father and a black mother were genetically closer to the father (Barrera 2002, 200–201; Sòrgoni 1998, 107–108).

During the half-century of Italy's colonial presence in Africa, Barrera and Sòrgoni note, the official position toward *meticcio* children was never made entirely clear, though colonial policy in general was focused on reinforcing the superiority of the Italians over the natives whenever possible (49; 105).The first regulation that indirectly mentions biracial children appears in 1914, discouraging interracial marriages and dismissing officials who had formed relationships of a conjugal nature with native women (Barrera 2002, 240; Sòrgoni 1998, 114). However, in 1917, in what may appear as a step in the opposite direction, citizenship was granted to illegitimate children and orphans who, because of their physical traits, were considered biracial (Barrera 2002, 242; De Napoli 2009, 22). Under this law, colonial subjects (including the *askaris*, the indigenous soldiers of the Italian colonial troops) could request naturalization, though it guaranteed few civil rights and carried little weight (Sòrgoni 1998, 95). Although blood and birth were determining factors of racial hierarchies, the degree of civility (standard of living and behavior) was also considered in deciding whether or not to grant naturalization to indigenous subjects (Sòrgoni 1998, 148). In reality, the decision to grant citizenship was not motivated by a desire to integrate *meticcio* offspring into Italian society, but rather, to exercise greater control over them (Barrera 2002, 245). The increase in the state's involvement in the private life of residents in the colonies, which may seem to favor colonial subjects and *meticci*, reveals that, starting in 1917, the Italian government began to assert its exclusive right to decide who was a citizen and who was not, and the Fascist regime

later used this same authority to permanently revoke citizenship from Italian biracial offspring (Barrera 2002, 250).

Controlling relationships between Italians and natives became a more serious concern among colonial authorities, as more Italian males were expected to come to Africa. The Fascist regime convinced millions of Italians that the nation's future development depended on the creation of a colonial empire in Africa, which included Ethiopia; an attitude that became synonymous with land, prestige and superiority.[4] The *meticcio* population posed a challenge to Fascist colonial policies aimed at establishing a demographic colonization in Ethiopia (Sòrgoni 1998, 209–210). Since the Italian male population in the colonies was expected to rise rapidly with the Ethiopian Campaigns, the creation of clearer divisions between the colonizer and the colonized became necessary to maintaining authority.

The Fascist regime was aware that many Italians moving to the colonies were destitute manual laborers, which meant that whiteness itself was not an indication of higher economic status and that the racial hierarchy was in need of a more rigid definition (Barrera 2002, 301; De Napoli 2009, 56). In order to create a feasible balance between inexpensive black labor and the amount of land that the Italian colonists could gain control over, colonial *meticci* had to be excluded because, if granted citizenship, the growing mixed-race community would enjoy the same privileges as Italian settlers (Sòrgoni 1998, 209–210). Aside from the abstract ideological arguments concerning the threat posed by colonial *meticci* to Mussolini's promotion of Italy's racial purity, there were also practical reasons for excluding individuals of mixed African and Italian descent from Italian society.

The first step in the process of excluding colonial *meticci* from the Italian community was to reinforce racial differences between Italians and black colonial subjects, intensifying the system of separation between the two groups and issuing laws in defense of white prestige. Beginning in the 1930s, the regime began issuing legal orders (*regi decreti legge* also known as *leggi organiche*) that regulated interracial relationships, common spaces in the colonies, and the right to citizenship and naturalization. De Napoli explains that the new provisions that came along in the mid-1930s completely reversed the terms of the previous laws that had intended to safeguard the future of mixed-race offspring, as they emphasized intrinsic genetic qualities as the only factor in determining racial belonging (60–61). Thus, while the appearance of the 1938 race laws and the 1940 decision to legally exclude mixed-race offspring from the Italian community may appear abrupt, in reality these laws took shape over the course of time and in response to problems of a practical nature.

Many of the legal orders that aimed at controlling indigenous subjects and reaffirming white prestige, that were issued after the 1935 Conquest of Ethiopia, foreshadowed the regime's intentions of making the creation of Italy's Empire of East Africa the starting point of more drastic racial policies.

The separation of Italian citizens from colonial subjects was a long-standing practice that had been in use since the Liberal period. However, early instances of segregation were less rigid than those of the post-1935 period, and were intended to reinforce a natural tendency toward racial separation (Barrera 2002, 50–52). Governor Salvago Raggi, who divided the city of Asmara into three urban areas, first implemented residential segregation in 1908 (Barrera 2002, 52). The first area was reserved for Italians and other European foreigners (Barrera 2002, 108). Eritreans were forbidden from living in the zone, with the exception of servants and hired help. The second area was a mixed zone for Europeans and other assimilated members of the city's population of traders and artisans such as Arabs, Jews, Indians, Turks and Greeks (Barrera 2002, 108). Finally, a third zone was created for the African colonial subjects.

During the post-1935 period, a series of legal orders were issued to reinforce the separation between subjects and citizens. To put an end to the phenomenon of the *madamato* and prevent interracial unions, an influx of Italian women in the colonies was promoted. A 1937 decree (*regio decreto legge* n. 880) established that Italian citizens implicated in relationships of a conjugal nature with colonial subjects could be punished with up to five years of incarceration (De Napoli 2009, 64). The 1937 legislation on *madamismo* was further reinforced by a 1939 decree that formally prohibited marriage with colonial subjects (Sòrgoni 1998, 153). The same legislative act also established penal sanctions for other behaviors undermining white racial prestige (Sòrgoni 1998, 153). The regime delineated a series of intolerable behaviors for Italian citizens that would be considered as grave and damaging conduct against racial integrity. Among the punishable behaviors were included relationships of a conjugal nature, the frequenting of public spaces reserved for natives, and the performance of manual labor or other work contracted by a native (Sòrgoni 1998, 153).

Mussolini's aims to reinforce Italian racial supremacy were achieved with the 1938 race laws, yet the process of a forced reinsertion of colonial *meticci* into the indigenous population was not an easy task for Fascist anthropologists. In order to formally define the *meticcio* population as black, anthropologists had to redefine the terms of discrimination because, only a short time before the rise of Fascism, the underdeveloped regions of southern Italy had frequently been equated with Africa, and

its inhabitants likened to Africans. Many studies conducted during the late 1870s had stressed the existence of two Italies, and the notion of the South's backwardness had led to a range of unsettling hypotheses about the origins of human races, such as those proposed by the anthropologists Alfredo Niceforo and Cesare Lombroso. In their respective works, *L'Italia barbara contemporanea* (1898) and *In Calabria* (1898), the otherness of the South was traced back to racial factors.

One cannot but note the irony of Africa's role in forming Italian identity, since in direct contrast with earlier comparisons to Africa that had served to broaden the chasm between northern and southern Italy, Africa later fulfilled the opposite role, becoming the Other against which an Italian identity (both northern and southern) could be forged and celebrated. Within the colonial context, differences between northern and southern Italy were mitigated by emphasizing the difference between Italians and Africans. Yet, Fascism still had to struggle to prove that colonial *meticci* were black, since physical features such the olive complexion, wider nose, and coarser hair were traits shared by many southern Italians and thus not sufficient external markers of racial inferiority.

One of the greatest obstacles faced by biological racism was to demonstrate that all Italians, including the southern populations whose physical traits had been previously linked with Africa, belonged to an Aryan race. Giuseppe Sergi's Hamitic theory attributed the darker skin color and various physical traits of Mediterranean populations to variations in the environment and climate in the Mediterranean basin. Sergi's theory would have provided a useful contribution to biological racism, except that the anthropologist also posited that these populations had descended from the same "Euro-African" branch that included, for example, Egyptians and Ethiopians. Fascism was obviously unable to accept such a leveling between Ethiopians and Italians, and rejected Sergi's theory.

In regard to Fascist racism's need to establish convincing criteria for racial belonging, De Napoli identifies two further legislative measures that exemplify the regime's late 1930s discriminatory racial policy: The first disfavored colonial subjects and mixed-race progeny on the basis of biological belonging, and the second discriminated against Jews on the basis of the supposed lack of national and spiritual kinship. Between 1938 and 1942, Mussolini asked scholars to create a coherent racist doctrine in order to protect the Italian race from the contamination of other races. The first theoretical document on Italian race, *Il manifesto della razza* was issued in July 1938 and outlined the general principles of Fascist biological racism. One month later, the first issue of *La difesa della razza* was published, which later became Italy's most famous periodical on biological racism and the vehicle for various intellectuals, such as anthropologists

Guido Landra and Lidio Cipriani, journalist Telesio Interlandi and his colleague Giorgio Almirante, philosophy professor Giulio Cogni, and physician Lino Businco, to voice their support of the biological approach to racism (Raspanti 76). At the institutional level, support for racism's various forms and initiatives was guaranteed by the Office of Racial Studies at the Ministry of Popular Culture, created in August 1938 and directed by Guido Landra until February 1939.

Il manifesto della razza marked the regime's taking of an official stance in favor of biological racism since, as De Napoli notes, the document refutes a conception of race founded on historical, linguistic, and religious elements and affirms that the "current population of Italy is of Aryan origin and its civilization is Aryan" (qtd. in De Napoli 2009, 142–143). At this juncture, it should be noted that only a few years before, the Fascist regime favored the term "stirpe" (stock) in preference to race, and the "stirpe italica" (Italic stock) united Italians in "character" and "spirit" rather than narrowly placing them amongst an anthropological race. Fascist propaganda of the early 1930s reiterated historical ideas of unity and legacy, selectively tracing Italian roots back to the earliest peoples living in the Italian peninsula (the Italic peoples), followed by the cultural heritage of the Ancient Romans and the moral values of the Roman Catholic Church. Olindo De Napoli and Mauro Raspanti emphasize this point of contradiction, as the elaboration of an official doctrine regarding racism in the years following 1938 was permeated by an essential ambiguity, since spiritual racism was never completely abandoned (143; 80). In search of convincing criteria for discriminatory policies against the Jewish community residing in Italy, Fascists looked toward a form of racism based on socio-historical factors (De Napoli 2009, 143; Raspanti 1994, 80).

The presence of mixed-race children in the colony continued to threaten definitions of Italian racial belonging since biological criteria provided insufficient grounds for proving racial superiority over colonial *meticci*. The biological and anthropological sciences to which the regime appealed were unable to provide unequivocal proof of racial inferiority and ultimately the Fascist anthropologist Lidio Cipriani put an end to the question by simply stating that African subjects and the *meticcio* population were biologically inferior races (De Napoli 2009, 89). While debates over the definition of the Italian race were prolonged in detailed analyses that justified anti-Semitism from biological and historical-cultural perspectives, discussions about the supposed inferiority of blacks and *meticci* were cut short and dismissed with phrases such as "as it is evident," "it is known" and "as one knows"; (qtd. in De Napoli 2009, 89).

The question of the racial inferiority of colonial *meticci* becomes even more complex, as De Napoli observes, when one considers that Italian racial identity was not considered self-evident, but rather needed to be constructed within the Fascist ideology (22). Unlike the German nation, in which the German population was claimed to be naturally and innately synonymous with the German race, the 'making' of Italians implied a conception of race that was not inherent (De Napoli 2009, 22). The notion of constructing national identity had permeated the colonial policies of the early 1930s, during which years the Fascist regime had conferred Italian citizenship on all deserving citizens until 1936. Eligibility for citizenship was determined by lifestyle, upbringing, and the assimilation in Italian culture and identity (De Napoli 2009, 22). In legislation after 1936, the category of merit was eliminated by the regime, which became hostile toward mixed-race individuals and gradually impeded their naturalization, until formally prohibiting marriage with colonial subjects in 1939 and barring the *meticcio* population eligibility for citizenship in 1940.[5]

Discrimination against *meticcio* offspring was justified in biological terms and, although the change in the Italian government's position toward biracial children may appear as a gradual shift from an initial position of acceptance to one of intolerance, as Barrera points out, the situation was more complex. The Fascist notion that fathers were responsible for shaping the identity of their children was clearly contradicted by the government's new racial policy against colonial *meticci* (Barrera 2002, 262). In the early stages of colonialism, Barrera asserts, relationships between Italian settlers and native women had recreated the comfort of home and were characterized by deep affection for native concubines and their offspring (183). When the Fascist government later felt the political and ideological necessity to revoke its earlier position and biologically classify colonial *meticci* as 'black,' it was confronted with the difficult task of having to rework the sphere of affection and positive perception that it had previously tolerated and, to some degree, even promoted.

The Colonial Novel: Disciplining the Native Population as well as the Italian Audience

In addition to the punitive and repressive rules against interracial relationships—meant to stop the growth of the *meticcio* population(Sòrgoni 1998, 229)—the regime disseminated the notion of racial superiority through various forms of communication media, including the colonial novel, which appears as a new literary genre in the late 1920s. Constructing

a sense of civic responsibility with regard to race was one of Fascism's principal aims (Sòrgoni 1998, 229), and it was hoped that the colonial novel would become a form of mass literature for diverse audiences and provide an instrument of Fascist instruction. In 1931, the periodical *L'Azione coloniale* invited Italian intellectuals to discuss the content of the colonial novel and encouraged young writers to contribute to the diffusion of the new genre. As various scholars such as Gigliola De Donato, Maria Pagliara, Adolfo Scotto di Luzio, and Giovanna Tomasello, have discussed in their studies of the 'best sellers' of this period, the project of the colonial novel was ultimately unable to reach a wide audience or successfully bend literary aesthetics in the service of political goals.

Propaganda and literature were forced to work within the contradictions inherent in Fascism's construction of national identity, and often the messages that literature aimed to convey escaped its initial purposes, unintentionally revealing the tenuousness of its arguments. Proposed as an instrument for the spread of Fascist ideology, the colonial novel abandoned many of the usual expedients of the previous literary tradition, in which Africa had served as a place of escape from reality. Rather than represent an exotic, liberating space in which travelers pursued sensory and sensual adventure, Africa was transformed into a colonial territory where the new, strong values of the Italian spirit could be exported (Tomasello 1984, 103).

Early representations of exploration and colonialism in Africa served as a powerful means of remedying Italy's problems during the post-unification period. Beneath the façade of unity was a heterogeneity of peoples and customs that inhibited national cohesion. Among others, Sandra Puccini and Alessandro Triulzi discuss how the comparison to African natives during Italy's exploration of Africa and early colonialism provided a source of otherness against which Italians could solidify an image of themselves and their country as less divided and less impoverished than it had previously appeared (23–24; 270–271). The exoticization of Africa during the early phase of Italian colonialism was thus inscribed in a system of aesthetic and ideological values that had less to do with Africa and Africans than with Italy and Italians. Explorer accounts and novels, Elena Ricci explains, ultimately reveal little of Africa and much of Italy's history and the individual and societal crises experienced by its inhabitants (153). Graham Huggan's observation that "the west speaks of the other while only speaking of itself" provides an apt definition of exoticism in Italian accounts of Africa (24). Italian explorers, colonial officials, and administrators collected data on the physical features and lifestyles of Africans that provided an image of the Other as disordered, weak, dark-skinned savages from whom Italians could differentiate themselves and establish

a sense of collective identity (Puccini 1999, 23–24; Triulzi 1997, 270–271). In this way, the attitudes and observations of the first explorers and civil servants provide the premises of the colonial program; even seemingly benign depictions of Africans as ingenuous and good savages implied Africa's inferiority and the potential of Italy to intervene and introduce a higher level of civilization (Puccini 1999, 24–25; 29–31; Triulzi 1997, 269–270).

The explorer Gustavo Bianchi's account, *Alla terra dei Galla* (1884) provides an example of this attempt to create an identifying model for readers and allow them to participate in Italy's colonial endeavors from a distance. As a member of one of the first expeditions in the Shewa region of Abyssinia, Bianchi describes the populations he encounters and the geography of the explored territory, making frequent references to the vastness and majesty of the region's rivers, mountains, and desert lands. In Bianchi's first-person accounts of hunting expeditions, diseases, and various other dangers encountered, he emphasizes his survival skills and evokes the reader's emotional participation. Bianchi depicts his African experience as a testing ground, a longed-for occasion, and a path toward personal growth, and his profile of the Italian explorer, as Puccini has pointed out, condenses masculine Italian characteristics to create a prototype of the national character with which readers could identify (23–24; 50–54).

Colonial governor Ferdinando Martini's account, *Nell'Affrica italiana* (1891) further illustrates how Africa helped to build a fictitious but essential sense of Italian community. In Martini's account of his journey across Eritrea, his descriptions of the local way of life are permeated by an exotic discourse that reinforces the differences between colonizers and the exotic, primitive natives. In Martini's view, the colonial system provided a model through which Italians could restore the equilibrium between nature and culture ("the bonds that we civilized men artificially weave around us constrict us, oppress us, seem at times to suffocate us [. . .] Africa breaks them and frees us"), something civilized men had irremediably lost (294). His occasionally harsh judgment of the Italians in the colony aims at guiding them toward becoming more complete individuals and more responsible citizens. In the political and existential search for self, Africa would enable Italians to fulfill a kind of manifest destiny, and Italy would reciprocate by bringing civilization to Africa.

The African-themed works by Gabriele D'Annunzio and Tommaso Marinetti are overrun by a similar attempt to exoticize Africa in order to provide a contrast to Italian society. At the same time, D'Annunzio and Marinetti's characters in *Più che l'amore* (1902) and *Mafarka il futurista* (1909), respectively, rise above the masses and Italian society to propose

a new way of being. Their characters provide an image of a new Italian man, and Africa becomes a largely fictitious creation that functions only in contrast to the unease of living within society. Both authors' African works belong to the time period between the Italian defeat at Adwa in 1894 and the 1935 Ethiopian Campaigns, during which the devastating counterattack on the Italian early advance in Ethiopia delayed Italy's colonial headway in Africa. D'Annunzio and Marinetti are, in this sense, interpreters of the confused emotional state of their time, as Anna Meda and Giovanna Tomasello have eloquently discussed, and their works reflect a desire to fill an ideological void in post-unification Italy related to its failure at Adwa and its general political mediocrity (89; 31).

Africa continues to act as reassuring place for Italian societal anxieties during the transition from the post-unification period to the Fascist era, however in the Fascist colonial novels we witness an interesting reversal as native people of the colonies are brought closer to Italians and Africa is presented as identical to Italy. Depictions of Africa as a land of adventure, free from societal constraints and the individual's conflictual relationship with society, as had been presented by earlier literary works and by authors such as D'Annunzio and Marinetti, became incompatible with the regime's ideological demands (Tomasello 1984, 103). The colonial novel now emphasized the progress that Italians had brought to Africa and the transformation of the African landscape from a wilderness, full of immense forests, vast deserts, and exotic beasts, into an urban space populated with homes, churches, railroads, and roads (Ricci 1998, 154; Scotto di Luzio 1996, 215–216; Tomasello 1984, 94). Transformed by progress, the equatorial landscape and its inhabitants gradually lost their exotic traits, and the Italian colonies began to resemble the motherland (Scotto di Luzio 1996, 216). The similarities between Italy and Africa depicted in the colonial novel were as fictional as the differences described in the earlier accounts of Africa's exotic otherness, and the aesthetic devices used in both kinds of narratives concealed the political motives behind colonialism. Whereas writers of the early exotic accounts had strategically manufactured difference to justify the colonizer's domination over the colonized, the colonial novelists used mimicry to manufacture a resemblance between the Italian Self and the colonized Other.

Given the social tension created by the *meticcio* population in this period, it is not hard to see why being able to successfully pass as white became a literary motif. Mimicry, particularly as theorized by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, is a prevalent aspect of passing in a number of Fascist colonial novels. As both the tendency of the subjugated to imitate their subjugators in the hope of gaining some of their power, as well as the colonizer's desire to become a model to be copied and admired

by the colonized, mimicry nonetheless precludes an absolute equivalence between the two, since the colonizer's superiority ultimately depends on difference rather than similarity (Bhabha 1994, 86). The colonized must remain a bad copy of the colonizer ("almost the same but not quite"), producing, at best, exaggerated replicas of the colonizer's language, culture, and behavior, which expose the underlying differences between them and often create humorous situations bordering on mockery (Bhabha 1994, 85–92).[6] Even in the noblest instances, when the colonizer wishes to provide the colonial subject with an ideal model, the attempt and desire to adhere to that model also characterizes the colonizer's vain attempts to conform to his own constructed self-image (Bhabha 1994, 85–92). Therefore, mimicry is a double-edged sword; employed by the colonizer as an instrument of control, it also becomes a subversive tool that allows the Other to challenge colonial authority (Bhabha 1994, 85–92).

In Fascist colonial novels, the native is made to look *almost* like the colonizer in order to showcase Italy's capacity to elevate the savage natives into a civilized population. Two novels of the period, Rosolino Gabrielli's *Il piccolo Brassa* (1928) and Arnaldo Cipolla's *Melograno D'Oro* (1936) feature light-skinned native children, Mahmud and Melograno, respectively. Both novels were published prior to the 1940 law barring colonial *meticci* citizenship, although the regime had already sensed the dangers posed by a potentially large population of *meticci* and by the invasion of Ethiopia had already begun to take legal stance to prevent the phenomenon of miscegenation. Given their age, light skin color and the absence of their parents (one is an orphan and the other's parents disappear early in the novel), Mahmud and Melograno, unable to claim a place within Italian society, are unmistakable references to the mixed-race children of Italian residents in the colonies, and both characters exemplify how Fascist propaganda literature suppressed reality by filtering out elements beyond its control. Rather than explicitly portray *meticcio* children, Gabrielli and Cipolla substitute them with the constructed hybrid figures of the askari and the 'passer.' Mahmud's western uniform and Italian accent put comical distance between the copy and the original, while descriptions of the Ethiopian Melograno's unnaturally fair complexion justify her beauty and appeal. Yet, despite their attempts at masking reality, the novels leave many contradictions unresolved and, although both Gabrielli and Cipolla discouraged their readers from sympathizing with or desiring the subjugated figure (since these attitudes would reverse the roles of dominator and dominated, superior and inferior), it is unclear if the authors truly succeed in encouraging their Italian characters and readers to feel superior to the black protagonist and preventing them from realizing that they do not correspond to the ideal image constructed by the plot.

The Copy and the (Ab)Original: Mimicry in Fascist Propagandist Literature

Rosolino Gabrielli was a well-regarded writer and journalist in the Fascist cultural circle, known for his contribution to the regime's propaganda; *Il piccolo Brassa* is one of many children's books of the period. Patrizia Palumbo and Adolfo Scotto di Luzio's respective studies on literary production targeting juvenile audiences illustrate how Fascism considered children to be the guardians of its moral values and the future icons of the nation, and thus the most important figures to be molded. The indoctrination of youth was a key element of the Fascist project and, throughout the Fascist *ventennio,* "the regime systematically fed young Italians its ideological doctrines" by taking over their academic and social lives, creating textbooks, recreational youth associations and radio broadcasts, and promoting a subcategory of colonial literature dedicated to young readers (Palumbo 2003, 225). Many of the children's stories set in Africa feature young Italian characters that leave home in search of their lost family or father. In Palumbo's studies on colonial children's novels, the scholar uses the appellative "orphans of the Empire," and orphanhood is indeed an important and recurring element in these novels since it provides the impetus for the stories' action. Scotto di Luzio has identified several unifying elements within the genre: The children's colonial novel, like its adult counterpart, aims for realism rather than adventure or sentimentalism; it focuses not only on the movement of young Italians into Africa, but also that of the indigenous population toward Italian civilization; the motif of the young native that is cleaned, fed, and cared for by an Italian colonial family is frequently presented as a microcosm of the colonial campaign, suggesting that the young native's physical and intellectual transformation mirrored the process of bringing civilization to the entire indigenous population; and, finally, the colonial territory is depicted as a new homeland for both Italian settlers and natives, reinforcing the myth of colonization as a civilizing mission with the potential to unite whites and blacks in their eagerness to transform the African land into an efficient colony (202; 215–218).

Il piccolo Brassa displays almost all of these salient characteristics in its depiction of a young Bedouin from the Brassa Tribe who is adopted by the Italian army in Libya and raised to become an *askari* soldier. The reader follows Mahmud's progress indirectly through the novel's third-person narration, as well as through the narration of the Italian soldier, Renzo Lunati, who befriends him. In this way, Gabrielli makes sure that Mahmud's position remains secondary to Renzo's; he is never given his own voice and is always a step behind Renzo. Moreover, Mahmud is often

described in terms of his attachment to his dog, Menelik, to the point where the native protagonist is equated more frequently with the animal than with the Italian soldiers.

> L'uno era l'ombra dell'altro. Si dividevano in fraternità tutti i regali; e dolorucci e gioie avevano comuni. Se Renzo era costretto a tirar le orecchie al suo scolaro o ad affibbiargli uno scarpaccione, Menelik mugolava in sordina, lamentosamente. E se a Renzo capitava di pestare la coda al cane, ecco Mahmud correre accanto al suo amico, a carezzargli la parte offesa e dirgli certe paroline di conforto italo-arabe che Menelik ascoltava gravemente, mugolando di piacere. (Gabrielli 1928, 111)
>
> The one was the shadow of the other. They shared all gifts in fraternity, the same pains and the same joys. If Renzo was forced to chastise the boy or give him a slight kick, Menelik whimpered quietly, sorrowfully. And if Renzo happened to step on the dog's tail, there was Mahmud, running to his friend's side, petting the wounded part and providing small words of comfort in Italian and Arabic, which Menelik accepted solemnly, whimpering with pleasure.[7]

The little Brassa's ungainly Italian further serves to separate the copy (Mahmud the *askari*) from the original (Renzo the Italian soldier):

> Io stare contento assai. Io fare ascaro, poi diventare muntàz (caporale), poi bulùk-basci (sergente), poi ìusc-basci (maresciallo)… Fare sempre Guerra, avere mai paura, sempre bum! E avanti come soldato italiano. (Gabrielli 1928, 159)
>
> I be very happy. I do *askari*, then become corporal, then sergeant and then marshal… Make war always, be afraid never, always bang bang! And onward, like Italian soldier.

Mahmud's uniform is another comic element that reinforces his inferior rank; although the army's tailor sews him a uniform in the style of the officers and Mahmud is proud of the outer pockets on his jacket and the riding-style pants from which his thin legs sprout, he is unable to find an appropriate pair of shoes.

> I soldati si sa non sogliono avere piedi da Cenerentola… Dopo lunghe e laboriose ricerche nel ripostiglio della fureria, Renzo aveva dovuto contentarsi delle scarpe più piccole che gli era riuscito di trovare. Ma si trattava pur sempre d'un paio di arnesi tali che avrebbero potuto affrontare e compiere la traversata dell'oceano Pacifico. Mahmud fu addirittura terrorizzato dall'imponente aspetto di quegli scarponi e si guardò attorno e tentò di darsela a gambe. (Gabrielli 1928, 100)

> Soldiers, as we know, don't usually have tiny Cinderella feet… After long and laborious hunts in the closet of the orderly room, Renzo had had to make do with the smallest pair of shoes he had been able to find. But they were still a piece of gear that seemed capable of crossing the Pacific Ocean. Mahmud was actually scared of the imposing quality of those great shoes; he looked around and tried to make a run for it.

Mahmud's large shoes distinguish him from the other soldiers, who are unable to hold back their laughter as they watch the little *askari*, otherwise so orderly and clean, drag his feet in the enormous shoes. The character of Mahmud provides an example of how mimicry is used to mitigate racial otherness without posing a threat to white superiority. His blackness is nearly erased by a good shower, a white uniform, and Renzo's efforts to transform him into an *askari* soldier. Mahmud's exotic traits gradually disappear until the young Bedouin feels substantially integrated in the Italian community to fight against his former people, the Brassas, in Italy's struggle to conquer Libya. He even betrays his tribe leader, Abdalla, who is preparing an attack against the Italian military camp. Mahmud reveals the content of Abdalla's conversation with other Bedouins.

> Dieci minuti dopo Renzo apprendeva ogni cosa dalla viva voce di Mahmud. Con un diluvio di parole italo-arabe il ragazzo gli aveva riferito quanto era stato detto nella baracca del *suk* e Renzo non tardò a comprendere che la cosa era grave. (Gabrielli 1928, 121)
>
> Ten minutes later, Renzo learned everything from Mahmud himself. In a flood of Italian and Arabic words, the boy had relayed what had been said in the *suk*, and Renzo understood immediately that it was a serious matter.

Far from being deemed a betrayal, the episode is meant to represent the culmination of Mahmud's transformation and mark the moment in which the colonial territory becomes his true homeland. His loyalty and gratitude to the Italians, sealed by his betrayal of Abdalla, emphasize that the relationship between colonizer and colonized is founded on respect rather than violence or economic gain, not unlike the Fascist motto that dictates to "first conquer souls, then territories" (qtd. in Scotto di Luzio 1996, 216–217). Yet, despite Mahmud's absolute faithfulness and eagerness to become Italian, there are two major events in the novel that prevent him from true social advancement. The first is triggered by Renzo's letter to his parents on the eve of his homecoming. Appealing to his

father's sense of compassion, Renzo asks permission to bring Menelik and Mahmud home with him.

> Babbo vi prego concedetemi il permesso di condurre con me, a casa nostra, due amici. Uno è un cane bello e intelligente [...] che mi ha seguito in Africa per un pezzo di pane e uno sguardo di bontà. L'altro è un arabetto: un bel ragazzo di quindici anni [...] che ho raccolto ferito sul campo, l'ho curato e guarito: era un selvaggio e ne ho fatto un uomo. Adesso parla, legge e scrive l'italiano. Se voi pensate babbo che questi beduini nulla hanno di umano all'infuori delle sembianze, sareste contento di sapere che vostro figlio ha salvato uno di questi sciagurati, e ne ha fatto un essere civile, e *può diventare un cristiano, e conta sul vostro appoggio per completare l'opera bella*. (Gabrielli 1928, 149; enfasi aggiunta)
>
> Father, I ask your permission to bring two friends home with me. One is a smart and beautiful dog [...] that followed me around Africa in exchange for a bit of bread and a kind glance. The other is a young Arab, a strong boy of fifteen [...] who I found wounded on the field, treated and healed; he was a savage and I've made a man of him. He now speaks, reads, and writes Italian. If you think, Father, that beyond their outward appearance, there is nothing human about these Bedouins, you would be happy to know that your son has saved one of these wretches and civilized him, and that *he can become a Christian and needs your help to complete his redemption*. (emphasis added)

Aside from the unrelenting comparison of Mahmud to the dog, it is significant that Renzo does not receive the reply that he had hoped for from his father:

> Ho letto con profondo stupore quanto mi scrivi. Credo fermamente che il sole d'Africa t'abbia scaldato un po' la zucca. [...] Convinciti che né io né tua madre vogliamo saraceni per la casa; non vedo perché tu debba regalarcene uno, salvo che non sia tua intenzione metter su una baracca alla Fiera ed esibirvi, a venti centesimi il biglietto, quel sacchetto di nerofumo. (Gabrielli 1928, 151)
>
> Your words have left me dumbfounded. I am inclined to believe that the African sun has gone to your head. [...] Rest assured that neither your mother nor I want any Arabs in the house; I don't understand why you'd want to give us one, unless it is your intention to open a stand at the fairgrounds and exhibit, for twenty cents a ticket, that carbon black sack.

Were he allowed to pursue higher education in Italy and convert to Catholicism, Mahmud the copy could become dangerous, threatening

to blur racial boundaries. By means of Renzo's father, Gabrielli blocks Mahmud's progress. In trying to keep the Bedouin's position secondary to Renzo's, Gabrielli applies the final twist, and when Mahmud dies, the event is narrated by Renzo some time after the fact, in order to prevent the reader from feeling proximity or emotional involvement to the character:

> Alla conquista di Tècniz, nel cuore della Cirenaica bella e infida, lo *iuscbasci* del III Battaglione Libico, Mahmud, assalito da un folto gruppo di beduini ribelli mentre portava un ordine scritto al proprio comandante, si difese da valoroso e morì colpito al petto. Dopo aver distrutto quell'ordine che era stato affidato al suo onore e alla sua lealtà. (Gabrielli 1928, 165)
>
> Upon the conquest of Tècniz in the heart of the beautiful and treacherous Cyrenaica, Mahmud, marshal of the 3rd Libyan Battalion, overcome by a large group of Bedouin rebels as he was carrying a written order to his commander, defended himself bravely and died with a shot to the chest after having destroyed the order that had been entrusted to the honorable and loyal soldier.

On one hand, Mahmud's tragic death can be seen as Gabrielli's means of permanently blocking his social and moral development and preventing his ascent to a higher military rank (as *askari* soldiers were not allowed to enter the officer ranks of the Italian army, though the question was frequently raised).[8] At the same time, his death also reverses the roles of the colonized and the colonizer by revealing 'Mahmud the copy' as superior to the original. After returning to Italy, Renzo goes back to his studies and forgets his experience in Libya until the news of Mahmud's death restores Renzo's sense of responsibility to his homeland and inspires him to reenlist. As is made clear by Renzo's last words, it is now he and the reader who must move toward the ideal model provided by Mahmud's death: "I will remember them always, and *envy* them for their greater devotion" ("li ricordo sempre, sai? E li invidio per la loro devozione").[9] Gabrielli successfully adopts a series of expedients linked to mimicry; Mahmud's too-big shoes, his similarity to the dog, Menelik, and his poor knowledge of the Italian language all distance Mahmud the copy from Renzo the original. However, Gabrielli is not able to completely control the implications of his final message for it unwittingly reverses the hierarchy between superior ideal and inferior imitation, as Renzo and the reader must try to adhere to the ideal model of the Italian embodied by Mahmud.

Desire Unveiled: Sexual Transgression and Racial Passing

Narrative strategies in colonial novels also attempted to train Italian characters and audiences to master the sexual urges and desires that conflicted with societal demands (Pagliara 1991, 382; 441). In direct contrast with earlier depictions of mysterious African landscapes and sexual encounters with exotic women, 1930s colonial novels set boundaries on desire and aimed to prove that, contrary to the reality of interracial unions, Italian men were disgusted by the notion of intermingling with women of inferior races (Pagliara 1991, 431). Anne McClintock's volume, *Imperial Leather*—in which the scholar investigates the portrayal of European colonial enterprises as essentially male acts that were described analogously with sexual conquest, provides insight into the representations of native women that is applicable to the Italian colonial context. The analogy between colonial and sexual conquest, in which the indigenous woman served as the vessel through which western culture was diffused and through which the European male entered into the experience of difference (McClintock 1995, 24–28), was a common element of many accounts and memoirs written by Italian explorers, colonial residents, and civil servants beginning in the 1880s. In colonial novels, however, because it was no longer permissible to depict Africa as an exotic alternate reality or describe romances with native women, the association between sexual and colonial conquest of earlier literary works is replaced by the white male's aversion to women of inferior racial status. Mario Appelius's *Il cimitero degli elefanti* (1928) and Pina Ballario's *La sposa bianca* (1933) provide examples of the degree to which the colonial novel was in tune with the regime's racial policies. Both authors provide detailed, minute descriptions of daily life in the colonies in order to demonstrate how Italian citizens and natives respected the policies of racial separation. The Italian protagonist of *Il cimitero degli elefanti* is repulsed by the notion of taking a native concubine, while the title character of Ballario's novel, the white bride, negates the historical reality of interracial unions and promotes the ideal marriage as that between two Italians.

However, the authors did not always completely control the implications and results of their message, as is the case with Arnaldo Cipolla's novels. Cipolla was born into a family with a strong military tradition and traveled throughout Africa, first as a soldier and then as a journalist. As one of the most prolific writers of novels set in colonial Africa, his loyalty to the Fascist regime was renowned and his novels were not meant

to be ambivalent. His children's book, *Balilla regale* (1935), focuses on a young boy, Omar, initially believed to be a *meticcio* because of his darker complexion:

> Omar era bruno di carnagione, ma nulla nel viso e nel portamento denotava il negro. Aveva una fine testa ricciuta, una bella fronte ampia, un profilo perfettamente greco, il viso di un ovale perfetto, la bocca, il mento e il collo ben modellati, ed i suoi grandi occhi neri brillavano d'una viva intelligenza. (Cipolla 1935, 12)
>
> Omar's complexion was dark, but nothing in his face or posture denoted a *negro*. He had a small head of curly hair, a nice broad forehead, a perfect Greek profile, a perfectly oval face; his mouth, chin and neck were well sculpted and his large black eyes shone with a lively intelligence.

Both his name and ambiguous skin color make Omar a hybrid character able to 'pass' in different contexts. The Muslims call him Omar, but in the mountains he is called George, and his mother calls him Mesfun. The narrator himself likens Omar's behavior to that of the *balilla*, the members of the Italian Fascist Youth Movement, partly because of his incredible command of the Italian language (though he also speaks Arabic and several African languages perfectly, and has the gift of communicating with animals). In short, Cipolla's protagonist is meant to provide an idol for young readers and, at the end of the novel, we discover that the boy is in fact the son of Italians, his complexion having been darkened only by excessive exposure to the sun. The reader's admiration for Omar is justified by the revelation that Omar's father, Paolo Bracci, was an Italian explorer and his mother had been among the first Europeans to travel in Africa. Although Italian, Omar passes for a native on multiple occasions, not unlike Kipling's Kim, another cultural hybrid. Omar, like Kim, is viewed positively as "the colonial who passes as Other, the better to govern," (70) to borrow from Anne McClintock's discussion of the character of Kim. Likewise, Cipolla conceals his character's true identity not to subvert colonial power, but to reinforce it by blurring the distinction between the colonizer and the colonized in order to better affirm the former's control. McClintock has also noted that, while "passing down the cultural hierarchy is permissible; passing 'up' is not," (70) which perhaps explains why the character of Mahmud in Gabrielli's *Il piccolo Brassa* is mainly a caricature and must die, whereas Omar's ethnic background prevents him from becoming a comic copy and allows him to eventually be named King of Ghera, the African community that becomes host to an Italian colonial outpost.

To a large extent, the hybrid protagonist of *Balilla regale* successfully conveys Cipolla's intended political message,[10] but the same cannot be said of the author's subsequent novel, *Melograno d'oro*. Once again, the protagonist is a passer, this time a beautiful young Ethiopian girl with extremely light skin. Cipolla draws on Ethiopia's legendary origins as a noble and light-skinned Semitic race that was later contaminated by intermarriage with the black Galla people. Fate reminds the Ethiopians of their sin and every 500 years in Ethiopia, a light-skinned girl is born. Traveling to join her future husband, heir to the Ethiopian throne, Melograno, who is barely fifteen, is covered by veils to protect her from being seen:

> La celebrazione degli occhi, della bocca e della carnagione di Melograno, se formavano da tempo il tema preferito dei cantori girovaghi dal violino a una corda sola, era frutto di pura immaginazione, poiché nessuno, all'infuori degli intimi, aveva mirato il viso di Melograno. Gli altri si dovevano contentare dell'apparizione della sua personcina slanciata, drappeggiata nel candore di *bornus* profumati e sotto i quali spuntavano i piccoli piedi ignudi, offerti in mostra come prova della bianchezza eccezionale della fanciulla. (Cipolla 1936, 4)
>
> The celebration of Pomegranate's eyes, mouth, and skin had been for some time the favored theme of traveling musicians…though born entirely of imagination, since no one other than her closest friends and family had ever seen Pomegranate's face. The others had to content themselves with the appearance of her slender figure, draped in the scented white *bornus*, her small bare feet poking out from beneath as proof of the girl's exceptional whiteness.

Cipolla, a fervent supporter of the regime's ideological orientation in the years leading up to the 1938 race laws, intentionally depicts his Ethiopian protagonist as a white woman to avoid making a native woman sexually appealing to his audience. Yet, although his portrayal of a black woman strays considerably from earlier depictions of the sensual, large-breasted black Venus, there are contradictory elements in *Melograno d'oro* that undermine Cipolla's message and objective of teaching male readers to control their erotic desires. Cipolla chooses the genre of the fairytale to dull the racist undertones of his plot, which echoed the theories diffused by Fascist anthropologists on the origin of Ethiopians while still conveying a clear moral. The author may have thought that an anthropological disquisition, often an integral part of the colonial novel, would weigh down the plot. The third-person narration of the novel and the complete absence of Italian characters help to distance readers from the sense of realism that first-person narration had provided in earlier colonial novels,

in which facts and firsthand experiences were recounted to encourage the reader to identify with the Italian protagonist.[11]

Although Melograno's body is intentionally hidden to protect both her virginity as well as the reader's attraction to her beauty, the desire to see her remains central to the text. Cipolla's narrative strategy unintentionally transforms the reader into a voyeur, allowing him to see without being seen and to desire a woman, despite her fair skin, that is culturally and biologically Ethiopian. Voyeurism, McClintock explains, much like pornographic fantasy, is characterized not only by a prohibited desire, but also by the pleasure derived from transgression (129). The voyeur is aware of this forbiddance but transgresses it because his pleasure is derived from that very infraction (McClintock 1995, 129). Forbiddance is the *sine qua non* condition of voyeuristic pleasure. The reader, aware of his position as a voyeur and Melograno's Ethiopian identity, actively participates in a transgressive act. Paradoxically, the reader is granted privileges—such as invading her privacy and watching her undress—that other characters (including Melograno's husband) are denied. In these episodes, Cipolla's language becomes highly erotic:

> Con un brivido Melograno s'immerse. Nella penombra che la lampada tenuta alta da Alagè rischiarava, il contrasto fra la pelle dorata della fanciulla e le brune epidermidi delle schiave suscitava un incredibile effetto. Chine sulla vasca, le loro abili mani insaponate passavano e ripassavano rapide, leggere, sul corpo della bianca; i suoi bianchi seni lampeggiavano come bronzo polito ai movimenti energici delle braccia. [...] La bocca appena tumida che s'apriva sulla fila dei piccoli denti perlacei, brillava di piacere. (Cipolla 1936, 30)
>
> With a shiver, Pomegranate immersed herself in the water. In the semi-darkness illuminated by the lamp held high by Alagè, the contrast between the girl's golden skin and the dark skin of the slaves who washed her had a stunning effect. Bent over the basin, their lathered capable hands passed over and over again, quickly, lightly, the statuesque body of the white girl; her white breasts shone like polished bronze under the arms' vigorous motion. [...] Her mouth slightly swollen, opening over the row of pearly teeth, was breathless with pleasure.

With her pale skin, Melograno should present no serious threat to the reader-voyeur, except that her ability to pass for a white woman does not change the fact that she is African. In this regard, *Melograno d'oro* makes an unmistakable reference to the *meticcio* population that was perceived as a problem. Cipolla's novel illustrates how, because sexual intercourse is the cause of miscegenation, discourses of racial identity and sexuality

are necessarily intertwined in the representation of mixed-race subjects. Such a conflation of sexuality, race, and national belonging made it challenging to express a coherent ideological position, and Cipolla is only one of many authors and artists who conveyed contradictory messages even when their political intent was clear. Ultimately, although the novel replaces the black Venus and warns against miscegenation as a threat to white prestige, it also pays a final tribute to the African woman's beauty.

A reading of colonial novels like *Il piccolo Brassa* and *Melograno d'oro* clearly shows how Fascist propaganda literature, even prior to the 1940 law barring biracial children from citizenship, replaced the historical hybrid of the *meticcio* with the constructed hybrids of the *askari* and passer in an attempt to control the perception of mixed-race individuals without making the historical phenomenon of *meticci* visible or admitting to the reality of interracial unions. Novels such as *Il cimitero degli elefanti* and *La sposa bianca* may have portrayed Italian characters as possessing an incredible capacity for self-control and discipline that prevented them from yielding to the black Venus, but in reality the number of *meticcio* children in the colony before and after the Ethiopian Campaigns did not diminish. The attempt to provide a visible, easily recognizable model of white prestige and Italian identity that could be emulated and admired by black characters and white audiences alike, was difficult if not counterproductive, and the hyperbolic adulation of Italy's national identity, strength, and courage was almost always incompatible with the desire to create a realistic artistic form.

Political demands on discussing questions of race and national identity collided with the very nature of this literary genre, which had developed in the light of exoticism. It was impossible to stigmatize exotic elements such as the landscape and indigenous women without destroying the genre, and a close reading of these novels reveals that the literature affiliated with the Fascist regime failed to condemn miscegenation and draw clear boundaries between the ruler and the ruled. As in the case of *Il piccolo Brassa*, the ideal model is often provided by the African character and, as in *Melograno d'oro,* the discourse of desire surrounding the native woman is in many ways continued rather than suppressed. Rather than placate anxieties about Italian racial purity and superiority, these works demonstrate the absence rather than the presence of certain values and feelings within the Italian cultural fabric; they are overrun by contradictions that expose the chasm between what is stated and what actually happened and undermine the author's ideological platform.

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2

The Dissident Literature of Enrico Pea and Fausta Cialente

Undermining Fascist Policies of Regeneration

In examining Italy during Mussolini's early years in power, scholars of Italian Fascism concur that the markers of Italian membership and the criteria for belonging were not ingrained in an essentialist view of national identity. Recent studies by James Mayfield and Mable Berezin provide extensive discussion on how the notion of a national identity in Italy was still unsteady when Mussolini came to power in 1922, more than 60 years after the country's unification. Mayfield notes that there was no graduated scale of belonging for the northern Italian communities bordering present-day Austria and Switzerland, nor for the Slovenian, Croatian, and Albanian populations that lived within the Italian national territory, just as no "innate ethos" excluded Italy's colonial subjects or its Jewish citizens (3). On the contrary, prior to becoming the direct targets of Fascism's discriminatory policies, many Jews and minorities residing in the Kingdom of Italy had supported the movement for unification and contributed to Mussolini's rise to power (Mayfield 2011, 3). Only later, as the Fascist state[1] began to progressively define the Italian identity in response to the regime's changing needs and its increasingly belligerent stance, would these citizens be relegated to distinct, inferior categories of racial belonging (Mayfield 2011, 4; Berezin 1999, 357). In this chapter, the fear of a physical degeneration in the Italic stock ("stirpe italica") through interracial unions and proximity to presumably inferior races only acts as the background of an analysis that is primarily concerned with the Fascist regime's fear of the influence of foreign models on Italian culture, and the devastating effects they could produce. Ethnic communities living within Italy's territory, on the mainland and in the colonies, represented only one of various internal threats to the Italian identity.

At the time of its unification in 1860, Italy was culturally fragmented and its inhabitants, far from sharing a collective Italian consciousness, were tied to profoundly diverse "regional identities and loyalties" (Berezin 1999, 363). Within a landscape of "cultural, social and economic fragmentation," Italy in many ways continued to lack "Italians," and the Fascist regime responded by developing a cultural project aimed at forging a well-defined and easily recognizable national identity based on strength of character, moral values and loyalty to the homeland (Berezin 1999, 365).[2] Ruth Ben-Ghiat discusses in her fundamental study *La cultura fascista* how, against claims that the Italian population had been "feminized and disarmed by centuries of foreign domination" and the politics of an inept ruling class, Fascism proposed to remodel the Italian culture with the aim of forming a new Italian population and new customs and habits (15–16). Philip Cannistraro is one of primary scholars who have noted that in order to achieve such an ambitious cultural program, Mussolini needed to gain and maintain control over the country's population by creating deep bonds between the Italian masses and the regime (1975, 8–9; 69–71). During his rise to power, Mussolini relied on a hard line of agitation propaganda, inciting the masses and intimidating individuals considered enemies of the Fascist party (Cannistraro 1975, 69–71). To create a new national consciousness and consolidate his power, Mussolini later began to explore more subtle means of infiltrating the lives of Italy's diverse socio-economic groups (Cannistraro 1975, 9).

Among many, historians Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Aaron Gillette maintain that the introduction of racism into the nation's dominant ideology was not the improvised or sudden result of the Fascist alliance with Nazi Germany formalized by the 1939 Pact of Steel, but rather can be viewed as the result of a long series of nationalistic initiatives (2004, 39; 2002, 52–53). In an attempt to collectively foster Italy's renewal, Mayfield asserts, the early Fascist state had accepted the presence of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities, provided they obeyed its governance and adopted the cultural practices it endorsed (2). Markers of Italian identity became more rigidly defined in the 1930s, when Mussolini attempted to reconfigure various aspects of society and forge new ties between the country's diverse local and regional identities by relying on Italy's cultural Roman heritage (Mayfield 2011, 2; Berezin 1999, 365). Rather than define national identity in terms of contemporary political or geographical unity within the Kingdom of Italy, the Fascist regime intentionally ignored the traces and influences of Italy's recent, Liberal past, and instead boasted the similarities between contemporary Fascist Italy and Ancient Roman glory (Cannistraro 1975, 139). The establishment of a national identity was thus presented as a process of regeneration rather than invention, as Fascism

claimed only to restore what had already belonged to Italy's character and spirit (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 12–16; Cannistraro 1975, 147).

Focusing on the notion of social regeneration, Ben-Ghiat's *La cultura fascista* examines how it grew out of the Fascist project of reclamation or *bonifiche*. The guiding principles behind the goal of transforming marshland into viable farmland in various Italian regions, including Sicily, Sardinia, Tuscany, Puglia, and Veneto, were extended to notions of biological and social purification (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 13). In discussing the ways the Fascist state started to rationalize the intervention and targeting of individuals who were seen to impede the goals of "social harmony and national renewal," Ben-Ghiat's study exhibits traces of positivist anthropology (36). Anthropologist Cesare Lombroso had used this same language to describe individuals who were thought to pose a threat to "the efficient functioning of the national community," including not only "criminals, political rebels and prostitutes," but also the bearers of certain physical traits, such as southern Italians (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 36).

Eugenics was thus an important aspect of early Fascist efforts at establishing national identity. As early as 1927, after Mussolini's *Ascension Day* address to the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Italy's declining fertility rate led to a series of pronatalist legal measures that were implemented to promote population growth. During the 1930s, changes to the Penal Code (the introduction of the Rocco Code) made all behaviors considered harmful to the health of the Italian race punishable by crime. However, as Aaron Gillette argues in his *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy*, throughout the 1930s Mussolini gradually came to embrace the conviction that races should be altered by eugenics but also by obsessively promoting Italian myths (53). While being a supporter of eugenics and believing that the Italian civilization could be improved by preventing individuals with undesirable traits from reproducing, Mussolini also had faith that the myth of Rome had the power to transform Italians from a "race of slaves" into "race of masters," and provided increasing support for studies and institutes whose principal purpose was to prove the continuity between Ancient Rome and Fascist Italy, as well as the spiritual unity of Italian people throughout the ages (Gillette 2002, 50–55).

In order to alter not only the Italian population's genetic makeup but also its sense of national belonging and cultural heritage, Mussolini was convinced that it would be necessary to combine eugenics with a program of cultural reform that would incite ideological and behavioral change (Gillette 2002, 50–55). The notion of Italy's shared cultural and spiritual background provided an important foundation for Fascist racial discourse, which theorized that once the innate qualities of the Italic stock were rediscovered, Italians would emerge as a uniform population in spite

of their diverse regional origins (Cannistraro 1975, 147). Through this line of discourse, Mussolini reiterated historical ideas of unity and legacy, selectively tracing Italian roots back to the earliest peoples living in the Italian peninsula, the cultural heritage of the Ancient Romans, and the moral values of the Roman Catholic Church.

What did it mean to be Italian in the Fascist Italy of the 1930s? Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop respond to this question in *Bianco e nero* when they consider the attributes that determined an ideal model of citizenship beginning in the post-unification period until present-day. According to the two scholars, the concepts of citizenship, national identity, and whiteness are inextricably connected. In analyzing the transformations in the Italians' "color line" or whiteness—the foundation of citizenship and national identity—Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop maintain that the notion of Italic stock allowed Fascism to carry out a process of whitening the "internal black," which was understood to be an individual from the South or from a lower socioeconomic status (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 42). The notion of whiteness during the Liberal era referred to an aesthetic condition that "concealed a political and class element" since dark skin represented a life of manual labor and poverty, and thus became a synonym for social and racial subalternity (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 35; 42–43). In Liberal Italy, the color line separated "true" Italians of the wealthy North from the less-white populations from the South who were stereotypically represented as poor farmers and thus racially inferior (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 42).

In the Fascist Italy of the 1930s, whiteness was not a phenotypic feature but a status that legitimized citizenship based on a "cultural and historical heritage" (the membership in the Italic stock) and by virtue of "precise positions of class and gender" in compliance with Fascist practices that were driven toward creating new Italian men and women (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 42). By unifying Italians based on a common historical and cultural background rather than in a strictly anthropological sense, the Italic stock racialized them in a *self-referential* way, meaning that it established a sense of cohesion that eliminated any internal differences (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 52). The Ethiopian conquest and the eventual creation of the African colonial empire positioned blackness outside of the metropole and *hetero-referentially* racialized Italians (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 52–53). Their whiteness was thus derived from the comparison with Africans and from the conformity to Fascist ideals that taught Italianness, proper ways of being citizens, and behavioral discipline since whiteness and citizenship were claimed to come with a series of responsibilities (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 53).

The Fascist regime established an Italian whiteness through comparison with black peoples of the colonies, and equally sought to manufacture and enforce an Italian way of life and conduct that distinguished its citizens from other foreign nationals. Among many, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Philip Cannistraro, and Steven Ricci have discussed how, within its program of societal renewal, the Fascist regime discouraged lifestyles and behaviors that had been imported from abroad by various forms of broadcast and print media, and especially magazines and films. In her seminal study on Mussolini's efforts to control consumer culture in the attempt to define the role of women in Italian public life, Victoria De Grazia analyzes how Italy's position of marginality in the western market, combined with its struggling domestic market and backward distribution systems, made the country vulnerable to foreign cultural influences, especially from United States and France (341). As protector of Italian mores, the Fascist regime also sought to avert the dangers associated with the social and cultural changes that arose with the country's move toward modernization. The proliferation of foreign goods and the emergence of a mass consumer society were associated with the risk of imitating foreign cultures and jeopardizing Italy's cultural background and sense of national identity (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 9–12; Cannistraro 1975, 7–8; Ricci 1998, 158).

In their respective studies on how politics shaped consumer choices and consumption habits in Italy, both Emanuela Scarpellini and Carol Helstosky emphasize the role of Fascist economic policies in reinforcing national identity. The regime adopted a series of policies to direct private consumption away from foreign merchandise by promoting self-sufficiency and domestic goods (Scarpellini 2008, 92). Phrases such as *national produce* and *made in Italy* were used in most commercial advertisements and the appeal to patriotism was successful in turning consumption into a key process to the nation's economic development (Scarpellini 2008, 87–88). At the same time, the purchase and consumption of domestic goods remained a fundamental aspect of promoting an austere rather than a luxurious lifestyle that corresponded to the model that had been prefigured by Mussolini's goals of national regeneration (Helstosky 2004, 63–64). As they gained influence over consumption habits, Fascist propagandist practices attempted to garner public support of austerity by associating the acquisition of foreign goods and luxuries with a lifestyle that contradicted the values of the state (Scarpellini 2008, 88). In short, the anti-consumptionist Fascist regime pushed the country toward economic and agricultural self-sufficiency, "imposed on the consumers more expensive Italian products" by equating the purchase

of Italian goods with the fulfillment of a patriotic duty (Scarpellini 2008, 87), and encouraged "sober consumption habits," "renunciation and thriftiness as national virtues" (Helstosky 2004, 64).

In response to the proliferation of foreign goods, tabloids, and films, which provided consumers and audiences with a potential alternative to the lifestyle and role models promoted by Fascism (Ricci 2008, 129–130), Mussolini devised several modes of diffusing a common system of values that would bond Italians to the state and integrate all citizens "into a single national experience" (Cannistraro 1975, 9). Mussolini established Fascist sports clubs, state welfare programs, party rallies, and tightened his control over mass media in an attempt to inculcate the masses with a new sense of Italy's identity and national mission (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 17–18; Cannistraro 1975, 67–73; Landy 1986, 7). The Fascist regime attempted to reach and attract disparate social classes by developing cultural activities that penetrated all aspects of daily life, whether in the home, workplace, school or community spaces dedicated to recreation (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 17–18; Cannistraro 1975, 67–73; Landy 1986, 7). The *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* was the regime's largest and most active organization in charge of leisure and recreational activities.

It is beyond the scope of this study to map the tools of Fascist propaganda at work in organizations such as the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* that were used by the regime to fascistize the Italian population. My investigation is instead invested in the analysis of certain aspects of literary and cinematic production that pertain to Mussolini's propaganda, specifically in regard to colonial literature and cinema of the 1930s. In this chapter, I will focus on the dissident literature of Fausta Cialente and Enrico Pea, Italian writers who lived in colonial Egypt, a space they interestingly describe as lacking a definite national identity or culture. Pea and Cialente substitute the notion of national belonging with the diametrically opposed affirmation of the right to live in a state of permanent rootlessness. Their emphasis on the cultural hybridism of Alexandrian society presents the reader with a wider spectrum and an alternative model of cultural identity that challenges the binary view of Italians versus non-Italians and of the superiority of the Italic stock versus the inferiority of other ethnicities. My analysis of Pea's novels *Il servitore del diavolo* (1929) and *Rosalia* (1943), as well as that of Cialente's narratives, *Pamela o la bella estate* (1935) and *Cortile a Cleopatra* (1936), is closely related to the theoretical concept of Levantinism, defined by Gil Hochberg in *In Spite of Partition. Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* as an imaginary space in which one is deprived of cultural heritage. Within the Levantinism described in Pea and Cialente's novels, the lack of cultural authenticity and the absence of a stable and clearly defined cultural

affiliation is not a stigmatizing condition but rather a fiercely defended privilege.

On the other hand, the kind of cultural melding promoted in Pea and Cialente's novels represented a threat to the Fascist regime's program of constructing a new Italian identity by implying that Italians residing in Egypt could lose their sense of nationality and culture. Alexandria's Italian Levantines were *white* Italians by birth who lacked most of the common values and attitudes of mainland Italians. During the rise of Fascism in Italy, Alexandria was a cosmopolitan city, host to a large population of immigrants from various origins who, for diverse economic, political, ethnic and religious reasons, chose to make Egypt their permanent home. Aside from the communities of Europeans, including Italians, who had been attracted to Egypt by the certainty of economic gain, Alexandria provided refuge to thousands of Armenian and Greek exiles who had survived periodic Turkish persecutions between 1894 and 1916. The city also provided refuge to survivors of Czarist Russia's early-twentieth century surge of anti-Semitism, and later welcomed Jewish refugees of the Nazi and Fascist persecutions of the 1930s.

My interest in the Italian immigrant population of Alexandria is motivated by their supposedly dangerous exposure to presumably inferior races (the autochthonous population and Jews) and foreigners, such as Greeks, English, and French immigrants, whose lifestyles could cause Italian immigrants to abandon their national identity. For the Italians in Alexandria who lived in close proximity to other ethnic communities, it was cultural rather than racial mixing that changed their identity and sense of racial belonging. Thus, the concern that interracial unions would cause a physical degeneration of the Italic stock, as discussed in a previous chapter of this study, is only one dimension of the Fascist regime's fear of the influence and effects of foreign models on Italian culture.

Ann Laura Stoler's seminal volume, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power,* provides insight into the social groups that marked the limit of white prestige and colonial control as they arguably represented a great source of concern for the Fascist regime as well. The scholar argues that two convincing yet false precepts formed the basis of colonial authority: the belief that Europeans residing in the colonies comprised a separate and unique biological and social body bound by common class interests, racial traits, political preferences, and feelings of superiority, and secondly, the belief that the confines between colonizer and colonized were distinct and apparent (2002, 24–25). She points out that from the very beginning, European colonial communities were clearly marked by cultural criteria that distinguished them from the colonized, including housing, clothing, food, clubs, conversation, and recreation (24). Stoler asserts that this was

not in fact the colonial reality since within the European communities, women and poor whites represented a real threat to the dominant group's prestige and authority, and state policies seeking to keep them in line were similar in the ways they restrained either group (25).

In terms of Italy, Charles Burdett, Haile Larebo, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, and Mia Fuller have emphasized how colonialism in Africa had always been conceived as "the social outlet for Italy's surplus population" (Larebo 1994, 284), and therefore a "domain of the proletariat" (Burdett 2007, 122–123). It comes as no surprise that Mussolini envisioned the Ethiopian Campaigns (1935–1936) as a possibility to transfer proletariat masses outside of the Italian borders, transforming these forces into "virile warriors" whose hard work in the colonies would serve Italy's greater good, and whose presence in Africa would reverse the balance of power between whites and blacks (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 39; Falasca-Zamponi 1997, 40). As made clear by Mussolini's 1927 *Ascension Day* speech and his Preface to the Italian translation of Richard Korherr's 1928 book *Decline in Birth Rate*, it was claimed that a permanent community of colonists was of great necessity in the eventual colonial empire to prevent the white race (and western civilization by extension) from disappearing off the face of the earth (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 39).

Aside from safeguarding the Italic stock, the regime tried to justify the conquest of Ethiopia with a rhetoric implying that, by moving to the newly founded colony, lower-class laborers would almost immediately acquire a new social status because of their race. The link between ethnic identity and social class was to be an important element in the newly formed empire since race mediated social relations, and white skin color implied upper-class standing as much as dark skin meant lower-class status. Laborers' advancement in the social hierarchy was, though, *almost* immediate in the sense that upper-class standing required discipline and adopting a new lifestyle. Here it was hoped that Mussolini's regeneration policy for emigrants would truly become effective. Emigrants were expected to learn to feel the sentiments of racial prestige, which meant to be industrious workers, to dress and behave properly in front of natives. As Mia Fuller points out, emigrants were asked to civilize African native populations while "civilizing" and cleaning themselves up in the process (61).

While the Italic stock was intended to conceal the internal differences among Italians (including class differences), the transferring of lower-class laborers to the colonies further masked the existing social hierarchies since the comparison with colonial subjects afforded destitute Italians a higher social status by virtue of their whiteness. Previously in this analysis, I have discussed how the *meticcio* population posed a challenge to

Fascist colonial discriminatory policies, and thus became nonexistent in Fascist propagandist literature. Likewise, I argue here that the phenomenon of Italians "going native" undermined the unspoken goals of the demographic colonization in Ethiopia and remained equally ignored in Fascist propagandist works. In his book *La prova della razza,* Olindo De Napoli describes the phenomenon of *insabbiamento* or transformation of an Italian residing in the colonies into a native, caused by the prolonged and close contact with the local population. The historian maintains that the phenomenon must have been widespread for passing a 1937 legislation (*Legge organica per l'impero*) that punished Italian citizens who were caught in "social promiscuity" sentencing them up to five years in prison because, in the words of one of the legislation's creators, "being the bearers of a millennial civilization, the greatest in all the world, constitutes a higher responsibility" (qtd. in De Napoli 66).

On the topic of women being threats to white prestige in the colony, Barbara Sòrgoni, Robin Pickering-Iazzi, and Cristina Lombardi-Diop have argued that propagandist practices in constructing racial consciousness in 1930s Italy lent themselves to a redefinition of the Italian women's role. While single and lower-class women were discouraged from moving to the colonies (De Napoli 2009, 25–26; Sòrgoni 1998, 101–107), Italian wives were asked to join their men to safeguard their physical and spiritual health (Lombardi-Diop 2011, 8; Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233). On the one hand, the regime expected women to be active wives, mothers, and sisters and encouraged them to becoming the heroines of the colonial adventure (Pickering-Iazzi 2003, 203–204). On the other hand, they were constrained within the domestic walls, for their lives were carefully outlined with domestic chores and behaviors in their role as the keepers of Italian customs and the guardians of the white man's prestige and morality (Sòrgoni 1998, 231). Media coverage in the mid-1930s targeting female readers who considered joining family members in the colony, made used of a "cultural fantasy of dominance" rhetoric portraying colonial life as a long vacation for Italian citizens who would live separate from native populations as preventive measure against miscegenation and social promiscuity (Pickering-Iazzi 2003, 208).

Propaganda envisioning colonization in Ethiopia, though, relied on policies that were more drastic when dealing with single and lower class women. Before the Ethiopian conquest, notes De Napoli, interracial unions between an Italian woman and a colonial subject were rare (25–26). However, when the project of extensive demographic colonization in Ethiopia became imminent, the Fascist regime wanted to prevent at all costs what could become an embarrassing reality and accordingly discouraged Italian women living in the colonies from marrying colonial

subjects, with the penalty of losing their citizenship (De Napoli 2009, 25–26). The 1933 *Legge organica per l'Eritrea e la Somalia* represented the first step in preventing a phenomenon that was not widespread, but existed, and was tacitly ignored by propagandist production at the time.

While Fascist propagandist literature of the 1930s is reluctant to represent Italian characters that undermined the Fascist policies of regeneration and protection of the Italic stock, the dissident literature of Pea and Cialente exhibits a mosaic of Italians experiencing a cultural identity crisis. Alexandria was not an Italian colony but an Italian emigrant destination during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and home to four seminal Italian modernists—Tommaso Marinetti, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Enrico Pea, and Fausta Cialente—whose writings understandably demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to the political and moral undertones of Mussolini's racial and cultural program. As Lucia Re argues in "Alexandria Revisited," the particular trajectory of these four intellectuals' artistic development outside of the Italian literary sphere and their unique position as members of Alexandria's multicultural community can be seen as common factors that "set them apart from other Italian modernists" (167). Egypt and the Arab world provided these writers with "a frame of reference to which they would return for nourshiment" throughout their careers, even after moving back to Europe (Re 2003, 168). Given this personal and emotional experience, colonial Alexandria in their works comes alive as a vibrant city, a mass of diverse cultures, races, and religions that coexist peacefully.

Growing Up in the Shadow of Alexandria's Hybridism

Khaled Fahmy and Micheal Reimer's respective studies on the historical development of Egypt show how this Turkish province of the Ottoman empire gradually enlarged its sphere of independence during the eighteenth century as it established its own army, foreign policies, and commercial and political relationships with Europe. The American Civil War had halted Europe's cotton supply and Egypt, already a large producer of cotton, indigo and cane sugar, had become the principal supplier of these raw materials (Fahmy 1997, 11; Reimer 1997, 109). A series of early nineteenth-century reforms, combined with Egypt's commercial success, facilitated the modernization of the country's economic and political infrastructures, further insuring its relative political stability while the rest of the Mediterranean faced the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), and World War I (1914–1918) (Reimer 1997, 107–121). At the same time, Egypt also accumulated a significant amount of debt to

European creditors, particularly France and Great Britain, who had provided significant financial support to the Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal, founded in 1854 with the task of cutting through the Isthmus of Suez (Fahmy 1997, 12–14; Reimer 1997, 108).[3] By 1879, France and Britain had complete control over Egyptian finances, although the country formally remained under Ottoman sovereignty. Egypt was governed by Great Britain from 1882 to 1914, when it was officially declared a protectorate. In 1922, Great Britain formally granted Egyptian independence while still maintaining ample control over the country. 1924 saw the first Egyptian constitution, and Egyptian citizenship became formally effective in 1926.

Though Cairo remained the capital, a number of administrators established their main residences in Alexandria, where commercial activity flourished thanks to improvements to its port and its strategic position between Europe, Egypt, and the Indian Ocean (Reimer 1997, 115–116). By the late nineteenth century, Reimer notes, Alexandria provided the main port connecting Egyptian cultivation fields with European factories and was thus at the forefront of the economic and political scene in the Mediterranean (9). Alexandrian society was characterized by ethnic, cultural, and political hybridism, and thus, would eventually provide an alternative model of identity that was to challenge Fascism's claims of racial superiority and shared cultural identity. As Reimer explains, the city attracted not only foreign immigrants, but also thousands of Egyptian families who relocated in order to be exonerated from military service and property taxes (95). Foreigners further benefitted from the Capitulations—civil and commercial treaties that granted favorable conditions and privileges, such as tax exemptions and the precedence of consular over local laws (Reimer 1997, 10; 108–113). Until the reforms of 1876, which led to a new system of modified courts (and eventually to the 1937 abolition of the Capitulations), foreigners were able to abide by the laws of their country of citizenship and were judged in civil or criminal matters by consular representatives rather than Ottoman judges.

One of the most well-known studies on Alexandria, *Alexandria 1860–1960: The Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, edited by historians Robert Ilbert and Ilios Yannakakis, emphasizes how although technically a colony of Ottoman and, later, British rule, the city lacked the cultural and ethnic barriers typically established by colonial rule and was instead characterized by a fluid acceptance of diversity. For the foreign communities in Alexandria, the desire *not* to be affiliated with any specific country was as important as any feelings of national belonging to their countries of origin. Anouchka Lazarev's chapter in *Alexandria 1860–1960* is particularly insightful as it focuses on the Italian settlements that can

be traced back to the Middle Ages, when the city served as an important commercial junction for the twelfth-century Italian seafaring republics. Before Egyptian citizenship became effective in 1926, as Ilbert and Lazarev point out, it was common for members of Alexandrian society to request citizenship from the consulate of a foreign country, such as Italy, France, or Greece, thus effectively renouncing their native country (22; 76–77). An affiliation with certain foreign countries could facilitate commercial transactions and prove useful for employment, so it was not uncommon for members of the same family to request citizenship from different countries (Lazarev 1997, 76–77). Italian citizenship was frequently requested because it was considerably easy to obtain, even for individuals with no connection to the country and no knowledge of its language (Lazarev 1997, 76–77).

Marta Petricioli's *Oltre il mito. L'Egitto degli italiani (1917–1947)* provides a detailed analysis of the historical development of Italian settlements in Alexandria which increased in the early nineteenth century, when many Italian professionals, merchants, artisans, and laborers came to Alexandria in response to Egypt's call for rapid economic and urban development, including projects for dams, canals, ports and railways, in addition to the Suez Canal project which was completed in 1869. Petricioli argues that Italy's failed resistance movements of 1848 had created an influx of Italian emigrant refugees and, in the years following the Italian unification, economic need remained the principal force behind emigration (1–2). Unemployed workers heeded Egypt's call for laborers and a number of destitute Italians followed in the hope of taking advantage of relief organizations that had developed in wealthy Alexandria (Petricioli 2007, 1–2).

Similarly, Lucia Re's study on the Egyptian works of Pea and Ungaretti accurately describes how Alexandria contradicted "the essentialist myth of race, nation and cultural tradition" that elsewhere provided the basis for colonial authority and subjugation (174). What made Alexandrian society unusual was its lack of any normative identity regulating social relationships. For the Italians living in Egypt, because Italian citizenship was viewed mostly as a legal or economic formality, the notion of national belonging lost importance while also becoming more difficult to define. The markers of Italian identity were dictated by external and often superficial factors, such as pamphlets and newspapers that applauded Italy's role in Egypt's modernization and alluded to a natural affinity between the two countries, united by their common Greco-Roman ancestry and development in the modern period (Lazarev 1997, 75). Italy and Egypt were often depicted as two young nations moving at the same pace, and even the struggle for national independence from British rule in Egypt

was emphasized as being reminiscent of Italy's own recent struggle for unification (Lazarev 1997, 75).

With the consolidation of Mussolini's regime, the situation of Alexandria's Italian citizens became clearly problematic, as many Alexandrian residents who held Italian citizenship had been born in Egypt and had experienced limited contact with Italy (Lazarev 1997, 75–76). The enthusiasm with which Italian residents of Alexandria participated in Egyptian political events was also worrisome to the Fascist regime, which monitored the Italian communities abroad and adopted measures to safeguard the Italian identity of its emigrants throughout the 1930s (Lazarev 1997, 73; 76). In the attempt to reinforce bonds with the homeland and inculcate the values that Italians abroad seemed to have forgotten, Mussolini began a process of Italianization in Egypt. As Lazarev notes, Italian diplomats were carefully selected and instructed to identify potential opponents (78). While the community was increasingly pulled into Fascist organizations such as the *Dopolavoro*, older Italian associations were suspected of serving as veiled antifascist organizations and were banned (Lazarev 1997, 78).

The process of Italianization was especially invested in education. Teachers were sent from Italy and the attendance of all emigrant children in Italian schools was mandatory in order to maintain the right to citizenship (Lazarev 1997, 78–79). Children of emigrants could also attend summer camp in Italy in order "to contribute to the physical health of Italian children" and, as Renato Ricci, the president of the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*, stated in a 1933 edition of the newspaper, *Il legionario*, "to facilitate the achievement of those ideals pursued by the national government [...] and [...] help modify the negligent attitude of the Italian communities abroad" (qtd. in Petricioli 2007, 54). In many cases, as Lazarev clarifies, Fascism's intervention and control over various institutions in Egypt's Italian communities was only a formality that many citizens continued to ignore (79). The school system, for example, remained unchanged and wealthier families continued to send their children to Jewish and French schools (Lazarev 1997, 79).

It is not hard to see how Fascism's attempt to mold Italian identity clashed with Alexandria's characteristic tolerance of non-affiliation and its fluid notions of belonging based on convenience, economics, and the cultural heterogeneity of its population. The stark contrast between Fascist ideology and Alexandrian reality meant that the Italian communities remained indifferent or ambivalent to new attempts to define its national identity (Lazarev 1997, 79). As Lazarev notes, one should not be deceived by the enthusiasm with which the emigrants supported events such as the Ethiopian Campaigns or the dream of a Fascist Mediterranean, because

such excitement ingenuously originated from the *forma mentis* of a community that continued to put its identity as "Alexandrian, Levantine, Mediterranean," ahead of any feelings of Italianness (81–84). Lazarev views instances of deference to Fascist policy as a form of opportunism that the scholar describes as compliance out of convenience. For the historian, Fascism had always underestimated the ambivalent nature of the Italians in Alexandria, as their constant wavering and two-fold loyalty to the homeland and Egypt was regulated by opportunity (78–83). Whether out of convenience, indifference, or genuine adherence to Fascist policy, even the slightest cooperation with Fascism went against the norms that had previously dictated social coexistence in Alexandria, and thus the attitudes adopted or accepted by its Italian communities was necessarily regarded as problematic (Lazarev 1997, 78–83). More often than not, Mussolini's attempts to solidify the relationship between Italy and the Italian emigrants abroad ended up widening the gap between them and inciting anti-Fascist sentiments (Lazarev 1997, 78–83).

Petricioli discusses the introduction of the 1938 race laws, which, not surprisingly, alienated the Italian community in Alexandria from the rest of the city. According to the historian, the Italian authorities were on good terms with the Jewish community from the advent of Fascism until the period of the Ethiopian campaign (40). As the colony's richest and most influential sector, the Jewish community had provided moral and financial support to various Italian interests and Fascist charities (Petricioli 2007, 40–71). In response to the new anti-Semitic policies, the Jewish community residing in Alexandria began to boycott Italian goods and services, withdrawing their savings from Italian banks and their children from Italian schools (Petricioli 2007, 40–71). Petricioli shows the degree to which the loss of financial support from the Jewish community affected Alexandrian society, as evidenced by Consul Camerani's 1939 appeal for the repatriation of emigrants who had previously relied on subsidies that were no longer available. The consul's appeal, published in the *Giornale d'Oriente* with the title "A Call from the Consul for Subscriptions in Favor of Charitable Institutions" implied that the Italian community would be unable to support itself without Jewish support (qtd. in Petricioli 2007, 58). In describing the precarious state in which many emigrants had found themselves without assistance, Petricioli notes that Camerani's article must have been a source of embarrassment in Italy as it contradicted the exalted prestige and the image of a strong, wealthy nation in which the Fascist propaganda had greatly invested (57).

A more complete understanding of the influence that Fascist politics exercised within Alexandria's society is provided through a closer investigation of the methods and modes through which the history of

Alexandrian society between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries was most frequently depicted. Many historical perspectives and accounts of Alexandria's development during this period have recently come under criticism. Current scholarship has attributed Alexandria's economic and cultural success to its complicity with Ottoman and British imperial rule, thereby implying that the Ottoman Empire and European powers provided the conditions under which cosmopolitanism flourished in Cairo and Alexandria. Scholars such as Will Hanley have revisited and re-evaluated the notion of Alexandria's cosmopolitanism and have proposed that many historical accounts of the city's development based their portrayal of Alexandria's cultural and political development on the experience of a small group of European elite, choosing to document the social history of the wealthy while ignoring the poorer masses (1351–1353). Hanley's article, "Grieving Cosmopolitanism," suggests that the topos of Alexandria as a cosmopolis characterized by cultural "diversity, harmony and fecundity" was gradually disseminated, first through fiction and poetry and eventually, also in literary criticism, popular history, and academic history (1351–1352).

Deborah Starr's *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt* likewise discusses the portrayal of cosmopolitan Alexandria as espoused by European writers, especially by British writer Lawrence Durrell, who were detached from the daily life of the Egyptian population and whose accounts border on a colonial discourse based on Europe's cultural superiority (35). Starr is one of several scholars who have noticed the absence of narratives written in Arabic or that address elements of Arabic and Islamic culture in historical and literary accounts of Egypt. The scholar further notes that the overpowering number of narratives written by foreign nationals gives the impression that the city was "almost exclusively populated by foreigners" (35). According to Starr, whose volume analyzes literary and artistic works in Arabic and Hebrew to provide a view of cosmopolitanism as a colonial condition, the view of Alexandria in western literature has always been vitiated by a colonial discourse that, by overlooking the world of the native Egyptian population, boasted Europe's cultural superiority over Arab culture (35).

In the specific case of Italian literary production, Alexandria's cultural environment produced important modernist figures such as Marinetti and Ungaretti, who are regarded as the respective founders of the futurist avant-garde movement and the modernist hermetic school of poetry. A large number of studies have addressed Marinetti and Ungaretti's ambivalent ties to the Fascist regime and have interpreted their roles as founders of important artistic and literary movements as the expression of a sentiment of hopelessness in Europe in the period leading up to and

immediately following World War I. Robert Dombroski is one of numerous scholars, as insightfully discussed by Frank Rosengarten, who have interpreted Ungaretti's initial approval of the Fascist regime as symptomatic of a sense of political apathy that the poet may have believed the new Fascist order was capable of transforming into renewed enthusiasm (n. pag.). In terms of Marinetti's endorsement of Fascism, it can be said that Mussolini's ideological aims, his focus on heroism and masculinity, and his expectations that Italians embrace national regeneration coincided with the type of artistic experimentalism aimed at inspiring practical action and promoting societal transformation that Marinetti and the Futurists had supported more than a decade before Mussolini's rise to power.

Yet, as Lucia Re emphasizes in "Alexandria Revisited," Alexandria's cultural hybridity had served as the backdrop for both of these figures and had provided them with a degree of intellectual freedom that had in turn allowed them to gain a radically diverse perspective on the Fascist regime's program of racial supremacy (168). Ungaretti and Marinetti's political sympathies did not prevent them from recognizing the essential unsustainability of the racist, Fascist imperialist project that, even while attempting to provide a model for a potentially political system that could be applied to other nations, rejected notions of diversity and multiculturalism (Re 2003, 168–169; 182). These writers must have held to their belief in Alexandria as living proof that a multicultural society could function and that diverse groups of citizens could be successfully united into a functioning, productive society without the presence of specific criteria defining nationality, religious beliefs, or race, since these factors, as Ilbert asserts, hindered the formation of common social bonds and experiences (31).

Within the larger argument of Alexandria's historical and literary representations, the Italian narratives produced in Alexandria under Fascist rule provide particular insight into the conflicted relationship between Italians and diverse ethnic groups. Unlike Marinetti and Ungaretti, the Italian novelists Enrico Pea and Fausta Cialente were not born in Alexandria, but they spent critical years of their lives and literary careers there, and their novels illustrate the ways in which literary models in Egyptian Africa differed significantly from those belonging to the tradition of Fascist colonial literature. Both Pea and Cialente often position their protagonists on the margins of European cosmopolitan society and do not take an elite or privileged stance toward Egyptian culture. Their cognizance of the political and ideological perspective that Fascism attempted to impose on the Italian community of Alexandria is revealed through their sympathetic attitudes and support for diversity, which would have been considered an affront to the Fascist regime.

Furthermore, the protagonists of Pea's works, as well as those of Cialente's narratives, are often depicted in realistic conditions of economic hardship much like those faced by members of the lower classes who immigrated to Italy's African colonies in search of a better life. Though not necessarily optimistic, their representations of the experience of the Italian community can be considered positive in that they offer a model of Italian identity that differed from that which had been propagated by Fascist colonial literature. Furthermore, Pea and Cialente provide a perspective on Arabic culture that was otherwise obscured or ignored by Lawrence Durell in the four novels comprising his *The Alexandria Quartet* published between 1957 and 1960. Their literature gives a sense of the mixture of nationalities and identities that characterized Alexandria without losing sight of the world that, according to scholars such as Will Hanley and Deborah Starr, had been overlooked in European narratives. My analysis of Pea and Cialente's works takes its primary inspiration from Lucia Re's aforementioned article in which the scholar argues that "as different as these four writers are from one another," their works are engrained in Alexandria's cosmopolitanism and heterogeneous social, economic, and cultural environment (167;182). In the specific case of Pea, his depictions of stratified neighborhoods and the shared plight of poor Italians and other European immigrants, as well as Arab laborers, "could not be further removed from Durrell's, with his cast of colonial characters oscillating between self-conscious bohemia and unabashed economic and intellectual privilege" (Re 2003, 170).

Since Pea and Cialente's Italian characters do not entirely shed their *Italianness*, but exhibit other cultural traits alongside it, their subversive stance draws close to revised concepts of Levantinism in recent scholarship. As defined by Gil Hochberg in *In Spite of Partition* and *The Dispossession of (Cultural) Authenticity*, an earlier work of hers, Levantinism refers to an imaginary space deprived of cultural heritage. The term originates from the *Levant*, as Hochberg explains, a vague geographic term usually used in reference to the countries along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, most often Israel and Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, although occasionally extended to include Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya (2002, 6). In some circumstances, the term has been applied to areas as far as Turkey, Greece, Cyprus and, wrapping around northern Africa and Andalusia, the southern region of Spain (Hochberg 2002, 6). French and British colonizers were the first to adapt the term Levant to designate a process of cultural blending that in turn came to connote a condition of lost national identity or cultural authenticity, of flirting with a culture without necessarily belonging to it (Hochberg 2002, 8; 2007, 46–47).

Hochberg traces the evolution of the terms *Levantine* and *Levantinism* from the derogatory connotations these expressions inherited during the colonial period through their acquisition of a more subversive interpretation as mediators between eastern and western cultures (2007, 45). Drawing on the writings by the Egyptian-Israeli writer Jacqueline Kanahoff, who views Levantinism as a cultural stance that promotes political openness and provides a means of confronting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hochberg proposes an understanding of Levantinism as the means through which rigid boundaries between countries, populations, races and religions can be elided (2002, 9; 2007, 70–72;). In crossing ethnic, religious, and national barriers, Levantinism creates a productive space that provides opportunities for cultural growth and acceptance, and becomes a model in which hybrid characters actively challenge the definition of culture as a natural and immutable appendix all humans carry with them from birth.

Considering Hochberg's view that Levantine figures suggest a process of becoming that emphasizes relationships and interactions rather than fixed cultural characteristics, it is interesting to consider the view of Levantines in the colonial setting, in which such figures were commonly considered as Orientalized Europeans or, in Giuliana Minghelli's words, "mixed-race offspring," born in Europe but citizens of Egyptian Africa (230). As Hochberg explains, part European, part Oriental, the Levantines were considered to lack any clear national affiliation and were often characterized as manipulative, morally depraved, and avaricious individuals who praised deals above ideals (2007, 46). In my investigation, Levantinism will further relate to the concept of mimicry in terms of both the colonized peoples' unintentional imitation of western manners and the colonizer's unwitting adoption of eastern traits.

Pea and Cialente's depiction of Egyptian Africa reflects the status of the Levantine, whose nature collapses the dichotomies of European/African, colonizer/colonized, and white/black. Their narratives reject the binaries and notions of cultural authenticity and static definitions of national belonging found in Fascist colonial novels, and instead propose a multifaceted view of Italian identity by refuting the definition of culture as an immutable and predetermined body of characteristics inherited at birth and by attempting to depict the identity of their Italian characters, to borrow Hochberg's words, as "an outcome of ambivalent, complex and partial identifications, always subordinated to context" (2002, 9). Both writers facilitate the creation of an imagined reality in which sameness and difference intersect in ways that enable the Italian immigrant in Alexandria to recognize himself in the Other. Ultimately, Pea and Cialente's subversive portrayal of Italians living in Africa contradicts the

Fascist image of the ideal Italian man and woman. The Italian Levantines in their works lack the strength, courage, charisma, and patriotism of the colonial novel's protagonist. What instead makes the Italian Levantine characters unique is the very fact that they belong to neither, and yet both, of the cultures.

Challenging Notions of Italian Racial Supremacy

Antonia Arslan and Patrizia Zambon's volume on Enrico Pea provides a lenghty discussion of Pea's difficult upbringing in rural environment in which his family's situation denied him access to formal education (13). Pea immigrated to Alexandria in 1896 at the age of 15 and supported himself with menial jobs. His memories of life as an impoverished servant and shop apprentice would later inspire his literature and stimulate what appears to be an almost natural inclination toward characters from lower social classes. Lucia Re suggests that the economic precariousness, lack of a formal education, and distance from Italian literary circles that characterized the early period of Pea's intellectual development ultimately provided him with a valuable creative outlet (181). As a self-taught writer who drew exclusively on the images and memories available to him, Pea's early writings focus on his memories of Italy and evoke the rich background of Versilia's popular culture, its dialectal expressions, legends, proverbs, and sayings (Re 2003, 181). Only later would Egypt be evoked to provide the background for his stories, novels, and eventually for his 1949 autobiographical account of his life in Egypt, *Vita in Egitto* (Livi 1988, 8).

Pea's Egyptian novels provide readers with several Levantized Italian characters, or rather characters whose lengthy stay in Alexandria had caused a change in lifestyle, customs, and religion. The first of Pea's Levantine characters appears in his 1943 novel, *Rosalia*, inspired by the author's experience in Alexandria as a wine, candle, and soap merchant and published serially in the *Giornale d'Italia* before the release of its paperback edition. After receiving a large order from an Italian client named Delle Piagge, the protagonist and narrator of the novel suspects him of fraud and decides to visit the Egyptian village where Delle Piagge works, in order to settle the account personally. Here, the reader encounters another client, the Levantized Cassano, an Italian who dresses and behaves like an Arab. The narrator cannot hide his surprise:

> Ma voi siete italiano?
>
> Accidenti!—mi rispose—Livornese. Nato nella Venezia di Livorno, s'intende. Perché mi vedete vestito così? La ragione c'è. La storia è un po' lunga, ma semplice.

> E a regolare la vostra posizione di italiano non avete mai pensato?
>
> Ma io sono italiano. Non ho mai rinunziato ad esserlo. E voi che avreste fatto nei miei piedi? In un mondo dove ero solo. Mi sono trovato affiliato alla Moschea e agevolato senza volerlo ho preso tutte le mogli che ho detto. [...] L'adattamento è la forza dell'uomo: io mi sono adattato senza sforzo, rifatto a nuovi costumi... (Pea 1984, 13)[4]
>
> You are Italian?!
>
> Damned if I'm not—he answered—*Livornese*. Born in the Venice of Livorno, that is. Why am I dressed this way? There is an answer for that. The story is a bit long, but simple.
>
> And you've never thought of reclaiming your position as an Italian?
>
> But I am Italian. I never stopped being one. What would you have done in my shoes? In a world where I was alone. I found myself affiliated with the mosque and got help without asking for it, I took all the wives I told you of. [...] Adaptation is the strength of man. I adapted without trying, adapted to new customs.

As Pea's narrator makes an effort to comprehend the reasons behind Cassano's conversion to Islam, his tone and gaze are motivated by a deep curiosity rather than any sentiment of colonialist superiority. Their interaction in the novel contrasts with the Fascist discourse that, in order to promote a uniform and united view of Italians, tried to obliterate the reality that Italy's history of foreign invasions and dominations had produced a diverse, hybrid population. By presenting readers with a character who is Italian and Muslim, Pea undermines the notion that the Italian national identity is inextricable from Catholicism and indirectly comments on Fascism's emphasis on cultural heritage and Catholic values, especially in the wake of the 1929 Lateran Pacts that had recognized Catholicism as the country's only official religion in exchange for the Church's political support. The Fascist regime insisted on presenting the Catholic faith as one of the traits that unequivocally united and defined Italians in its attempt to forge a sense of Italian kinship across centuries. Pea, on the other hand, used characters like Cassano to privilege other Italian characteristics, such as tolerance, cultural openness, the ability to adapt, and the will to survive in adverse situations. The author speaks of Cassano's conversion to Islam and justifies it through a discussion of the practical aspects of the issue.

Pea's novel provides another representation of a Levantine in the character of Van Le Neppe, the son of a rich Dutch cloth merchant who gives up the comforts of his father's business to settle in a small village near Alexandria. Although he is not Italian, Pea's narrator identifies with him for their common childhood ailment—the "illness of books" (Pea 1984, 169). Van Le Neppe's father had considered his son's literary passion a practical obstacle

for his business, as evidenced by his son's insistence on adding superfluous details to his business travel reports, which often included comments that had little to do with profits or expenditures. Despite his father's urging, Van Le Neppe refuses to accept that business memos are not "personal diaries" and that no one is "interested in *Santa Maria del Fiore*" or in knowing that "the wife of their representative in Marseille had been a dancer before she got married" (Pea 1984, 169) Le Neppe's response to such criticism can perhaps be seen to echo Pea's own sentiments:

> è la vita, papà. è la vita degli altri. Gli altri sono il nostro prossimo…la curiosità di sapere. Di vedere…papà, capisci? […] Girando il mondo s'impara a conoscere le virtù dei cristiani. E ci si libera da molti pregiudizi." (Pea 1984, 174)
>
> It's life, *Papà*. It's other peoples' lives. These others are our neighbors…the desire to know. To see…*Papà*, don't you get it? […] Traveling the world, we learn to recognize other people's virtues. And we free ourselves from many prejudices.

Pea's interest in the poor, disinherited, and marginalized plays a key role in *Rosalia*. The personal facts and autobiographical elements in the novel are the "mainspring of his narration," according to Giuseppe Peritore, but what ultimately determines the story's direction is "the search for an existence similar to his own" in which the author could recognize his own trials and weaknesses by means of his encounters with the Other (669). In this way, Pea is able to strike a delicate equilibrium between diversity and universality and, unlike writers of Fascist colonial literature, Pea draws near to the world of the Egyptian peasants or *fellahin* almost cautiously, in a gesture of cultural respect. Although characters belonging to the native colonial population are also present in the Fascist colonial novel, they are often used exclusively as background figures to the landscape in which the Italian protagonist's personal mission or search for truth highlights his courage, military strength, or honesty. Although *Rosalia* is in most respects an autobiographical account of the author's life in Alexandria, Pea chooses to reveal himself by means of the Other, developing characters such as Le Neppe through parallels between himself and the otherness abhorred by the Fascist regime, even transforming the Egyptian peasant into an emulable figure. Through the character of Le Neppe, Pea reflects on European beliefs about the Arab world, as well as on the necessity to accept and adapt to different social realities:

> […] cosa errata, la superficiale conoscenza che gli europei hanno dell'arabo […] E qui si tratta dei sentimenti che per conoscerli occorre

> tempo e famigliarità con questa gente. Saper parlare la lingua e gli usi. Affratellarsi senza albagìa. Vivere, insomma. Non passare attraverso i paesi da forestiero sempre in gita. Dico anche a chi passi europeo, pur nato e cresciuto su questo suolo. Perché è proprio così che i più rimangono: stranieri alla comunità indigena. (Pea 1984, 101)
>
> The European's superficial understanding of the Arab is often incorrect [. . .] We are dealing with sentiments that require time and familiarity with the population in order to be understood. Learning the language and customs. Socializing without arrogance. In short, living. Not just passing through a country like a foreigner on vacation. I intend also those who pass through as Europeans, even if they were born and raised on this soil. Because that is exactly how the majority remain: foreigners to the native community.

Pea's constant drawing near to the world of the Egyptian peasant, besides providing an insight into the world of the Other, can be interpreted as a strategy for the author to understand himself through identification with marginalized characters. If so, the gradual discovery of the narrator's own identity occurs in conditions that differ from the path of subjective growth commonly depicted in Fascist colonial novels, in which the stories—mainly describing Italian characters who left for Africa in search of themselves—were meant to eventually provide the protagonists with a place and mission in life in the Fascist order.

The search for self in the lives of others and the focus on impoverished, marginalized characters as a means of criticizing Italian society under Fascist rule is a process that we also find in Pea's earlier Egyptian novel, *Il servitore del diavolo* (1929), the final book of a trilogy that includes *Moscardino* and *Il Volto Santo*. The trilogy follows the character of Moscardino during his childhood upbringing as he is raised by his grandfather. As Simonetta Salvestroni explains in *Enrico Pea, tra anarchia e intergrazione*, the sense of provocation that pervades *Il servitore del diavolo* and the trilogy as a whole is rooted in both a precise historical context as well as in the personal experiences of the author, whose depiction of Moscardino is largely autobiographical (12). Aside from the first-person narration, in *Il servitore del diavolo*, strong connections are established between Moscardino and Pea himself, for example, in the narrator's reference to his childhood in Versilia:

> Io che sempre sognavo a occhi aperti, adesso mi ricordavo della mia infanzia. Divenni assente, e per poco ripassai il mare. Rividi la casuccia del Monte di Ripa, le pecore nella stalla, la pergola con l'uva lugliese; e poi il camposanto di Seravezza: punte di nostalgia: *il suono delle campagne*

> *del mio paese, che m'ha negato il pane, ma che io non rinnego né maledico* (enfasi aggiunta). (Pea 1979, 68)
>
> Always the daydreamer, I now thought back to my childhood. I became distracted, and for a moment crossed back over the sea. I saw the little house in Monte di Ripa, the sheep in the stable, the July grapes on the bower, and then the graveyard in Seravezza, pangs of nostalgia; *the sound of the bells in the town that denied me bread but that I will neither deny nor* curse. (emphasis added)

Aside from evoking the writer's nostalgia, this passage also serves to problematize the position of the narrator and his identity as both an Italian and as a servant to an Egyptian master. The borders between self and other disintegrate as Moscardino finds his own image reflected in that of the Other, and identifies himself as a black servant, suggesting that his actual skin color is irrelevant:

> Io passavo per un servo semplice, che si stupisce di tutto, ma anche per un servo ubbidiente, attaccato al padrone: servo di *razza negra*, *per caso con la faccia pallida* (enfasi aggiunta). (Pea 1979, 60)
>
> I passed for a simple servant, one always marveling at everything, but also an obedient servant, attached to his master: a servant from the *black race, whose face happened to be white*. (emphasis added)

As Salvestroni notes, works such as *Il servitore del diavolo* distance themselves from bourgeois intellectuals' accounts of how the agrarian masses experienced the historical reality of Fascism, providing instead the hard-won perspective of the oppressed, exploited classes (23). According to the scholar, Pea's novel is truly "a painful testament—lived from within, and thus finally from a non-bourgeois angle—of the transition experienced by the patriarchal and primitive world of the countryside from an initial eagerness for renewal and revolt that Fascism stifled to eventual acceptance of the established order" (2).

In the story, Pea's protagonist works as a servant to the *devil*, an Egyptian master whose nickname indicates the novel's transgressive stance. The title and the character of the Egyptian master serve a "metaphorical and antiphrastical role" as Franco Petroni explains in his *Le parole di traverso*, since the devil in anti-Catholic culture of the late-nineteenth century had a positive meaning and was a symbolic representation of anarchy and the desire to promote "equality and freedom from all forms of slavery" (115). Petroni observes that the anarchists in the novel enact "a form of psychological coercion that parallels that of even the worst masters" and thus it

is not surprising that *Il servitore del diavolo* represents Pea's artistic and political shift from a phase of revolt to a reconciliation with a world (Italy) toward which he had previously demonstrated bitter hostility (115). In fact, at the end of the novel, we find that Moscardino has abandoned his job as a servant and rebelled against his new master after having finally learned to defend himself against exploiters, regardless of their religious or political views (Petroni 1998, 115).

Pea's diverse characters provide him with the means to describe a cross-section of the Egyptian world, its ancient customs, and its traditions of courtesy and hospitality (Arslan and Zambon 1985, 98). The author's attention to minute, sensorial details brings his landscapes to life as they provide the background for his characters' daily struggle for survival. The Egyptian landscape in *Rosalia*, for example, is described meticulously in terms of its labor, poverty, the simplicity of the European immigrants' lives and the daily existence in the small villages of the *fellahin* (Arslan and Zambon 1985, 98). Egypt emerges through Pea's poetic sensibility toward commonplace scenes of daily life and small glimpses into train stations, villages, markets, a *fellah*, even a shadow. Similarly, the *Baracca Rossa* (the red shack), is where Pea begins outlining Alexandria's complex social environment in *Il servitore del diavolo*. The *baracca* is poorly constructed "of wood and iron, painted scarlet red" (Pea 1979, 82). It is here that, sheltered by the shack's red and black materials which mix in "perfect harmony," discontented adventurers, immigrants, anarchists, and political refugees from all over the world gather (Pea 1979, 82). Pea's gaze focuses on the aspects of Egypt that visiting tourists did not see as he describes the fatigue, poverty, and violence that characterize the lives of the early-twentieth century expatriates who are depicted throughout the story. Pea, like his autobiographical character, Moscardino, distances himself from the role of the Fascist-colonizer hero. In his autobiography, *Vita in Egitto*, the author shares his own recollections of the *Baracca Rossa*:

> Mi avevano insegnato proprio loro a tirare sassate agli idoli, potevo colpire i maestri diretti e contraddire le opinioni dei maggiori. Una palestra quella a cui non rinunziavo: non mi sentivo legato al rispetto di nessuno né a tutele spirituali di chi credeva di saperne più di me. [...] La convivenza internazionale in questa Babele d'Egitto m'aveva convinto dell'inutilità e del danno delle patrie. (Pea 1949, 17; 26)
>
> They were the ones who taught me to throw stones at idols, that I could hit the leaders directly and contradict their opinions. It was a training I could not refuse: I felt no attachment to respecting anyone or to the religious guidance of those who believed to have more to do with it than I. [...] The

> international coexistence in this Egyptian Babel had convinced me of the uselessness and harmfulness of the homeland.

Although we implicitly know Moscardino to be the narrator and thinly veiled representation of the author himself, his character maintains a significant degree of anonymity throughout the story. As in *Il Volto Santo*, he is never addressed by name or described in such a way as to link him to his origins, whereas even minor characters who lack proper names are labeled in some way (an Italian woman from Gorizia is aptly called *Goriziana* just as a muslim servant becomes *Il Barberino* in reference to his status as a *Berber*). Aside from the brief moment of nostalgia, mentioned earlier, that takes the narrator back to his childhood in Versilia, his identity is otherwise problematized throughout the novel. The stylistic decision to suppress the narrator's name and thus his individual identity reflects the narrator's disinterest concerning the qualities that separate or distinguish him from the other immigrants gathered at the *Baracca Rossa*.

Moscardino's status as a nameless servant also reveals Pea to be a shrewd observer of the Italian political situation as he implicitly reminds the reader of the racist overtones that permeated all of the Southern Question. Lucia Re argues a similar position when she notes that Pea refuses to ignore the hypocrisy in the expectation that, once in Africa, he should adopt the role of the superior white master when a short time before, the underdeveloped regions of the South and the poor areas of central and northern Italy (and thus the areas of Lucchesia and Versilia, where Pea came from) had been equated with Africa (177). He instead chooses to further complicate the boundary between African and Italian identity.

On a larger scale, *Il servitore del diavolo* represents a refusal to be considered a piece of national property. Why would a poor, underprivileged emigrant ever live in Egypt and yet defend the boastful cultural superiority of a country that had denied citizens like himself the possibility of living respectably within its territory? What is more, could a pale-faced servant truly claim racial superiority? In the end, for what reasons should the tolerance and cultural openness of characters like Cassano and Le Neppe be condemned? Was the identity of these men truly negated by their immersion in the Egyptian culture or did their ability to adapt actually place them in a privileged position? Pea's novels raise such questions and, in doing so, undermine the motives behind an Italian racial supremacy and the criteria with which Fascism intended to create a new Italian man. Through his re-evaluation of cross-cultural contamination, such as the mixture of languages, backgrounds, customs and religions, and his

encounters with hybrid figures such as Cassano and Le Neppe, the author challenges the dominant perception of culture and identity and affirms his right not to belong. Pea's Levantinism, like Hochberg's definition of the term, refers to a condition of hybridism that fosters a favorable meeting of diverse peoples and cultures and undermines the vision of national identity based on homogeneity and uniformity.

Upstairs/Downstairs: Race and the Social Hierarchy in Representations of Egypt

Cialente, who was born in Cagliari in 1898, spent more than 30 years (1921–1956) in Alexandria after marrying a musician who lived in Egypt. Like Pea, she was detached from Italian literary traditions and trends of the period. Lucia Re, among others, has noted that Cialente does not fit the image of the submissive and obedient Italian woman implemented by Fascism and, on the contrary, her novels betray a subtly antifascist sentiment (167). Her short story, *Pamela o la bella estate*, written in the early 1930s and published in 1935, is the writer's first work set in Egypt. The story focuses on the character of a Venetian woman whose existence in Alexandria could be considered fairly mainstream if not for her marriage to an Armenian photographer, Averkessian, who is described as follows:

> La sua pelle è piuttosto gialla, ma calda e asciutta, inquietante. I suoi capelli sono densi, lisci, e portano, grave come un destino, quel colore livido: neri come le pupille, e il bianco degli occhi è di nuovo quasi giallo. Egli non è fatto con un grande spreco di colori, pensa a volte Pamela guardandosi le guance rosee, gli occhi dorati, i capelli morbidi e lucidi. (Cialente 1962b, 21)
>
> His complexion is rather yellow, but warm and dry, disquieting. He has dense, straight hair of a bluish color that, weighty as destiny, is as black as his pupils, and the whites of his eyes are, again, almost yellow. His making required no great waste of color, Pamela sometimes thinks, looking at her own pink cheeks, golden eyes, soft, shiny hair.

Despite his appearance, Pamela's marriage to Averkessian reflects Cialente's disregard for Fascist notions of racial superiority and the dangers of intermarriage. The author's stance appears especially transgressive, considering that she writes *Pamela* during the same period in which Maria Volpi Nannipieri's novel, *Sambadù, un amore negro* (1934), was vehemently contested—and eventually confiscated by Mussolini himself—for its depiction of a relationship between a white woman

and an African.[5] It was also during this period that the Fascist regime approved the *Legge organica per l'Eritrea e la Somalia*, a 1933 legislative measure that served to establish stricter racial divisions between Italian citizens and the local population, as it stated that an Italian woman who married a colonial subject in Eritrea or Somalia would lose her citizenship. Cialente's novel demonstrates a brazen refusal to adhere to the regime's intolerance of unions between white women and men considered ethnically inferior. Pamela's marriage to Averkessian collapses traditional dichotomies and reflects the process of Levantinization described by Hochberg, in which the opposition between western and eastern cultures is replaced with the proximity between the two.

Although Averkessian is an eastern European, the perception of him being racially inferior to the Italian woman (an impression pointed out by Pamela herself) reflects the ambivalent attitude that the regime had toward European residents in territories belonging to the former Ottoman Empire, which, as explained by Valerie McGuire, were considered to be "white" lands in "Fascist discourses" and yet "the specter of Africa and the Orient haunted" Italian ways of representation and perception of their inhabitants (3–4). McGuire's analysis does not actually assess the representation of Armenians in Fascist propaganda, but rather, the policies of Fascist rule over the Dodecanese Island populations, who were considered "not of color, and yet racially different" (214). In McGuire's opinion, the physical and cultural similarities between Greeks from the Dodecanese Islands and Italian colonizers[6] forced the regime to define boundaries that separated the two groups through representations in which the degree of civility of the former appeared to be paralyzed by bizarre and backward traditions dating back to the Ottoman period (65–69; 156). The backwardness of the Dodecanese Greeks created the foundation on which Italian colonists could display, by contrast, Italy's modernization and progress (Mcguire 2013, 132), and thus, the foreign component of the Levant needed to be noticeable in representations of the archipelago and its people as it was functional to mark the distance between Italian dominators and Dodecanese subjects (McGuire 2013, 156).

Also, former subjects of the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians, could have been perceived in the same manner as Dodecanese Greeks, "not of color but racially different" in respect to the Italians, and Pamela's description on her husband seems to confirm such an assumption. Even when an Armenian would still belong to a higher racial category if compared to populations of Italy's African colonies, hierarchies of whiteness in Cialente's novel seem to rest upon economic and racial inferiority. Since Averkessian's salary is not sufficient to support the family, the couple is forced to rent out their apartment during the summer and to move

into the cellar. The tenants are a French couple from Cairo who belong to the upper class of European intellectuals. The novel, thus, exposes several degree of European whiteness at play, with Pamela confined in between the position of racial and social inferiority occupied by her southern European husband and the higher racial and social standing of the wealthy French couple.

The male French tenant is an artist who invites models to come to their home to pose for his paintings. The arrival of the couple, who hosts numerous dinners at the house, introduces Pamela to a series of novelties, such as the array of cooking utensils that reflect her tenants' wealth. Pamela's initial stupor at what seems to her to be an extravagant lifestyle soon gives way to feelings of admiration. In the cornucopia of food, beverages, and music served each evening, Pamela enters a state of euphoria that for a brief time allows her to forget her life and financial limitations:

> Dapprima Pamela ha creduto che fossero avvenimenti straordinari, e ci vedeva soltanto una gran confusione e un gran sperpero. Invece è così tutti i giorni, la gente può vivere così, basta saperlo. (Cialente 1962b, 47)
>
> At first, Pamela believed they were extraordinary events, and she saw only great confusion and great waste. Instead, each day was like that, people could live that way, now she knew.

In order to take part in her surroundings, Pamela unwittingly becomes a kind of servant in her own home. As she is pulled further into the bourgeois lifestyle of her tenants, learning how to serve guests and convincing the French *signora* to enjoy her guests while Pamela takes care of the preparations, her attempts to share her new discoveries with her husband are rebuked. Averkessian becomes cold and silent, while also discouraging Pamela from further pursuing their company. Pamela's fascination with the identity of the Other, Anita Virga points out, can be associated with a kind of cultural aggression that eventually takes the form of physical assault, when one of the French couple's regular guests kisses her in the garden and later apologizes for his actions by blaming the kiss on having had too much to drink (7). This is doubly painful for Pamela, who must face not only physical aggression, but also accept that the aggressor himself had no real interest in her as a person nor any control over his actions (Virga 2009, 7). Knowing that he was intoxicated is what bothers Pamela most of all:

> La sua collera ha radici altrove: e il sapere che quella sera lui era ubriaco, la brucia più di tutto. Questo, almeno avrebbe dovuto tacerlo. È una donna anche lei, benché viva sottoterra come le talpe, moglie di un uomo quasi giallo. (Cialente 1962b, 56–57)

> Her anger came from another source; and knowing that he had been drunk that night is what scalded her the most. He should have kept that fact, at least, to himself. She was woman, after all, even if she did live underground like a mole, the wife of a yellow man.

The episode reveals Pamela's inability to be recognized in the world of the French couple and the necessity of returning to her previous status, which suddenly appears considerably less dignified (Virga 2009, 7). Pamela "senses intuitively that her physical contact with the guest offered the possibility for her to be recognized as an equal" among the French tenants (Virga 2009, 12). She continuously reflects on the night of the kiss and imagines a series of alternate conclusions to the evening in which she exercises complete control over the situation, at times imagining herself to reject the guest's touch while he kneels down entreatingly (Virga 2009, 10).

The title's reference to Pamela's "beautiful summer" is contradicted by the unfavorable circumstances that actually characterize her simultaneous admission into and exclusion from the society of her French tenants. Although Pamela is to some extent welcomed into the world of the tenants, she mistakenly believes to be accepted by the Other on the basis of similarities between their respective identities (her being a northern European just like them) within the multicultural space provided by Alexandria. In reality, however, the only form of cultural exchange or development that Pamela is permitted to engage in exists in the imitation of the Other (Virga 2009, 6). The arrival of the French couple, which initially seems to present itself as a possibility for mutual cultural exchange, ultimately confines Pamela to a degrading form of mimicry based on coercion and the loss of control (Virga 2009, 6).

The development of Pamela's character can be traced between two distinct processes of imitation. By marrying an Armenian and living in Egypt, Pamela's identity had already transformed from that of an Italian to that of a Levantine. Drawing on Hochberg's definition of Levantinism, Pamela's initial form of imitation can be viewed positively as an indication of her willingness to adapt to diverse cultural practices and disregard the rigid boundaries between countries, populations, races, and religions. Her transformation from Italian to Levantine mirrors the process of adaptation to new cultural contexts in which individuals adopt—by first imitating—local habits and customs in a display of the kind of cultural tolerance that was extremely valued in Alexandria's society. Yet, this same flexibility of character is what causes Pamela to enter into a second process of imitation, this time entering into a vertical relationship with the French couple based on a form of mimicry (Virga 2009, 7–8). This form of imitation, similar to that proposed by Homi Bhabha, creates a dynamic

between Pamela and her tenants that parallels the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer (Virga 2009, 7–8). Pamela imitates the French tenants' manners out of an eagerness to obtain the same degree of physical and social visibility that they enjoy (Virga 2009, 7–8). Even her husband, Averkessian, is aware of the unequal relationship and tries to remind her of that which she senses but is not willing to accept:

> Tu credi d'esser per loro un'amica . . . o qualcosa di simile. E non t'accorgi che ti trattano da serva [. . .] Bada, non è gente per te. [. . .] Ed ha avuto ragione. Mentre lei ha creduto a qualche diritto . . . o a un privilegio. (Cialente 1962b, 54)
>
> "You think you're a friend to them . . . or something like that. And you don't realize that they treat you like a slave . . . Take my advice, those people aren't for you." [. . .] And he had been right, while she had believed in some kind of right . . . or privilege.

Pamela's position of racial inferiority and the social hierarchy introduced by the European characters is emphasized by the spatial organization of the house, as her family is forced to occupy a space that is less visible and physically beneath that of the French couple in the lower level of the home (Virga 2009, 8). In the house, the bottom floor, "occupied by Pamela's family, not only suggests their inferiority with respect to the upstairs rooms," but also makes Pamela's family invisible to the outside world (Virga 2009, 8). Living "like moles," they are unseen by the French couple, who seem unable to recognize the family members as humans, let alone their particular identity as an Italian-Armenians (Virga 2009, 8).

The parallel that Cialente draws between Pamela's memorable summer and the dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized is unexpected and dangerous, as it challenged the view of Italy's racial supremacy promoted in Fascist colonial literature. As a white, Italian-born wife and mother, the character of Pamela should have served as a model of Italy's racial and cultural superiority in the African context. Yet, it is clear from the opening of Cialente's novel that Pamela's sense of national and cultural belonging is ambiguous. In contrast to the propagandist colonial literature, in which the Italian colonial community was always defined by cultural criteria that distinguished it from the indigenous population, Pamela literally moves between the upper and lower strata of society (and levels of racial hierarchy), represented by her French tenants upstairs and her Armenian husband downstairs, respectively. Her envy of the French tenants' lifestyle contrasts with the typical colonial novel, in which ample sections of the narrative were dedicated to descriptions of the Italian

settlers' way of living, which marked a distinct social space reserved to the colonizers, and from which the native population remained excluded. In examining Pina Ballario's 1933 novel *La sposa bianca*, Robin Pickering-Iazzi highlights the author's efforts to visualize Italian citizens and natives as living in full respect of the policies of racial separation that were already in place before the 1937 law prohibiting 'social promiscuity'(215).

Not only does *Pamela o la bella estate* openly and directly describe an Italian woman's union with an Armenian, but it also provides an unflattering picture of her living conditions. Pamela's sense of inferiority and her desire for recognition and acceptance by the northern European characters would, if Cialente were to adhere to Fascist literary models, be attributed to her initial decision to marry someone of inferior ethnic and social status. Instead, Cialente has no internal or external forces intervene to drive Pamela and her husband apart or reveal their marriage as the true cause of the protagonist's inner conflict. Unlike the traditional conclusion of the colonial novel, in which a sense of order was imposed by the author to amend the chaos provoked by the wayward characters, the conclusion of Cialente's novel suggests that Pamela's summer strengthens her relationship with her husband.

Cortile a Cleopatra (1936), Cialente's second novel set in Egypt, also presents several unconventional features. In her introduction to the novel's first edition, Cialente expresses her intent to transcribe the multiform flavors of local speech, including the cadences and lifestyle of the lower class Levantines, the improper Italian used by immigrants, and the influence of Arabic on the spoken language. Thus, even before the opening of the novel, Cialente reveals a heterogeneity of habits, customs, and dialects in Alexandria and within the Italian community that certainly contrasted with Fascist discourse of cultural cohesion. Her narrative threatens to undermine the basic elements and assumptions of Fascism's cultural project and fundamental hegemonic discourse. As in *Pamela o la bella estate*, Cialente again highlights the hybridism of the Italians residing in Egypt, and the novel's mediocre Italian protagonist, Marco, clearly challenges Fascist ideals of masculinity, race, and work ethic. Marco is the protagonist who arrives in Egypt after having been raised by his father in Italy. In *Cortile*, a suburb of Alexandria, Marco joins his Greek Orthodox mother, Crissanti, who spends all day in prayer, and also meets his future fiancé, Dinah, the daughter of a Jewish fur trader. Dinah's parents introduce him to the fur trade, but he lacks the work ethic necessary to become a productive employee:

> [Marco] si svegliava la mattina colmo di placida noia, sentimento che non lo lasciava quasi mai durante il giorno e lo accompagnava in bottega, lo

> riportava a casa la sera. Qualche volta si diceva: "Oggi lavorerò molto" [...] invece lavorava come tutti i giorni, forse un po' meno. (Cialente 1962a, 197)
>
> [Marco] awoke each morning filled with placid boredom, a feeling that stayed with him for most of the day, accompanying him to the shop and taking him back home in the evening. Sometimes he told himself, "Today I will work a lot" [...] and instead he worked the same as all the other days, perhaps a bit less.

As Giuliana Minghelli oberserves in her article "L'Africa in cortile," Marco, half-Italian and half-Greek, is characterized by a sense of not belonging that is further emphasized by his lack of a father figure, especially in a society as rigorously patriarchal as that of Fascism (230). In fact, Marco's lifestyle and nonconformist attitude place him in antithesis to the model Italian proposed by Fascist propaganda. Continually fleeing from obligation and responsibility, the ethics of work and success are completely foreign to Marco. He remains immune to the desire to defend the Italic stock's prestige, while his constant impulse toward freedom and his explicit rejection of physical, emotional, and geographical ties all characterize him as a Levantine.

One of the main features that emerges from a reading of *Cortile*, and links Cialente's narrative production to that of Enrico Pea, is the treatment of geographical spaces as representative of the tenuous borders that separate nations, languages, cultures and individuals. For both writers, Egypt's spaces and its characters are often inscribed and described in terms of small quarters, narrow streets, courtyards, and shacks. In capturing the odors, flavors and sounds of daily life, neither author attempts to offer more than a cross-section of Egyptian life. Cialente's Africa, as Minghelli notes, is reduced to a neighborhood, a garden, a stairwell, from which one observes a world composed of different ethnicities, a space that is not only Egyptian, where there exists no definite identity or clear cultural belonging, a hybrid space that is also indicated with the word 'Levantine'(230). Even the title (*Cortile a Cleopatra*), Minghelli points out, sketches "what Edward Said [...] defines the imaginary geography" of the Orient, a space with vague boundaries, existing only in the imagination (227). Likewise, Umberto Olobardi compares Pea's style of narration to impressionism in painting since it operates "through glimpses and rapid synthesis according to what most strikes the imagination" (180). The effort to visually create a feeling of a place from disconnected images and rapid glimpses leads Giuseppe Peritore to define Pea's prose as "short novel," not so much for its length as for its value as "condensed representation" (661). It is as if Pea chooses a topic or a space that is "meaningful to

him and rather than develop it, he reduces it until he gets to the few lines that matter" (Peritore 1972, 669).

This perspective differs significantly with respect to the Fascist colonial novelists that aimed at providing a total panorama of the African landscape. In "Sul paesaggio africano," Elena Ricci has addressed the relationship between landscape aesthetics and the logic of dominion, arguing that the desire to represent landscapes in their totality can be viewed as an attempt to exert territorial control and transmit a colonial message (153–155). From this perspective, the logic behind Fascist colonial literature's desire to provide a complete picture can be seen to coincide with the hegemonic goal of selling a false image of national cohesion and unity, whereas Cialente and Pea's depictions of Egyptian Africa take a clear stance against this type of representation by giving preference to hybrid spaces that lack rigid definitions of cultural and national belonging. Rather than consider cultural landscapes as pure, uniform spaces, these Levantine narratives inhabit peripheral border zones, re-envisioning the concept of culture and cultural exchange, and providing a more realistic representation of Italy's historical role and geographic position as an intersection of different cultures. The Egyptian Levant of Alexandria reproduces a border zone that refers unmistakably to Italy's own role and geographic position, which for centuries had been a crossroads of cultural encounters and exchanges.

In conclusion, the Fascist campaigns for cultural regeneration sought to create a new Italian man and woman while protecting them from undesired foreign cultural influences. Throughout the 1930s (and before the 1938 racial laws), the use of cultural heritage to define race united Italians without narrowly placing them within an anthropological race. Mussolini's desire to establish an Italian empire in Africa that included Ethiopia was bent to fit several ideological purposes that ultimately served to disguise the reality that demographic colonization was a class- and gender-based policy which concealed social hierarchy among Italians (and the existence of lower-class Italians) and sought increasing control over women. Pea and Cialente's narratives contrast the Fascist model of citizenship and encourage readers to question the identities crafted for them by the regime.

In my reading, the themes of interracial unions and cultural contamination are intended to create resistance against the regime's efforts to spread false ideals of homogeneity. If the colonial novel, which was an instrument for the expansion of Fascist ideology, offered a subtle and yet powerful alternate view of reality by filtering out elements beyond its control, Pea and Cialente's dissident literature exposed Italian emigrants' social, economic, and ethnic heterogeneity which dangerously undermined Fascist

discourse of Italian supremacy and uniformity. Moreover, these Italian Egyptian writers provide a virtual habitation within their novels, a place that fulfills what Minghelli declares "the presence of an absence"—the absence of an identity, of a single culture, of an affiliation with a homeland (232). In this context, Levantinism as theorized by Hochber is a mental state caused by the loss of a relationship with one's culture, an identity crisis which Pea and Cialente understand in terms of a strengthening of the individual from a cultural and humanistic perspective.

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3

Fade to White: Cinematic Representations of Italian Whiteness

Demographic Colonization of Ethiopia

Whereas the second chapter of this volume focused on the means by which Fascism attempted to reform Italian society by protecting it from the influence of foreign models, this chapter will examine how the conquest of Ethiopia was meant to enact "a disciplining process" (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 111) for both the Italian colonists in Africa and the citizens at home, and how the process of creating a racial consciousness served to redefine and control the roles of women and Italian labor forces. Narrative strategies for curbing the desire for emancipation within potentially subversive sectors of Italian society, particularly among women and the working class, can be found in films like Augusto Genina's *Lo squadrone bianco* (1936) and Guido Brignone's *Sotto la croce del sud* (1938). These cinematic works, both of which aim to preserve existing social and gender hierarchies by providing viewers with a highly controlled access to the geographically remote regions of the colony through the mediated perspective of the lens, reveal the need to maintain societal order and tradition and to warn Italian audiences of the dangerous nature of desires that conflicted with the Fascist sense of discipline.

Fascist propaganda in support of establishing a colonial empire in Africa strategically appealed to basic needs and concerns in order to maintain popular support of Mussolini's regime. As various scholars, including Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Charles Burdett, Mia Fuller and Haile M. Larebo have noted, the Ethiopian Campaigns were presented as both an investment opportunity for Italian labor forces as well as a humanitarian effort to liberate Africa from its backwardness (Ben-Ghiat 1996,

127; Burdett 2008, 122–123; Fuller 2008, 61; Larebo 1994, 65). In reality, the actual targets of Italy's modernizing and civilizing mission were not the Africans, but rather the Italian masses (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 131; Fuller 2008, 61). Instead of attracting wealthy Italians, Ethiopia and the African empire were envisioned, much as they had been during Francesco Crispi's late-nineteenth-century colonialism, as social and economic holding grounds for Italy's surplus working-class population (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 131; Burdett 2008, 122–123; Fuller 2008, 61; Larebo 1994, 65). As Fuller explains, it was believed that settlers would not only civilize and modernize the African landscape and its native populations, but that they would themselves become civilized and modernized in the process:

> This image of rehabilitation of the land and the men (both colonized and colonizers) was identical to the one driving internal *bonifica* (reclamation) projects in Italy in the same period. Disenfranchised citizens were put in a position (under much surveillance and discipline) in which they were to 'reclaim' themselves while at the same time reclaiming land. In brief, this vision of self-reforming landless peasants was the fantasy of Italians who were not agriculturalist themselves, but urban Italians engaged in reforming poor Italians and solving the "Southern Question." (61)

Reforming the Italian identity through and against the image of the ostensibly less civilized African population was not only a question of social and economic status, but also of race. It was hoped that the impoverished, rural southern Italian population, often accused of tainting Italy's claims of cultural, economic and racial purity and superiority, would be able to reclaim and purify its own image thanks to the new, starker contrast that the African colonies would provide. Whiteness was an important factor in regulating citizenship and, in examining the factors that determined Italian whiteness, Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, in *Bianco e nero,* emphasize that skin color was never explicitly mentioned but was inferred by means of the contrast with those who were darker. During the Liberal period, whiteness implied a sense of belonging within a social class and a defined regional area, and was meant to distinguish "real" Italians—the wealthy bourgeoisie of the North—from the darker southern populations that were often stereotypically represented as poor and racially inferior peasants (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 42).

Fascism introduced a radical change in the criteria for membership in Italian society in two specific ways. First, as Giuliani argues, it created a specific discourse of citizenship and belonging based on shared values and cultural heritage rather than on physical attributes, thereby drawing the poor, rural, "dark" South into the fabric of the nation and including

it within the collective concept of the Italic stock (24). Moreover, the blackness of Italians was further mitigated by the Ethiopian conquest and, later, the colonization of Italy's Empire of East Africa (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 24). Colonial propaganda drew support because it appealed not only to financial and social problems, but also to a larger historical and existential desire for national belonging, one that implicitly included a racial discourse in which the whiter, northern Italian population remained the ideal model. In theory, it appeared that working class southern Italians could achieve belonging, and thus whiteness, by adhering to the Fascist model, which not only rehabilitated, but also exalted the poor South as a source of inspiration for the new model citizen. The new, ideal Italian identity would derive its social and moral customs from the agricultural South reinvigorated by the Fascist spirit (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 39). As Giuliani explains, the model Italian was fashioned on the stereotypical representation of southern Italians as "rural, virile, antibourgeoisie, proliferative, and loyal to their families, the nation, the Church, and Fascism" (24). In this way, on a practical level, Fascism created a politics aimed at sanitizing and reforming the poor masses by controlling emigration and directing Italians to the colonies (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 43).

Many scholars have noted that the desire to reappropriate the repertoire of traditional values, that the rural South was claimed to still being in possession of, appears to contradict the importance that Fascism placed on technological progress. In addition to Ben-Ghiat and Giuliani, scholars such as Federico Caprotti and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi have paid extensive attention to the regime's aspirations toward "selective modernization" (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 143), or rather the attempt to modernize the country without inherently changing Italy's social structure. A great tension emerges within Fascist ideology, Caprotti points out, between "embracing the onslaught of technological, industrial, and social modernization" on the one hand and, on the other, attempting to "rekindle traditional values" of rural life" (n. pg.). Thus, while the regime praised technological progress as the only means of transforming Italy into a world power, it also employed discursive practices that championed Italy's rural spirit as the antidote against the deleterious effects of progress and modernization, the corrosion of national customs and the subversion of social hierarchies (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 39–40).

It is worthwhile to recall, as Ben-Ghiat and Giuliani discuss, among many, that Mussolini began his political career as a socialist and that his initially antibourgeois language, mission to secure the right to land for destitute peasants and support of women's suffrage gained the approval of women and the underemployed (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 35; Giuliani and

Lombardi-Diop 2013, 40). His astounding reversal in position followed his appointment as Prime Minister in October 1922, Ben-Ghiat notes, after which Mussolini abandoned his former political stance and established a lasting pact with a wide range of conservative forces whose privileges and interests he intended to protect (2004, 35). Mussolini's 1927 Ascension Day address made his new political alliance public and marked the turning point from the "antitraditional, anti-marriage, futurist and anarchist sentiments" of early Fascism toward the new political endorsement of conservative nationalism as a means of preserving tradition (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 40). Mussolini's new alliances called for a suppression of organized unionism and the adoption of practices "aimed at excluding women from the workforce" and the right to vote (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 35). With the Fascist Party's move toward the right, Mussolini's speeches took on a different tone, casting the State as a laboratory for constructing Italian society and enforcing social, sexual, and racial order in the context of widespread uncertainty (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 27).

As Ben-Ghiat has suggested, Mussolini's policy of social "reclamation" was intended to ensure that economic and technological progress would not lead to social emancipation (1996, 143). In his rise to power, Mussolini employed a political rhetoric that warned Italy of the imminent dangers of modernization, such as the greater visibility of women and the working class supported by unions as well as the emerging feminist movement (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 9–11). Mussolini's party capitalized on the fear that modernization could foster social anarchism in order to garner support for its plan to regenerating Italian society, which included conceptualizing modernity as a process to discipline Italians that adopted products of modernization, such as technological development and mass organization, to monitor society, lifestyle and behavior (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 111). In this way, the shift to the right transformed the Fascist revolution into a political movement dedicated to reviving a rural model of morality and virility that distinguished between positive and negative forms of modernization.

While favoring and gaining favor from Italy's conservative powers, Mussolini touted ruralization as a positive form of modernization and inaugurated his Battle for Grain during a period that he deemed the end of the "era of urban politics" (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 40). The major efforts of the Fascist state during the late 1920s, including the grain campaign, the plan to create a colonial empire, and the politics of controlling and encouraging Italian emigration, all arose from a platform that intended to protect social and sexual hierarchies. In accordance with the objectives expressed in the Ascension Day address, in which the ruralization of the Italian population was presented as a means of reinforcing

Italian racial identity and transforming the country into an empire, Mussolini established a connection between domestic renewal and colonization (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 14). Between 1930 and 1935, as Luigi Preti has pointed out, he launched the country into the project of reclaiming the Pontine Marshes while also envisioning the Ethiopian Campaigns as a parallel mode of acquiring lands that could be entrusted to farmers (17).

Relocating the lower classes to the fertile lands of Ethiopia was part of a precise calculation, because by redirecting masses of poverty-stricken Italians toward the Ethiopian conquest and the creation of a colonial empire, Italy could potentially change the worldwide perception of Italian emigrants as miserable and supplicant (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 40). Moreover, the transformation of the poor masses into soldier-farmers was also a means of controlling them and diverting them from a potential class struggle (Falasca-Zamponi 1997, 40). The desire for emancipation within sectors of Italian society was thus transferred from the domestic space to that of the colony, where settlers would develop a racial awareness and could enjoy a position of relative dominance. The implication was that, by moving to the colony, lower-class laborers would acquire a new social status because of their race. In this respect, the conquest of Ethiopia was presented as offering the opportunity for laborers to some day become small landowners, while clearly seeking to replicate class-based policies that would simultaneously subjugate both African natives and lower class white subjects.

While the emphasis on fertility and virility in the Fascist view of modernity in the context of agricultural and economic renewal was extended to other aspects of life in order to assert the positive values of male strength, discipline, and the existing social and sexual hierarchies, other forms of modernity, as Ben-Ghiat has noted, were linked to moral decadence, social and sexual disorder and racial degeneration (1996, 113–114). Fascism thus claimed it could avert a state of crisis by promoting a "comforting continuity" with tradition that also implied leaving existing political and gender hierarchies intact (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 12–13; Chang 2000, 7–12). It becomes clear that the Ethiopian Campaigns, like the 1922 March on Rome at home, were meant to promote a return to order and were intended not to mobilize proletariat forces, but rather to control their behavior through their participation in the colonization of Ethiopia (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 127). This, in turn, meant that citizens were unwittingly invited to accept and celebrate racial hierarchies.

Mussolini's strategy was to provide destitute laborers and peasants with a different cause for which to fight and to transform them into "virile soldiers" whose hard work in the colonies would serve Italy's greater good (Falasca-Zamponi 1997, 40). At the time, the establishment of a

permanent community of colonists was believed to serve a fundamental role in the empire by guaranteeing the preservation of the white race and western civilization (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 127). The regime tried to persuade the Italian poor masses to move to the new colony of Ethiopia by entrusting them with the task of safeguarding the Italic stock. The importance of reinforcing Italian superiority over the natives became particularly important on the eve of the Ethiopian Campaigns, which seemed to offer a viable means of forcing Italian emigrants to adopt a new lifestyle in order to acquire upper-class standing in the colonial setting. Emigrants were expected to remain faithful to the values of mainland lifestyles, since those values would provide the foundation of their moral well-being, while also becoming reformed citizens who embraced sentiments of racial prestige and the posture of the industrious worker who dressed and behaved properly in front of natives.

Haile Larebo argues in *The Building of an Empire* that the Fascist goal of civilizing both the colonies and the Italian colonists failed because the Italian settlers in Ethiopia lacked an understanding of the civilizing mission that the Fascist regime had envisioned, as they did not necessarily embrace notions of racial prestige or social responsibility (289). Moreover, while the colonial efforts were perhaps successful in distracting public attention from domestic and economic hardship and political oppression, the regime failed to accurately calculate the costs of settling large numbers of Italian families in Ethiopia, which included not only transportation and construction costs but also the development of a social and economic infrastructure that included the military protection of the land from Ethiopian attack (Larebo 1994, 285–289). Yet, despite the practical shortcomings of the Italian colonial project, as Robin Pickering-Iazzi, Barbara Sòrgoni, and Edward Tannenbaum have discussed, the colonial discourse at its ideological foundation had a lasting effect on the preservation of the existing class structure and traditional roles, especially in terms of the Fascist attitude toward women (Pickering-Iazzi 2003, 200; Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233; Tannenbaum 1972, 136).

Beyond emphasizing the importance of large families and glorifying the role of the housewife and mother, the Fascist regime actively reversed the progress achieved by some sectors of educated urban women who had freed themselves from traditional roles before 1922. Women in the 1930s were lauded as exemplary wives and mothers, while forms of "emancipated behavior, ideas, and desires" were associated with deviant versions of femininity (Pichering-Iazzi 1995, xi). Giovanni Gentile's essay, *La donna e il fanciullo* (1934), as Pickering-Iazzi notes, provides a quintessential illustration of Fascist gender politics in which the emancipated woman is presented as an oppressive force that must be cast off in

order to liberate women's natural instincts as mothers and wives (1995, xv). Minister of Education from 1922 to 1924, Gentile voices in his comments the general tendency of Mussolini's propaganda to diffuse lifestyle models for managing the family and the household that corresponded to the Fascist ideals of order and respect for tradition. The model of the rural homemaker and southern housewife, whose sexual and reproductive conduct was informed by Catholic moral principles, thus came to embody the values of fertility, Mediterranean whiteness and fidelity to Catholic and patriarchal models (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 49).

The creation of the African empire lent itself perfectly to a redefinition of the woman's role. The belief that the family was founded upon paternal authority and the woman's dedication to domestic life in the interest of the State placed high expectations on women in Italy and the colonies (Sòrgoni 1998, 232). The role of the Italian woman in the colony was carefully visualized as preparatory courses for colonial life were organized by the *Istituto Fascista dell'Africa Italiana* in collaboration with local headquarters of the *Fasci Femminili*, the women's section of the Fascist Party (Sòrgoni 1998, 231). The new Fascist woman was represented as an agent of a virile, rural, strong, and healthy Italy, because her role complemented that of her spouse without undermining his superiority, and because she served as the guardian of Italy's racial and cultural integrity (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 47–56; Sòrgoni 1998, 233). In this respect, the colonial wife provided a powerful contrast to both the women from the city, who were judged by the regime as corrupt and infertile, and to the indigenous women of the colonies, whose beauty posed a different but equally dangerous threat (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 47–56).

Such a revision of the woman's sphere, in which the power of the colonial woman was founded to some extent on her very powerlessness, emerges more clearly if one thinks of what was expected of women in their marital relationships. African women had a reputation of being extremely beautiful, but also as being submissive and devoted to white men (Sòrgoni 1998, 232–233). In order to preserve their families and marriages, "Italian women in the colony were challenged to surpass the native women in obedience and submissiveness" (Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233). Thus, although the regime appeared to assign an active role to women, encouraging them to become the heroines of the colonial venture and implying that their presence in the colony was necessary for safeguarding the physical and spiritual health of their men, the true objective was to reinforce the woman's role within the domestic sphere (Pickering-Iazzi 2003, 206–207; Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233).

In the colonial setting, aside from being an exemplary wife, the woman had to know how to cultivate the garden and raise livestock; she

had to manufacture different kinds of clothing and had to be familiar with hygienic practices inside and outside her home (Pickering-Iazzi 2003, 204–212; Sòrgoni 1998, 231). Moreover, a major divergence from the organization of the Italian family on mainland Italy can be found in the superimposition of gender and racial hierarchies; the colonial wife had to manage not only the household but also her servants and ensure that their quarters were kept separate (Pickering-Iazzi 2003, 204–212; Sòrgoni 1998, 231). In this way, the discourse of constructing racial consciousness also fell under the responsibilities assigned to women, the custodians of Italian customs, racial purity, and morality (Sòrgoni 233).

Italian Cinema and Fascism

Though the Fascist regime paid great attention to controlling different sectors of Italian culture, it was slow to develop cinematic narratives, themes, and images for propagandistic purposes (Bertellini 2003, 256; Hay 1987, 71; Landy 1986, 7; Reich 2002, 7). In fact, before the 1930s, Fascism had no specific cinematographic policy and Mussolini did not subject cinema to his propaganda, giving relative autonomy to the private production of films (Bertellini 2003, 256; Cannistraro 1975, 274; Reich 2002, 7). As Steven Ricci and Jacqueline Reich have pointed out, one reason for this may be that Mussolini's efforts were concentrated on the consolidation of power and the resolution of internal tensions, but it is also true that the Fascist regime was slow to recognize the cinema's potential as a propagandist apparatus and was wary of the economic crisis that had arisen in the film industry due to the competition of foreign (mainly French and American) films, a domestic market that did not allow producers to make enough profit to cover even basic costs and a poor system of financing productions that had relied on aristocratic entrepreneurs since the industry's initial growth in the 1910s (Reich 2002, 8; Ricci 2008, 55–56).

Although films made before the Fascist *ventennio* did not consciously take part in a political agenda, Giorgio Bertellini has noted that the cinema nonetheless provided the "training grounds for the refinement of a nationalistic ideology that, through the cinematic medium, could reach vast and diverse audiences" (259). Early Italian cinema was dominated by large-scale historical films whose plots revolved around representations of Ancient Rome and the Risorgimento in films such as *Marcantonio e Cleopatra* (1913), *Cabiria* (1914), *Tamburino sardo* (1911), and *Il piccolo patriota padovano* (1916). As Ricci has observed, these films contributed to a shift in the audience's perception of itself from a largely regional identity

toward a sense of shared cultural heritage, so that whereas the political unification of Italy had failed to establish a coherent national identity, films that focused on the shared history of Roman and Risorgimento culture "elided social and cultural divisions for the diverse Italian audiences by offering them the possibility of seeing themselves as the inheritors of a supra-class, supra-regional historical unity" (46).

The production of large-scale historical films came to a halt after World War I, mostly due to the economic crisis of the Italian film industry, which reached its peak between 1922 and 1923. Beginning in the 1920s, films about ancient history, which often featured Africa in the plot's background, were gradually replaced by serial films featuring a strongman, such as Maciste, Ursus, Spartacus, or Aiace. Yet, this branch of cinema continued, although in a new vein, to draw inspiration from Ancient Rome for two specific reasons. Mainly, as Bertellini notes, the strongman's "display of sheer force [...] anticipated the Fascist deployment of images of male strength and power" (259). Bertellini further observes that, between the original film versions of the 1910s and the later episodes built around the role of the strongman, the protagonists lost their African physiognomy. Strongmen such as Maciste, who moves from his characterization as a black slave in *Cabiria* to assume different guises in later films (e.g., as a member of the Italian alpine troops) are subjected to a process through which they are gradually turned into light-skinned heroes (Bertellini 2003, 260). Building on Bertellini's astute observation, one of my aims in the present chapter is to provide a possible explanation for the physiognomic transformation of black characters through an analysis of *Lo squadrone bianco* and *Sotto la croce del sud*.

The early years of the Fascist *ventennio* helped draw Italian cinema out of its period of difficulty by developing a series of projects aimed at reviving the national film industry without putting specific constraints on content. Among the various measures taken, the regime introduced an import tax on foreign films and required that they be dubbed into Italian (Reich 2002, 8). It further required that one third of all films screened in cinemas be Italian (Reich 2002, 8); foreign films were controlled but remained preeminent since the Italian media, publishers, theaters, and cinemas lacked funding and therefore failed to satisfy the demands of growing audiences, especially in larger cities (Ricci 2008,129–130). As Ricci explains, it was for this reason that "the industrialization of cultural production not only meant concentration of capital and modernization of systems of distribution, but it also led to an increased dependence on product from abroad" (129). Finally, all screenings of feature films had to be preceded by or alternated with documentaries or newsreels from the LUCE Institute (Reich 2002, 8; Ricci 2008, 71), the agency founded in

1925 to diffuse cinematographic and photographic material of the Fascist regime for educational and informational purposes.

The newsreels were aimed at fostering consensus and support for the regime and at drawing attention to events, values and people, and they closely followed the national and international progress of Mussolini's government, from the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes to the Ethiopian Campaigns (Ricci 2008, 70–71). The LUCE Institute's ability to sway public opinion was especially significant in light of the population's limited access to radio programs, since the radio was a luxury commodity and the country's high illiteracy rate limited the efficacy of books and newspapers as modes of distributing information to the masses (Ricci 2008, 71); the use of visual material obviated both of these problems. There were many cinema halls in Italy and members of the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, the Italian Fascist leisure and recreational organization, received a discounted entrance in order to encourage Italians to go to the cinema more regularly. Moreover, since cinema halls were not available in all parts of the national territory, the *Cinemobile* was created to project films and newsreels in piazzas.

By requiring cinema halls to screen its documentaries and newsreels before showing commercial films, the regime created a direct channel of communication with Italian audiences. For example, as Ricci explains, an American film might be preceded by a LUCE documentary or newsreel about the perils of certain Hollywood comedies, with the effect that before spectators were allowed access to the fictional premise of a foreign or Italian film, they were "addressed as subjects of the state [...] and the mandatory presence of the state newsreels functioned as an intertextual prophylactic against potentially transgressive readings of the film" (72). Thus, although Hollywood productions undoubtedly represented the most feared competition and elicited additional concern for their wider array of representations of female characters and more modern illustrations of sexuality, critics such as Reich and Ricci have suggested that a love-hate relationship developed between Hollywood and the regime because American films provided the regime with a negative example of all that should be eliminated in Italian society and a repertoire of situations considered morally and socially decadent upon which it could express severe judgments (17; 158).

Starting in the mid-1930s, the Fascist regime played a more active role in promoting and regulating cinema. In addition to a series of institutional reforms intended to help construct a Fascist film culture, the *Direzione Generale del Cinema*, a single state agency that regulated the distribution, dubbing, and censorship of films, was established in 1934 (Reich 2002, 10; Ricci 2008, 157). That same year, the *Direzione* established the

Venice Film Festival, followed by the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinema* in 1935, and *Cinecittà*, "one of Europe's largest production facilities," in 1937 (Ricci 2008, 157). However, the most noteworthy step undertaken by the *Direzione Generale del Cinema* was the increased regulation of censorship and dubbing practices (Ricci 2008, 157). The law requiring foreign films to be dubbed in Italian provided a means of shaping and adapting cinematic content, protecting the Italian language from foreign words, and "cleansing foreign films of cultural references" that posed a threat to Fascist ideology (Reich 2002, 11; Ricci 2008, 157). More importantly, since scripts had to pass through the *Direzione Generale del Cinema*'s office, the regime relied on censorship to align films with Fascist models and themes and to promote an image of Italy as filled with honest men and large, happy families, whereas misfortune, crime, violence, and poverty were depicted as social issues only in other countries (Ricci 2008, 163).

Ethiopia became a topic of interest in the cinema of the 1930s with the emergence of the genre of the "African film," a term used to denote "films partially or entirely set in one of Italy's colonies in Africa" (Gili 1990, 39). Most of these films, created during the period of the Ethiopian Campaigns, were financed by the regime and were thus part of a precise cultural agenda aimed at publicizing the colonial enterprise (Gili 1990, 39–40). Within the category of African films, we find some specifically colonial films that, like the colonial novel, explicitly intended to describe life in the colony by translating Mussolini's colonial project into cinematic images and proposing the African dream of a colonial empire as the solution to Italy's problems. These elements are found both in the newsreels and in feature films. For example, among the LUCE newsreels, we find a section entitled "Conoscere la colonia," devoted exclusively to life in the colonies, and one of the feature films analyzed in this chapter, *Sotto la croce del sud*, similarly depicts the colony as a territory destined to receive Italy's surplus workforce.

The African films not only served as a means through which demographic colonization was promoted, but they also provided a mechanism for transferring the problems blocking the path toward the new Italy to another place (Hay 1987, 183–184). By providing an outlet for topics that could not be discussed openly without undermining the image of a strong nation, these films allowed certain pressing issues in Italian society to be addressed within the space of a land soon to become Italian (Hay 1987, 198). In the African films, we often find two Italian characters intentionally pitted against each other, while the Africans are an enemy that acts as the choreography, providing the context for exploring an entirely Italian conflict between fathers and sons and old and new generations (Hay 1987, 184). The absence of the native population's voice, defined by Bertellini as

colonial "autism," shows how the African natives were reduced to serving as the mere choreographic background in stories that focus on Italian characters who leave for Africa in search of themselves and a mission in life (257). The narrative structure of these films, which implies an end to chaos and the reinstitution of order, provides an antidote to Italy's uncertainty and anxiety by presenting the colony as a space in which individuals can find their place and fulfill a role, and in which differences of gender and social class are subdued by a larger sense of national solidarity (Hay 1987, 198). Moreover, many of these cinematic works are reminiscent of the *Strapaese* movement and its proposal, upheld by Mussolini, to reject urban culture in favor of a return to Italy's rural origins. Here, again, the space of the colony ironically becomes an extension of the uncultivated Italian land, waiting to be reclaimed, transformed, and occupied.

Man and Machine: Technological Advancement and Loss of the Individual

Although Augusto Genina had previous experience as a director and screenwriter in Italy, France and Germany, it was during the height of Mussolini's rule that he earned a special place among the elite of Fascist propagandistic cinema with films like *Lo squadrone bianco* (1936), *L'assedio dell'Alcazar* (1940) and *Bengasi* (1942). All three films won the Mussolini Cup for "Best Italian Film" at the Venice Film Festival in their respective years of release. *Lo squadrone bianco* was filmed during the time of the Ethiopian conquest, a period in which the regime put in place legal orders that labeled the populations from the Horn of Africa as biologically inferior. As discussed in chapter 1, the discrepancy between the regime's new ideological orientation toward the 1938 race laws and its intention to invade Ethiopia (1935) can be identified in Italy's puzzling eagerness to establish an empire and subject its citizens to a population of, presumably, savage, inferior races, when the coexistence of Italians and blacks was already considered a threat to Italy's racial and cultural fabric.

As with literature, cinema became instrumental in providing a counter-theory of reality in order to circumvent the contradiction between the desirability of living in the new African land while also labeling its population as unappealing and inferior. Films were used to represent the potential of the Italian civilizing mission in Ethiopia and depict the process by which Ethiopians would become disciplined, well-reformed individuals, and one of the main ways in which white dominion was justified in cinema was by altering representations of blackness. According

to Ricci, many elements of the strongman serials reappear in films sponsored by the regime, such as *Lo squadrone bianco*, *Scipione l'Africano* and *Condottieri* which were released between 1935 and 1938 (87). In the gradual lightening of skin color, the strongman is not only associated with the figure of the Italian soldier, but also assumes a new "collective strength of military action" that goes beyond individual heroism and replaces "the athleticism of the individual strongman" (Ricci 2008, 90). In these films, as Ricci notes, the heroic deeds of the protagonist are no longer associated with individual actions or valor and become inextricable from the national cause, so that the image of strongman in Fascist cinema is reconfigured to reflect "populist unity with the People, the soldiers, [...] and the land" (95).

Genina's *Lo squadrone bianco* provides an example of the new, collective heroism and the director "normalizes" the physiognomy of the population that was being colonized through a number of strategies. First, as Cecilia Boggio has pointed out in "Black Shirts/Black Skins," he focuses on the Italian efforts in Libya during an earlier moment of colonial history (1911), which allows him to comment indirectly on the Ethiopian campaign while also depicting Arabs rather than Ethiopians (the real future *askari* soldiers) (284). To some extent, *Lo squadrone bianco,* like other films on the African subject, obliquely addresses pressing issues in contemporary Italian society by shifting them to a more remote time or place. On the other hand, Genina's tactic is unique in that it enacts a process of wishful thinking in which the setting in Libya alludes to Ethiopia and in which the civilized, light-skinned *askari* soldiers in the squadron are meant to foreshadow the future of the Ethiopians under Italian domination. Moreover, the title of Genina's film refers to the white shirts worn by the *askari* soldiers who fought alongside the Italian army in Libya against Libyan rebels. Genina thus employs a common strategy in those years of using clothing (such as the white uniform worn by those fighting in the Italian army) and refined or polite speech to show how the black man had been "disciplined." Finally, beyond associating the *askari* soldiers with white allies and white clothing, Genina further normalizes the colonial natives by representing them as light-skinned (Boggio 2003, 285). In short, by camouflaging his characters, Genina avoids the contradictions at the base of the Italo-Ethiopian War and makes the conquered land seem more attractive by avoiding the problem of race.

The protagonist of the film is a young lieutenant, Mario Ludovici, who, disillusioned by the unrequited love of a young bourgeois woman, Cristiana, will eventually ask to be transferred to Libya. The film opens with Mario speeding in his vehicle before stopping to make a phone call to Cristiana, who encapsulates all of the stereotypical attributes of

bourgeois decadence; she is blonde, slender, and elegant, and lives alone in a nice apartment served by a maid. Just home from a gala, she throws a tantrum and refuses to invite Mario over, but he is determined to see her and, upon arriving at her house, declares his love for her while she, indifferent, lies on the couch with a cigarette in hand. Mario's ineffective declaration of love provides Genina with the opportunity to comment on the world of Cristiana and her friends, who are negatively characterized by their idle, purposeless lifestyle of luxury and general indifference to the values of Fascist Italy.

The scene meticulously recreates the decadent atmosphere typical of the *telefoni bianchi* films, in which modern society was often depicted in terms of a liberalization of customs, including the liberation of female characters from characteristics associated with the Fascist feminine ideal. As neither mothers nor wives, female characters like Cristiana were often portrayed as thin, attractive, economically independent women who used their appeal to manipulate the male characters. Thus, it is perhaps no coincidence that white telephones appear among the furnishings in Cristiana's apartment, since the cross-section of attitudes found in her home provides Genina with a means of representing bourgeois attitudes toward the colonial enterprise. Africa is shown to exist only in an abstract and elitist dimension, and the "passion" for the African colonies, Boggio explains, is mistaken with the hobby of collecting, as exemplified through the African statuettes and shields displayed on a glass shelf in Cristiana's apartment, which might be compared to ethnic souvenirs or museum pieces (285). Because the bourgeoisie's abstract and elitist vision of Africa was useless to the Fascist goal of repressing opposition and transforming the colony into fertile fields, Genina must transport Mario from Cristiana's decadent world to the regenerative space of the colony.

In Libya, Mario is sent to the blockhouse, where he encounters the true face of Africa and is met with distrust by his commander, Captain Sant'Elia, who senses the trifling motives behind Ludovici's arrival. Although these two Italian soldiers eventually develop an almost filial relationship (Bertellini 2003, 265; Boggio 2003, 282; Hay 1987, 189), Sant'Elia's initial skepticism is based on the view that Libya was in need of determined and devoted soldiers, not men like Mario who were merely seeking to escape personal disillusionment. The Italian population after the Risorgimento was claimed to have been feminized by a ruling class that had produced the kind of ineptitude (Ben-Ghiat 2004, 15–16) embodied by Cristiana and her friends, and the Fascist regime proposed to reform Italians like Mario, drawing them toward a lifestyle shaped by hard work, self-discipline and responsibility to the State, and

Mario's gradual militarization in the film is representative of the type of social regeneration desired by Mussolini.

Mario's assignment in Libya provides him with real objectives and a uniform to honor, turning the military ideals of Fascist Italy into those inherited by the glorious past of the Risorgimento and Imperial Rome. As Mario is reformed, his character is gradually stripped of all elements connecting him to his past, as becomes clear in Sant'Elia's exhortations ("Try to change, and change quickly. Your past doesn't belong to me, your present life does. I need all of you, is that clear, all of you").[1] Mario's transformation begins at the physical level, with his change of appearance and the adoption of the safari jacket. The emphasis on clothing and physical appearance in the film provides an accurate reference to Mussolini's own views of the importance of dress and public image. As Falasca-Zamponi has discussed, Mussolini firmly believed that style and appearance were symbolic of inner qualities and, although he claimed not to judge men by their appearance but by their inner substance, "the stylistic and aesthetic elements of rituals attracted the regime's scrutinizing eye" (100).

In the film, the replacement of Mario's black uniform with a safari jacket is of course dictated by practical reasons, since the jacket's cut was more suitable for riding on camelback and its light color made it easier to withstand the heat of the Libyan Desert, but the change of clothing is also closely tied to Mario's inner transformation. The black shirt, which was associated in Fascist discourse with the regime's "courage, struggle, and spiritual superiority," was accompanied by a series of precepts that defined how, and by whom, it was to be worn (Falasca-Zamponi 1997, 102). Sant'Elia's demand that Mario gives up his black uniform at this point in the film is perhaps a reference to one of the ten Fascist commandments, which stated that men who were not willing "to sacrifice their bodies and souls to Italy and to serve Mussolini without question" were unworthy of wearing the black shirt (Falasca-Zamponi 1997, 102). Nonetheless, during the march through the desert against Libyan rebels, Ludovici will eventually prove himself a hero when the captain dies and Ludovici takes command over the squadron.

The character of Sant'Elia is introduced against the background of daily life in the squadron, its concrete problems and need for leadership and strategy. The commander has been on the trail of a group of rebels for months, and hopes to drive them out with the aid of his loyal squadron of *askaris*. The order and rigidity of the squadron of *askaris* recall the glass shelf of statuettes shown in Cristiana's house earlier in the film, and are perhaps meant to draw a connection between the statuettes and the passive, almost decorative role of the soldiers. Bertellini expresses a similar opinion in defining the *askari* in the squadron as affected by

a form of "autism" resulting from a complete lack of individual will or voice (266). Subservient to the commands of their white leaders, their blackness is suppressed to the point that, by the end of the film, the courageous "white squadron" serves merely as a visual prop, an ornamental piece meant to accessorize Mario's inner search (Bertellini 2003, 266–267). Moreover, whereas the group of rebels is invisible yet omnipresent, and thus doubly threatening, and is presented as disorganized, scattered and lacking a leader, the unquestioning support of the passive white squadron of *askaris* for its charismatic leader is perhaps meant to serve as a positive model of the ideal Fascist supporters in both the colonies and on the Italian mainland, who were expected to uphold the regime's efforts to suppress any and all forms of opposition (Boggio 2003, 283; 286).

In addition to the colonial debate and the discourse surrounding race, it is also necessary to examine the ways in which *Lo squadrone bianco* condemns certain aspects of modernization in favor of a simpler lifestyle. Mario's arrival in the colonial space of Libya signals his removal from the comforts of his previous lifestyle; he must now communicate by telegraph or letter rather than by phone, and he must travel by dromedary rather than by car. The relative slowness of these older modes of communication and transportation slow the passage of time, which is now measured in days and months rather than in minutes and hours. In the scenes set in Libya, the only signs of modern life are found in the brief appearance of a military plane and the gramophone brought by a group of tourists who visit the blockhouse. As with the representation of Cristiana's vacuous lifestyle at the beginning of the film, Genina's rejection of technological progress within the regenerative space of Africa serves in part as a criticism of the *telefoni bianchi* films, in which the latest technological discoveries were placed in plain sight as visual expressions of an evolved, modern Italy.

In this respect, *Lo squadrone bianco* provides a clear example of how Fascist propaganda often relied on arbitrary distinctions between "good" and "bad" forms of modernization. By praising the minimal access to technology available to the Italian army, the film contradicts the affirmations made in LUCE newsreels of the same time period. Shown in conjunction with commercial films in cinema halls, the LUCE documentaries and newsreels consistently presented audiences with favorable representations of Italy's modernization of Africa. For example, in describing the Italian army's advance on Ethiopia, Italy's advanced technological instruments were placed in clear opposition to the rudimentary instruments with which the Ethiopians lived and fought.

As noted in the nearly exhaustive inventory of documentaries and newsreels on the colonial subject compiled by Barbara Corsi and included

in the last section of Gian Piero Brunetta's book, *L'ora d'Africa del cinema italiano 1911–1989*, the events surrounding Ethiopia's inauguration as an Italian colony, which was made official on May 5, 1936, were often depicted in close relationship with the technological advancements that were believed to have made colonization possible, as evident in the following two transcriptions of audio newsreels that aired on January 15 and November 4, 1936, respectively:

> A.O.: Rapide impressioni della multiforme attività direttiva del Comando Superiore nell'A.O. (funzionamento delle linee telefoniche; servizio trasporti. Gli Ufficiali Superiori dirigono e coordinano le operazioni sui due fronti.) Ecco un aeroplano di ritorno da una ricognizione [...] I collegamenti radio si giovano di tutte le più moderne risorse della tecnica. [...] Così la Radio, superba conquista che l'umanità deve al genio italiano, si allea alla conquista dei nostri condottieri e al valore delle nostre truppe nella vittoriosa avanzata liberatrice attraverso l'ultimo baluardo della schiavitù e della barbarie. (Corsi 1990, 188)
>
> A.O.: Rapid signs of the Superior Command's multiform governing activity in the A.O. (functioning telephone lines; transportation services. Superior Officials oversee and coordinate operations on both fronts.) We have a plane on its return from a reconnaissance [...] Radio connections benefit from the most modern technological resources. [...] Thus the radio, superb achievement of humanity indebted to Italian engineers, is allied with the achievements of our leaders and with the valor of our troops in the victorious liberating advance across the final bulwarks of slavery and barbarism.
>
> Addis Abeba: Le prime impronte fasciste ad Addis Abeba...si aprono nuove strade, sorgono rapidamente nuove costruzioni, si attivano servizi di comunicazione e di trasporto, le officine e i laboratori si moltiplicano. Un fervore di rinnovamento pervade la vasta città-giardino, impaziente di assumere al più presto un aspetto degno della capitale dell'Impero Italiano d'Etiopia. (Corsi 1990, 204)
>
> Addis Abeba: The first marks of Fascism on Addis Abeba...new roads are opened, new constructions are rapidly rising, services of communication and transportation are activated, auto repair shops and workshops are multiplying. A fervor of renovation pervades the vast Garden City, anxious to assume as quickly as possible an appearance worthy of the capital of the Italian Empire of Ethiopia.

In order to better understand Genina's representation of technological progress, which seems to contradict the positive views of modernization presented in the LUCE newsreels, it is helpful to consider other feature films of the 1930s that approach the issue of technological progress from a perspective that differed from that of the *telefoni bianchi* production by

praising technological advancements while also reinforcing the existing social and economic order supported by Fascism. Whereas in Alessandro Blasetti's film, *Terra madre* (1931), new and more efficient agricultural machinery save farmers, and especially women, from the more difficult tasks in the fields, in *Rotaie* (1929), *Treno popolare* (1933), and *Il signor Max* (1937), the mass mobilization of citizens afforded by modern forms of transportation, such as trains and buses, was carefully celebrated in such a way as to avoid confounding geographic mobilization with social and economic mobility (Ricci 2008, 107).

In Mario Camerini's *Rotaie*, the train serves as a providential element in the story of two young, unemployed lovers whose extreme poverty leads them to consider suicide. A miraculous reversal occurs when their attempt at suicide fails and they stumble upon a wallet full of money left in the bar of a train station. Given the setting of the film, it is modern society itself, with its fast-paced travelers, trains and stations, that saves the couple from death while also threatening to condemn them to a different but equally unsettling fate. The lovers purchase a first class train ticket and travel to a tourist resort for members of high society, where their encounter with the elite ambiance of the Grand Hotel threatens to ruin their relationship. Having incurred a sizeable gambling debt, the male protagonist's desperation leads him to consider the possibility of prostituting his wife. Ultimately, despite having lost all of their money, they are able to catch a train that will take them home. This time, they are content to travel second class, surrounded by simple people like themselves. As Ricci has observed, the juxtaposition of the two journeys allows the film to eschew problematic implications about social mobility in such a way that the temporary "destabilization, invoked by the spatial mobility that was occasioned by their access to modern transportation, is transformed into a 'permanent' stabilizing of class order entirely consonant with an idyllic Fascist status quo" (112).

Raffaello Matarazzo's *Treno popolare* similarly celebrates technological advancement without compromising the Fascist regime's goals. The film, which revolves around an organized visit to the city of Orvieto, describes one of the pastimes endorsed by the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro,* which urged Italians to visit Italian cities by offering weekend train discounts. The momentary escape from one's city or domestic environment is carefully structured so as to suggest that inappropriate conduct, such as marital infidelity, might be allowed as long as the social hierarchy remained unchallenged (Ricci 2008, 116). Under the pretext of reinvigorating national pride by exposing its citizens to Italy's historical and cultural patrimony, these trips featured fixed, full-day itineraries aimed at familiarizing visitors with characteristic locations, and thus providing an example of one of the state's

many mechanisms for gaining control over all aspects of life, including leisure (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 122). The state's development of tailor-made activities, such as organized excursions, resort holidays, musical performances, film screenings, and rural fairs and festivals, provided an efficient means of involving the less wealthy classes in activities that posed no political threat to the regime, prevented the spread of dissent, and celebrated the Fascist ideals of societal hierarchy and order (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 114; Ricci 2008, 116).

Just as the set itineraries of the activities organized by the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* prevented individuals from straying from the established course, the function of films like *Treno popolare* was to discourage behaviors influenced by modernization and remind audiences that the increase in mobility came with new demands and responsibilities on the part of the citizen (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 123). Similarly, in Mario Camerini's *Il signor Max*, a newspaper vendor named Gianni works all year in order to be able to afford a luxurious vacation in the most beautiful Italian cities. During Gianni's journey by train, which has little in common with the trips organized by the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* since he travels first class and his itinerary is open to unforeseen events, he encounters a group of elite travelers returning from a trip to the United States. By making their acquaintance, Gianni is able to temporarily ascend the social and economic ladder and abandon his status as a vendor to assume a new identity as the sophisticated Max. From the train, he further ascends to environments even more elegant, such as luxurious hotels and parties aboard ships, but his playful digression comes to end when Gianni realizes his disgust with the world of his new friends.

In this way, Camerini and Matarazzo's films celebrate the increased mobility of the lower classes, who were able to travel and take vacations as railway transportation became more widely accessible, but they also reaffirm traditional class and gender practices and provide antidotes to transgression. These films successfully navigate the fine line between two opposed forces, both considered necessary for the future development of the country's power, by simultaneously championing modernity and upholding the virtues of the simple lifestyle that was said to provide "moral health and well-being" to Fascist Italy (Falasca-Zamponi 1997, 150). In the case of *Lo squadrone bianco*, we find a similar attitude about controlling human activity under the pretense of promoting increased mobility and opportunities for social and economic advancement, although the focus has been shifted from the control over leisure activities to the colonial enterprise. As with cultural activities and free time, Mussolini believed it was necessary to create circumstances for Italians to embrace new opportunities for social and economic growth while also maintaining, if not increasing, control over their lives.

Ultimately, in the films *Treno popolare*, *Rotaie*, and *Il signor Max,* the plots place "different classes in sight of one another" (Ricci 2008, 123) and the films recreate a sense of order in that characters return to their proper place on the social ladder. Similarly, in Genina's film, despite Mario's initial collocation among the bourgeoisie, Mario is stripped of all markers of a higher social status in order to turn him into an imitable model. Mario's transformation into an everyman was meant to allow all Italian male spectators, even those of the lower classes, to identify with his character. Moreover, just as Camerini and Matarazzo's films reveal how the activities organized by the *Opera Nazionale del Dopolavoro* attempted to control the lives of the lower classes with precise objectives and responsibilities, the colony was also conceived not only as a potential host for Italy's overabundant workforce but also as a space that would require a new degree of control and regulation of the population. The Fascist regime felt that an important part of military life included reforming notions of individual worth and aspiration and eradicating bourgeois values, thus in *Lo squadrone bianco*, it is the discipline of military life that reforms Mario's lifestyle and provides him with the opportunity to become a hero by sacrificing himself to the State and freeing himself from those components which defined him as bourgeois.

Genina's film is not the parable of a character from humble origins whose arrival in the colony provides him with a means of social advancement in virtue of his inner qualities. Rather, one of the reasons for which technological advancement is not celebrated in the film is to highlight Mario's journey as one in which his initial attachment to tangible forms of well-being is slowly renounced in order to reveal the innate, universal qualities, such as industriousness and self-sacrifice, that all Italians were said to possess. Mario's transformation into a common man is initiated by his introduction to Sant'Elia, who, in telling Mario to remove his Fascist uniform, reminds him that it is not the "style" of the clothing that one adopts that matters, but rather the leader who demands it. Sant'Elia's harshest criticism is that Mario behaves like a "man from the moon,"[2] one who fails to recognize his place and his responsibilities. Mario's individualism and bourgeois habits are gradually eroded by Captain Sant'Elia, who constantly reminds him that he must now serve as a leader for the other men in the squadron, who are used to a different kind of commander, so that when Cristiana eventually arrives in Libya and asks to speak with Mario after his return from the excursion in the desert, she notes that he seems to "have another face, another gaze."[3] He likewise understands that a full transformation has taken place and bids her farewell by assuring her that "Mario exists no longer" and that his new place "is here."[4]

Thanks to his experience in Africa, Mario undergoes a physical and psychological shift from the ostentatious bourgeois world, where every comfort was available to him, to the simplicity of life in the desert in the squadron's company. In a colony yet to be conquered, becoming a leader requires Mario to subordinate to the social order of both the Italian army and the native population in order to earn the trust of his superiors and the *askari* soldiers. The film establishes a hierarchy whereby the *askari* soldiers, or the colonial subjects, were expected to be subordinate to the Italian army, but it also emphasizes the necessity of compliance and the sacrifice of individuality on the part of the Italian colonizing forces. Thus, while the process of "civilizing" the Ethiopians is enacted through the portrayal of the disciplined *askaris* in the squadron, the process of "refining" poor Italian emigrants is embodied by the bourgeois Mario. As Mario becomes closer to the *askari* squadron, which represents those sectors of the native Libyan population that were subjected and loyal to the Italian State, Genina insists upon the character's movement toward the populace, toward his men and the *askari* soldiers, as he becomes part of the squadron itself.

It thus becomes plausible that the true enemy in the film is not, in reality, the group of Libyan rebels, which in fact makes only a brief appearance in the film, but rather the process of reclaiming and reforming Mario as a model Italian soldier in the new colonial context. In this way, the presumed "foreign" enemy in the film serves as a façade for the problems jeopardizing the unity and cohesion of Italian society at home where, in the climate of social change in postunified Italy, women and the working class had achieved a greater degree of visibility in the public sphere and consumer culture was creating a society in which individualistic desires were given precedence over the values promoted by the Fascist regime. From this perspective, *Lo squadrone bianco* is a cinematic work in which the virtues of simple people, as discussed by Falasca-Zamponi, are deemed necessary for the country's future (150). The character of Mario exemplifies mobility and social advancement as liberties that can be acquired only by adhering to the regime's values and by relinquishing individual aspirations to power, control, or economic prosperity. In this way, Genina's film might be said to propose, through Mario Ludovici's example, an imitable model for the audience.

At the same time, it seems necessary to ask if Genina's film succeeds in its attempt to encourage members of the lower classes to embrace the colonial effort and to develop a loyalty toward a State that asked them to reject the impulse for greater material well-being. The objectives of the film and the premises upon which it emphasizes both the advantages of the colonial enterprise and the disadvantages of pursuing individualistic

desires ultimately seem at odds with one another. On the one hand, improving one's life and achieving a higher social status was one of the promises offered by propaganda in favor of Mussolini's colonization: The regime patronized forms of modern culture and redefined its goals; cinema, tourism, and technological progress were portrayed as having the potential to restore traditional social and gender roles rather than emancipatory forces; and the LUCE newsreels boasted of the transformation of the African territory from vast deserts into urban spaces with homes, churches, railroads and roads, and promoted Italy's colonial war as a mission to modernize Ethiopians.

Yet, by enlarging the spectrum of options and desires, and praising technological development and the consolidation of a consumer culture, the regime threatened to reintroduce individualistic choices into a society that was being organized around totalitarian practices seeking to curb "mundane demands" and deny social advancement within sectors of Italian society (Falasca-Zamponi 1997, 125). Since the film attempts to depict the disruptive effects of modern culture by highlighting Mario's abandonment of his past life with Cristiana in order to become a heroic figure in the colony, Genina's plot ultimately condemns the very progress that Italians were supposedly bringing to Ethiopia by praising the heroism of a simpler lifestyle and attempting to squelch the desire for cars, telephones, parties and a higher standard of living in general. One can better understand the inherent ambiguity of Genina's film, in which emigrants, by identifying with the character of Mario, are promised social advancement and at the same time are denied both the material and political advantages implied by such emancipation.

Negative Contrasts: Filmic Representations of *Meticci* and Levantines

At the time of the late-nineteenth-century colonial expansion in Eritrea and Somalia, representations of nude and seminude indigenous women were used both to increase the sales of certain publications and to encourage the Italian male population to participate in the colonial enterprise (Sòrgoni 1998, 58). In several written accounts on Africa like *Memorie d'Africa* (written between 1883 and 1906 and published in 1935), by a civil servant named Alessandro Sapelli, the native woman is often referred to as a *concubina* or *madama* and described as obedient and compliant to her "tenderly loved master" (qtd. in Barrera 2002, 178). As Giulia Barrera observes, prior to the invasion of Ethiopia, Italians who went to the colonies did so with the intention of staying for a long period of time and,

considering the scarcity of Italian women in the colony, those who aspired to have family were able to justify relationships with *madame* (237). As "Italian men sought not only sex, but also emotional support," the terms of the relationships between Italian men and African women changed because they were no longer only sexual, but also included a host of feelings and sentiments (Barrera 2002, 183).

Yet, as Italians were asked to settle permanently in the colonies, and especially in light of Mussolini's more racist colonial policies following the conquest of Ethiopia, relationships between Italians and *madame,* understood in these terms, posed a serious threat. Gradually, the modes of representing both the native population and the interests of the Italian settlers were reconsidered in order to prevent men from abandoning their fidelity and obligations to their families and to the Italian State (Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233). These changes in the representation of the colony intended to limit the appeal and also the feasibility of forming lasting relationships with native women, as Italian women were invited to join their men and were expected to provide their partners with a sense of home, and thus fill a previous need in the lives of Italian men abroad (Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233).

The problem of biracial offspring in the colonies is directly addressed in Guido Brignone's 1938 film, *Sotto la croce del sud*. Brignone's film not only reminds audiences that the colonial policy in place at the time demanded that Italians moving to the colonies be joined by their wives, but also offers persuasive arguments in favor of racial segregation by illustrating the danger of illicit relationships. Brignone submitted *Sotto la croce del sud*, a work he believed to possess a Fascist framework, for consideration at the 1938 Venice Film Festival and was disappointed by its poor critical reception. Having been raised in a family of theater actors and embracing the family trade by becoming a filmmaker, Brignone had already enjoyed significant success as a filmmaker. He had directed the actor Bartolomeo Pagano as Maciste in the series of films that included *Maciste all'inferno* (1925) and his film, *Teresa Confalonieri*, had won "Best Italian Film" at the 1934 Venice Film Festival. Brignone had great hopes for *Sotto la croce del sud*, a film set in Ethiopia in the region southwest of Addis Abeba inhabited by the Sidama and Galla tribes, which in some respects could be considered as a continuation of *Lo squadrone bianco.*

In light of the historical context and the year of the film's release, Brignone seems to have taken for granted that Fascist colonial policy had succeeded in permanently resolving the question of biracial offspring, since the only biracial characters in the film, Simone and Mailù, are already adults and, by the end of the film, the audience is left with the sense that unions between Italians and Africans are no longer considered

appealing or productive. At the same time, even if Brignone intended to present mixed-race offspring and interracial unions as a problem of the past, it is worth recalling that, as I have discussed in the previous chapters, before *Sotto la croce del sud*, representations of biracial individuals were viewed as taboo since making *meticcio* progeny visible meant acknowledging their existence and raising the question of how to define and classify, from a legal and racial perspective, their belonging within Italian society. Although Brignone's biracial characters are represented in terms of unappealing, unedifying behavior, it is worth investigating how and why these characters are used to acknowledge and criticize interracial unions, when biracial characters had been avoided altogether in the past.

One explanation for why Brignone may feel justified in presenting a previously taboo subject is that by 1938, the year in which both Brignone's film and the race laws appeared, various legal measures regarding mixed-race individuals in Italian society, such as the 1936 legislation limiting the cases for granting Italian citizenship and the 1937 legislation punishing Italian citizens who were caught living with a *madama*, were already in place. Before the 1940 law that officially categorized *meticcio* offspring as blacks, the race laws had discriminated against blacks, whereas individuals of mixed Italian and African descent were in theory still eligible for citizenship. Brignone's negative portrayal of Mailù and Simone perhaps anticipates the attitudes that would later be used to justify the regulation that revoked the Italian *meticcio* children's right to citizenship, but the legal debates of the time period also reveal the inaccuracies in Brignone's portrayal of the problem as no longer relevant. The introduction of the 1940 law, two years after the release of *Sotto la croce del sud*, reveals the degree to which interracial unions were still common.

Either way, Brignone's film clearly aims to highlight the dangers of a society in which biracial children are given agency, and a major purpose of *Sotto la croce del sud* is contrasting the industriousness of the Italians with the indolence of the biracial natives, Simone and Mailù. The film provides an example of how, as Pickering-Iazzi has suggested, "the value of productivity" can be evoked in order to build "a monument to racial prestige" (2002, 212). The film's title refers to the song, "La croce del sud," that Mailù plays from a record in one of the opening scenes of the film, and which in turn refers to the Southern Cross, the dominant constellation of the southern hemisphere that points to the South Pole, just as the North Star indicates the North Pole.

The Southern Cross symbolizes the southern lands and the indolent lifestyle of its inhabitants, which is depicted in representations of Mailù as spending her days doing nothing but listening to sweet melodies as she reclines with a cigarette in hand, in a pose reminiscent of the divas in

the *telefoni bianchi* films. The lyrics in the song ("sad night… profound nostalgia")[5] evoke a decadent atmosphere reinforced by Mailù's remark in a later scene in the film that her willful abandonment to dreams is part of her race. The depiction of Mailù's world and her financial reliance upon Simone is contrasted with images of the Italians' productivity, as exemplified by scenes such as that of the arrival of Marco's workers in the plantation, or by their renditions of patriotic songs ("Farewell my sweet mother, farewell my sweet wife").[6]

The main plot of the film focuses on the story of Marco, a veteran of the Italian-Ethiopian Campaigns who trades in his "musket" for a "hoe" when he decides to return to a plantation he had purchased from the Abyssinian government before the war. After several years of absence, Marco returns to the plantation with a group of Italians, including a young engineer named Paolo. Upon their arrival, they are welcomed by the natives, who immediately recognize Marco and express their esteem for him, but they also discover that the fields have been completely abandoned. The greedy *meticcio*, Simone, who now runs the plantation, has become rich by removing the local inhabitants from the fields and putting them to work in an illegal trading business. In order for his business to continue undisturbed, Simone recognizes the need for Marco and Paolo's approval and asks the *meticcia* Mailù to seduce the younger of the two men, who is less experienced and more naïve.

The plantation thus represents a corrupt world that must be brought back to order and, as individuals of mixed blood, Simone and Mailù unequivocally illustrate the flaws of the earlier years of colonialism, during which interracial relationships had been tolerated. Mailù is portrayed in great detail to suggest the consequences of poor colonization, and she not only succeeds in attracting Paolo's attention, but soon becomes a problematic element within the group of settlers, all of whom desire her. Played by the actress Doris Duranti, who at the time was known as the "exotic orchid" of Italian cinema, Mailù's character embodies the type of seduction used to warn audiences of the potential dangers of Africa. The carefree idleness, *dolce far niente*, and suggestive atmosphere evoked by the music, her exotic dress, and the seductive appeal of her character are all reminders of the elements that threatened to corrupt the spirit of the colonizers unless neutralized by values such as work and family. (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 138-139; Pickering-Iazzi, 2002, 196)

At the same time, one purpose of presenting the antagonists of the film as biracial is to emphasize their difference, not only from the Italians but also from the native population, and to avoid a direct correspondence between the negative attributes of Mailù and Simone and the overall, largely positive, representation of Africa itself. Whereas there is a mutual

understanding and respect between the Italians and the natives, who are both aware of their place and role, Simone and Mailù are characterized by a strong sense of non-belonging and are viewed as despicable by the Italians and Africans alike. The natives despise Simone because, in order to take over Marco's plantation, he had sold several men from the village as slaves to a local authority, *ras* Bitu. Likewise, in various scenes of the film, Italian characters define Simone in negative terms as a "Levantine, a scoundrel" and as a "wicked half-breed."[7]

To a certain extent, the film merely represents the historical reality that both Italians and Africans often viewed mixed-race progeny negatively. While Fascist anthropology of the late 1930s suggested that unions with indigenous women would deteriorate the Italian race, biracial offspring abandoned by Italian fathers also created a problem in the organization of, for example, the Eritrean society because, as Sòrgoni points out, children born out of interracial unions needed to be assimilated into the mother's family, which disrupted the rules of property division (123–124). Another aim of the film is to reject the myth of biracial children as genetically closer to their white father. Brignone provides a direct response to earlier efforts, during the Liberal era, to officially recognize mixed-race children in the colonies and assure them a place in the society of their Italian fathers. During this time, anthropological arguments were made in an attempt to prove that male features were dominant in an interracial union, and thus the children born of a white father and a black mother were closer to their fathers (Barrera 2002, 200–201; Sòrgoni 1998, 107–108). The purpose of this position was two-fold: It provided a means of accepting biracial children into Italian society, since the emphasis on honesty and exemplary moral conduct required Italian men to assume responsibility for their children, while also defending the racial integrity of these families by providing evidence that their genetic and moral character was predominantly inherited from the Italian father (Barrera 2002, 200–205; Sòrgoni 1998, 107–108).

Brignone, on the other hand, focuses on the ways in which biracial individuals disrupt the social and economic structure of the entire society. Whereas individuals of mixed Italian and African descent had in previous works been discussed only obliquely, Brignone directly addresses the question, stating in an interview that the purpose of such explicit representations was to teach the Italian audience that "in Africa one must always remember that one is white and, moreover, Italian and Fascist" ("in Africa uno deve ricordare sempre che è bianco e soprattutto che è italiano e fascista") (qtd. in Ben-Ghiat 1996, 142; Pichering-Iazzi 2002, 206; Hay 1987, 192). In *Sotto la croce del sud*, Simone and Mailù's negative influence reaches its peak in the scene in which the natives of the

village perform fertility rites. The sight of the natives' naked bodies leads Paolo instinctively to Mailù's house, whom he only has time to kiss before Simone arrives.

Brignone's substitution of the black Venus with a female character of a lighter complexion is similar to the literary device used by Arnaldo Cipolla in *Melograno d'oro* and by Emilio Salgari in *I drammi della schiavitù*, as it serves to justify the European's attraction to a woman who, though dark skinned, was genetically closer and bore a greater physical resemblance to the white man, making erotic desire easier to justify. In regard to the eroticism of certain scenes, Pickering-Iazzi refers to Donald Bogle who, in the context of American cinema of the 1930s and 1940s, analyzes audience reactions to African-American characters played by white actors (2002, 213). Adopting Bogle's criterion, Brignone's cinematic work seems unmistakably opposed to interracial unions because the film presents the audience with a seductive *meticcio* character played by a famous Italian actress. Doris Duranti's presence would, according to the director's intentions, have the psychological effect of reminding viewers of the fictitious nature of the story, and thus also of the desire she evoked, since the actress was not actually biracial (Pickering-Iazzi 2002, 214). This element alone was intended to legitimize the desire and prevent the film from being misinterpreted.

Although, in accordance with the regime's racist policies against colonial subjects, Brignone adopts the common device of lightening the skin color of the female protagonist, his film reveals a change in the representation of the black Venus, who is no longer a sexual conquest or a passive, beautiful concubine. Because Paolo is initially attracted to a group of nude Abyssinian women performing fertility rites, Brignone is able to put Mailù on the same level as the black Venus in terms of the racial hierarchy, implying that the light-skinned biracial female is racially and morally tainted and can provide only base sexual pleasures. At the same time, because of her ambiguous racial background and greater resemblance to European women, Mailù can also be seen as a general reflection on the role of women—including Italian women—under Fascist Italy. Her character is dangerous not only because of her race, but because she enjoys too much freedom. Like Cristiana in *Lo squadrone bianco*, Mailù moves freely from one place to another, and her mobility is dangerous because it allows her to regard the plantation as a transitory place to which she owes no obligation. Even when she eventually decides to leave the plantation, she exits the scene without a precise destination since she lacks a family or home that could tie her to any one location. Moreover, Mailù's economic mobility is not presented as a positive attribute since her lack of a strong family unit requires her to live with Simone and work for him in order to financially support her lifestyle.

In this way, Brignone's use of both race and gender to negatively depict Mailù provides a reflection of how the process of building racial awareness and civic responsibility in regard to the concept of race were ultimately complementary and functional to redefining the social role of Italian women (Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233). *Sotto la croce del sud* brings onscreen the need to create a new domestic space for the Italian man during a period in which the changes fostered by modernization altered the traditional configuration of the family unit. Mailù's character reinforces the need for Italian women to fulfill the role tailored for them by Fascism, to serve as guardians of racial purity and to join their husbands in Africa to oppose the native women's charm with submissive and obedient behavior in order to ensure the faithfulness of their spouses (Sòrgoni 1998, 230–233). In the film, the arrival of the settlers' wives serves exactly this function, as they are placed in direct opposition to Mailù's fatal charm.

Whereas Mailù is reminiscent of the slender, nonconformist "*donne crisi*" of *telefoni bianchi* cinema, and her hair and clothing are of a different style and color, adorned with exotic accessories, the Italian women who are called upon to preserve their families by moving to the colony and dedicating themselves to their husbands are robust and dressed simply and in dark colors (Pichering-Iazzi 2002, 207; 211). Moreover, in direct contrast to Mailù's characterization as spending her time doing nothing, as soon as they arrive in the colony they immediately start to work and are portrayed as always occupied with domestic duties. Finally, after being mesmerized by the naked bodies of the Abyssinian women, as Paolo passionately kisses Mailù, the steamy atmosphere of the lovers is interwoven with scenes of family life in which Marco's men are seated at the table attended by their wives (Hay 1987, 195).

One can identify an additional function of the arrival of the Italian wives in the film in the many critical studies, such as those of Victoria de Grazia, Piero Meldini, and Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, which have focused on the Fascist pronatalist campaign, a demographic campaign launched by Mussolini in 1927 to raise the birthrate in Italy which, between 1886 and 1926, had dropped drastically. According to the pronatalist policies, bachelors were taxed, prolific mothers reaped bonuses for each child, female employment was restricted to encourage procreation, and abortion was outlawed under Mussolini. In reality, Ricci notes, the pronatalist policies had no effect on the growth of the Italian population and served only to spread the concept of family "as bound to the interest of the state" (73). Considering that the pronatalist campaign opposed women's suffrage and aimed to limit female presence at the workplace (Ricci 2008, 73), it seems that Brignone's film did not only aim at

criticizing interracial unions but also at reinforcing the subordinate role of Italian women.

At the same time, using the character of Mailù as a foil for the Italian wives, the film sends a contradictory message regarding her power and appeal. In order to resolve the paradox between the high incidence of sexual unions between Italian men and native women in the colonies and the notion, implied in Fascist literary and cinematic propaganda, that Italian men were disgusted by females of inferior racial status, *Sotto la croce del sud* brough onscreen the case of an Italian male character as sexually victimized. The image of Mailù as a sexual predator of the white man, while effective on the one hand, also jeopardizes the image of the strong, iron-willed Italian man promoted by the Fascist regime, with the result that Brignone unwittingly contradicts one of Fascism's most publicized myths of the Italian man as the embodiment of virile strength, an ideal extensively promoted through Mussolini's own public image. In the attempt to use the female biracial character as a means of reinforcing the role prescribed to Italian woman and depicting interracial unions as dangerous, Brignone thus unintentionally challenges the image of the Italian male as the epitome of dominance with the character of Paolo, and suggests that he is not always capable of suppressing his own instincts and mastering those sexual desires that conflicted with societal demands.

It is not by chance that the film received significant criticism in Fascist circles for its ambiguous portrayal of the character of Paolo. According to Ben-Ghiat, the exotic setting of the plantation, the references to fertility rituals performed by the native population, and Paolo's physical attraction to Mailù are elements that made the film's atmosphere "explosive" and undermined its reception at the Venice Film Festival (1996, 141). In her lengthy analysis of the film in the article "Ways of Looking in Black and White," Pickering-Iazzi posits Mailù as the most perplexing character for the audience in terms of the film's message. Her character, as an exotic *femme fatale*, condenses the negative characteristics of both her race (African, sensual, lacking discipline) and her gender (female, cruel, independent), and she is especially threatening because she encompasses two cultures and two races, African and Italian (Pickering-Iazzi 2002, 207–208).

Given Brignone's public endorsement of Fascism and his belief that the film reflected the regime's values and goals, it is likely that Mailù's exotic dress and Hollywood diva poses, which proved a lethal combination for Paolo, were intended as a clear, negative commentary on her character that, because of her sexual appeal to most male characters in the film, was lost on many members of the audience (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 142;

Pickering-Iazzi 2002, 207–208). Although one of the objectives of Brignone's film was to discourage interracial unions and deny the reality that the punitive rules in the colonies were ineffective in preventing unions between Italians and native women, many viewers may have seen this work as making the opposite argument. In this way, the female *meticcio* character, who strategically replaces the early figure of the black woman, offers an example of how propaganda often unintentionally contradicted the message that it aimed to relay.

In Fascist Italy, the elaboration of clear, albeit arbitrary, notions of masculinity and femininity, as discussed extensively, among others, by George Mosse, Barbara Spackman, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, provided an important means of defining and prescribing moral behavior deemed proper for men and women, and the Fascist *ventennio* created and reinforced patterns of acceptable behaviors for men and women within diverse social settings. In this film, the concept of black femininity that was promoted by the regime's propaganda with the intent to consolidate the domesticity of Italian women ends up undermining the fundamental qualities inherent to Fascist masculinity and exhibits tones of the subversive characteristics outlined by Pickering-Iazzi in her book *Mothers of Invention*.

The scholar defines Italian women during the Fascist period as "mothers of invention" with the double meaning of a woman subjected to the model of traditional femininity—the wife and mother role invented by the regime, which was the only opportunity for women to assert any relevant role in Fascist society—and a woman who is an agent of invention whenever she managed to garner autonomy or resistance within a cultural and historical context that imposed limits on her emancipation (1995, x–xi). Women became "subjects of invention" when they creatively used their ingenuity required by the regime, who encouraged them to be agents of morality and the protectors of Italian customs in order to reach their aspirations and complete tasks beyond taking care of the family and home (Pickering-Iazzi 1995, xi).

Sotto la croce del sud clearly relies on notions of masculinity and femininity as defined by the Fascist regime. If modern masculinity embodied the nation's ambition to explore new lands, create and maintain an empire, and exhibit courage and a steely devotion to duty, while femininity was defined by attributes that reflected the necessity to maintain order and tradition within society and guard the moral values of the family (Mosse 1996, 113), the conclusion of Brignone's film aims at reestablishing and reasserting these roles. Nevertheless, in the attempt to emphasize Mailù's gender behaviors (autonomy, mobility, economic independence, lack of work ethic, lack of familial bonds) as negative, the plot involuntarily

confers upon the biracial Mailù a power that the black Venus did not previously possess. The qualities that contribute to Mailù's emancipation as a woman—and thus that make her a *femme fatale* censored by the regime—are reflected in the subversiveness of her race, to which is attributed an unusual power that allows her to jeopardize Paolo's masculinity. Only when Paolo overhears a conversation between Mailù and Simone does he discover that he has been used. Recognizing Mailù's deceit, he ends their relationship and tells Marco that he wishes to leave immediately for Italy without his masculinity being ultimately restored by the plot.

Despite the ambiguity around the characters of Mailù and Paolo, the film reaches a resolution when a fire set by Simone creates confusion in the plantation, as a part of the harvest from the past months is lost in the flames. These events remind the audience of the dishonesty and the unproductivity of the biracial characters and also provide a series of tragedies that allow the Italian protagonists to demonstrate their capacity to successfully reestablish order (Hay 1987, 197). Simone and Mailù emerge as the only negative figures and the film ultimately celebrates the myth of good colonizers and docile, ingenuous natives. The return to order is solidified by Simone's death and Mailù's redemption, as she confesses the truth to Paolo and leaves the plantation, recognizing that they are "good people who have to think about their work"[8] and that her presence "is a poison."[9] Despite the obvious message that the film's conclusion attempts to communicate, some degree of ambiguity still surrounds Mailù's character, for while Simone is undoubtedly a malicious character, it is unclear whether or not Brignone also condemns Mailù's conduct since her departure from the plantation for the sake of the "good people" suggests that she is able to redeem herself (Pickering-Iazzi 2002, 213). I would further argue that the contradictions in the film are not limited to the eroticism or the ambiguous portrayal of Mailù, but rather that both Simone and Mailù are ambiguous figures because of their portrayal, not merely as mixed-race characters, but also as "Levantines."

When Paolo and Mailù first meet, he asks her if she is a "Levantine," and Marco reveals his disgust for Simone by referring to him as a "Levantine, scoundrel." Simone's last name, Arioropolos, signals to the audience that he is of Greek descent, and thus not of an Italian father, whereas Mailù's background is never clarified. The term "Levantine," was generally used in reference to the Italian residents of Africa who, unconcerned with belonging to a supposedly superior race, embraced cultural intermingling with other ethnic groups. They were the Italian characters that Enrico Pea and Fausta Cialente suggestively described as having recovered that part of themselves that connected them to the Other, effectively rejecting the dichotomies of inferior and superior, the colonized and the colonizer.

But whereas "Levantine," to borrow a phrase from Trinh Minh-Ha, was a term used to denote individuals who were "not quite the same, not quite the other" (140), it becomes a generic term in Brignone's film, used to mark those individuals who threatened the establishing and preserving of a culturally and ethnically homogeneous Italy.

The physical removal of Mailù and Simone from the plantation at the end of the film is meant to signal the triumphant erasure of such otherness in Paolo and Marco's community and to foreshadow the similar fate of all *meticci*, who Brignone likely believed were destined to disappear from Fascist Italy thanks to new laws and social practices. While the threat posed by Simone and Mailù as mixed-race characters might be overcome by the legal revocation of *meticci*'s right to citizenship in 1940, their more ambiguous status as "Levantines" represented a greater threat to Fascist society. Because Levantines were often Italian expatriates who were not necessarily of mixed or ambiguous racial descent, Fascist authorities struggled with the question of how to define them and how to justify their decision to become "almost African, almost Oriental." Unlike the *meticcio* progeny, the Italian Levantines could not be barred from citizenship or forcefully stripped of their Italian identity.

The villains of *Sotto la croce* are two *meticcio* characters defined as "Levantines" throughout most of the film, who are eventually sent away from the Italian community. Brignone thus attempts to consolidate otherness into a question of race and resolve the question by simply removing hybrid figures from the united white community. At the same time, the opposite effect is also achieved insofar as, by defining the mixed-race characters as both "*meticci*" and "Levantines," Brignone reminds the audience that there were also Italian citizens who freely chose to become "almost" African. In the film whiteness becomes a question not only of skin color and biological belonging, but of one's cultural identity and adaptation to foreign environments. In this, the possibility of creating a cohesive, coherent definition of the Italian population is suddenly called into question by the implication that those white Italians who lacked the common values and attitudes of their fellow citizens were perhaps not "Italian" at all.

The crucial point of contradiction is that, while removing Simone and Mailù from the Italian community and foreshadowing the destiny of colonial *meticci*, Brignone's film simultaneously incites other fears by calling them Levantines and reminding the audience of the Italian residents in Africa whose belonging to the Aryan race was called into question. In their respective studies, Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, Olindo De Napoli, and Mauro Raspanti follow the gradual shift of Fascist racism from an emphasis on cultural and spiritual characteristics to a new

emphasis on biological traits, as Fascist discriminatory policies of the late 1930s came to rely heavily on a discriminatory language in order to lay the foundations of the legal, social, and racial identity of the new Italian citizen, as defined by the 1938 racial laws. Whereas this move toward Aryanism within Fascist discourse is still heavily debated among scholars, I rely here on the distinction drawn by De Napoli between discriminatory policies against colonial subjects and practices aimed at targeting the Jews living on the mainland, to illustrate how the Italian Levantines and the *insabbiati* living in Italy's African colonies posed a threat to the definition of Italian whiteness and race by revealing the contradictions within Fascist discriminatory policies before and after the 1938 racial laws.

The use of cultural heritage and lifestyle to define national identity in the colonies eventually failed to provide the criteria for racial supremacy to which Fascism aspired after the 1936 conquest of Ethiopia. Aside from the abstract ideological arguments concerning Mussolini's view of Italian racial purity, there were also practical reasons for excluding individuals like the colonial *meticci* from Italian society, as they endangered the demographic colonization of Ethiopia. Because the *meticcio* population was uniquely situated between the African demographic, which was viewed as a source of cheap labor, and the Italian colonial population, which sought to gain control over significant portions of land, the right to citizenship threatened to shift the *meticcio* population from the former group to the latter, creating obvious social and economic tension within the existing order. This is why, before the 1940 law that reinserted colonial *meticci* into the indigenous population, the regime sought to prevent mixed-race individuals from obtaining citizenship. The points delineated in the 1938 *Manifesto della razza* provided the ideological platform for a biological discrimination by underlining that the prestige of the Italian race, both in the colonies and in the motherland, had to be defended as it risked being damaged by miscegenation or by living in close contact with other ethnic communities (De Napoli 2009, 145; Raspanti 1994, 75). This document affirmed a need to repudiate a conception of race on the sole basis of historical, cultural, and religious elements, in order to affirm the Italian populations' belonging to the Aryan race.

On the other hand, the discriminatory policies against Jews, which De Napoli and Raspanti discuss in depth, reveal the degree to which the regime continued to rely on historical and cultural factors, and the myth of an Italic stock, in order to define membership in the Italian community. Abandoning the search for purely biological criteria, the regime leaned toward forms of racism based on socio-historical factors and, starting in 1939, Fascist racism looked favorably toward nationalist and spiritualist

approaches. Unlike the colonial subjects who had lived in a subordinate and distinct position with respect to the Italian population of mainland Italy, the anti-Semitic biological discourse posed significant challenges to the legitimacy of the regime's claims because Jews had been part of Italy's social and economic fabric since the Risorgimento (De Napoli 2009, 141; Raspanti 1994, 78).

Nationalist racism was supported by the anthropologist Giacomo Acerbo, the university professor of Political Science Vincenzo Mazzei, and the writer Aldo Capasso. Other active promoters of the nationalist approach included the university professor Nicola Pende and the physiologist Sabato Visco, who in February 1939 replaced Guido Landra as director of the Italian Office of Racial Studies, a position that Visco would occupy through May 1941. A major vehicle of the nationalist discourse, according to which Italy was to be viewed as a compact nation whose ethnic population had been forged by environmental and historical factors and by the spiritual legacy of Ancient Rome, was the magazine *Razza e Civiltà*, which promoted the idea that individuals who were not a part of Italy's tradition of civic life did not belong to the Italian race (Raspanti 1994, 79–80).

Of even greater interest is the spiritualist racism that grew out of the theories advanced by the philosopher Julius Evola and diffused in the journal *Lo Stato*, which defined the Jewish population in terms of its spirit, or rather the behavior of its members as determined by moral and cultural values. According to Evola, the behavior of the Jews was contemptible because for centuries their moral code had tolerated and even praised deceit, greed, and disregard for one's neighbor (De Napoli 2009, 216). Such attributes were thus seen to have permanently influenced the biological makeup of the Jewish population, whose members, regardless of their religious beliefs, were tainted by a biological instinct, or "istinto di razza" (De Napoli 2009, 216). While the biological component remained an important aspect of Evola's theory, and he ultimately did not propose a revision of the anti-Semitic laws (De Napoli 2009, 218), the purely genetic criteria that had been used to support the racial laws of 1938 were subjected to new spiritual criteria.

The premises of anti-Semitic discriminatory policies against Jews, who were excluded from definitions of racial belonging following the 1938 racial laws because of their supposedly diverse biological fabric, cultural background, and moral values, become immediately questionable in light of other groups, such as the Italian Levantines and *insabbiati* living in the colonies. Like the Jewish population of Italy, this category of Italian citizens, who lived in close contact with other ethnic communities and whose lifestyles and beliefs did not necessarily adhere to social or economic doctrines of the Fascist regime or to Roman Catholic values,

represented a clog in the system. In this way, although the turn toward the Aryan discourse in Fascist racism was not contradicted by the nationalist and spiritualist orientation, since the biological factor continued to play an important role in both, these new arguments turned the defining elements of belonging into an extremely ambivalent and not-easy-to-control ethnic and cultural prism.

In their attempt to create consensus with Mussolini's regime, the films analyzed in this chapter communicate a code of behavior and exalt a definition of national identity that relies on the supposed racial superiority of the colonizers over the colonized. Confident in the prospect of changing even the most intimate aspects of life, these films present protagonists who are meant to show how the values and desires of average Italians could be fused with those of the State in order to transform viewers not only into supporters of Fascism but also agents of its revolution. The shift from disharmony to a re-established order in the films was intended to mirror the journey of the new citizen from the chaos of selfish desires to the joys of living in accordance with and in obedience to the tenets of the Fascist regime. In my analysis of these films, my interest lies not only in evaluating the degree to which these films were ultimately successful in convincing viewers to adopt certain behaviors or reevaluate desires that were prohibited by the existing social order. I have also tried to expose how films affiliated with the Fascist regime contain a wide range of contradictory elements that escape their ideological intent.

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4

Levantines and Biracial Offspring in Postwar Italy

Colonialism and the Lack of Public Debate in Postwar Italy

The recognition of inadequate debate on Italian colonialism in postwar Italy is by no means a novelty. Many Africanist scholars including Angelo del Boca, Nicola Labanca, and Alessandro Triulzi have discussed the various factors that may have contributed to this lacuna in research and debate. Due to the unique way in which Italian colonies achieved independence (not from any battle for colonial freedom, but rather, because of the conditions of Italy's defeat in the Second World War) a postwar decolonization denouncing Italy's wrongdoings in Africa has only taken place in the last four decades. While countries such as France and Great Britain were compelled by various factors and through various means to acknowledge their colonial histories, postwar Italian governments, Angelo Del Boca remarks, evaded their duty to acknowledge their offenses and deliberately obstructed the reality of the situation (2003, 18). He expands on this notion by referring to the fifty-volume *L'Italia in Africa* (1952) a publication, endorsed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose objective was to praise the efforts of Italian colonialism (2003, 18).

In his article, "History and Memory of Italian Colonialism Today," Nicola Labanca outlines three phases of Italy's amnesia regarding colonialism, focusing specifically on the tendency of the Italian community to conveniently forget or sporadically recollect the experience in Africa in the thirty years following the end of the war (30). My analysis in this chapter focuses on the first phase outlined by Labanca: the aftermath of the war, when the legend of a benevolent Italian colonialism, which was vitally needed to redeem postwar Italy from its past alliances in World War II and the dark chapters of the Fascist *ventennio,* deferred

any critical historical inquiry into the colonial past (Del Boca 1992, 113; Labanca 2002, 427). Italian culture of the 1940s and 1950s vehemently denounced Fascism but did not condemn colonialism with the same strength of purpose, and instead continued to affirm the self-exonerating legend of *italiani brava gente* (Del Boca 2003, 17–19; Labanca 2002, 438). It is no surprise, then, that it is extremely rare to find films and novels of the immediate postwar period with an anti-colonial tone or in which the legend of benevolent colonialism is questioned.

Alessandro Triulzi's discussion of "memory latency" in his essay, "Ritorni di memoria nell'Italia postcoloniale," is particularly useful in my examination. Triulzi argues that colonial memory, dormant during the immediate postwar period as the Italian society attempted to turn its back on the past, reemerges in moments of crisis in the form of nostalgia for the colonies (6–7). In this context, the colonial memory becomes selective, characterized by a sense of regret but also by the suppression of memories causing pain (Triulzi 2008, 6–7). For example, there are no traces of the violent and disturbing attempts to defend and demonstrate the cultural and racial cohesion of Italian society during the Fascist period, such as the segregation of Italian citizens and colonial subjects, the racial laws, and the revocation of the right to citizenship for children born of an Italian and an African parent. Triulzi draws on Ruth Iyob's definition of *mal d'Africa* in "From Mal d'Africa to Mal d'Europa" in his description of the artificiality of the colonial memory, which nostalgically recalls only reassuring facts and events so that the colonial past becomes a sort of fantasy (Iyob 2005, 258–263; Triulzi 6–11). Triulzi references, in his essay, how Italian public opinion was affected by *mal d'Africa* when paying homage to Somalia on the occasion of the Trust Territory of Somalia (1950–1960),[1] which revived Italy's national pride and reinvigorated a nostalgic meditation on the period in which this country belonged to Mussolini's East African Empire (1936).

Among scholarship similarly focused on the concept of *mal d'Africa*, Loredana Polezzi's article, "Mal d'Africa and Its Memory," examines feelings of sentimentality toward Africa in relation to Italy's sense of regret for having been stripped of its position of prestige with the loss of the East African Empire. Despite public opinion's condemnation of Fascism, Polezzi maintains that such nostalgia had become rooted in the Italian spirit and took on political undertones. Thus, the phenomenon of Italian *mal d'Africa* should not be understood only as the generic "illness" affecting repatriated Europeans who had abandoned the colonies against their will and struggled to find "a suitable space back in their motherland," but also as an entire society's bitterness caused by "the end of a perceived moment of Italian greatness" (Polezzi 2007, 42).[2] Drawing from Seth Graebner's, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's, and Dennis Walder's

respective studies on (colonial) nostalgia, I further discuss how such wistful affection entails a process of remembering the colonial past that can be either conservative or progressive. Building on Svetlana Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, they assert that the former focuses on *nostos* and seeks to recover lost places and times by "patching up the memory gaps," and the latter "dwells on *algia,*" on the anguish and pain, and "on the imperfect process of remembrance" (Graebner 2007, 12), because it exhumes mixed negative and positive fragments of the past without reconciling them (Hirsch and Spitzer 2003, 84; Walder 2009, 939–940).

Moreover, Patricia Lorcin's insightful comments support my usage of colonial nostalgia as either a collective or a subjective experience. While nostalgia could be either a societal phenomenon or a subjective experience, it migrates from the realm of subjectivity to the domain of collectivity when it is made public by commercialization, when representations of a biographical account become "the symbols and objects of a highly public, widely shared and familiar" narrative (qtd in Lorcin 2012, 10). As opposed to the term nostalgia, I favor the expression *mal d'Africa* which encompasses the meaning Truilzi gives to it, as the expression of a (restorative) nostalgia establishing a positive relation with colonial time, and a longing rooted in a colonial imagery that has historically exploited representations of black femininity as a means to conceal the dark side of Italian colonialism. My analysis also underscores the existence of a more unsettling *mal d'Africa,* which is the result of an anguish provoked by a (reflective) nostalgia that complicates the past, with positive *collective* memories standing alongside negative *subjective* experiences that destabilize the rose-colored vision of Italian colonialism.

Similarly crucial for my analysis are Áine O'Healy and Karen Pinkus' respective contributions on the subject of the latent colonial memory in their examination of the sudden reemergence of the colonial past through black female characters in the Italian cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. In their respective studies, O'Healy and Pinkus argue that colonial history becomes visible within the contemporary cultural panorama in the form of an indigenous woman who haunts the Italian conscience like an unwelcome ghost (181; 308–312). Because these phantasmal apparitions usually occur abruptly and are detached from the rest of the plot, they are even more suggestive and induce a feeling of disorientation and uneasiness in the audience. While the sudden appearance of black women in films could potentially have signaled the reawakening of colonial memory, the black female figures discussed by O'Healy and Pinkus are not necessarily indications of Italy's recognition of its true colonial past; the nostalgic recollection of the past, as Triulzi notes, is characterized by occasional outbursts of collective excitement—as in the case of

Italy's return to Somalia in the 1950s and during the 1992 Restore Hope operation—and lacks any sense of awareness of its own inadequacy (5–7). Triulzi views colonial memory in postwar Italy mostly as a fabrication of the past that evokes only unproblematic memories rather than an attempt to fully recover the past in an effort to understand its impact on the present. Likewise, according to O'Healy and Pinkus, the sudden appearance of black women in Italian cinema does not prompt an act of recollection that would require confronting and coping with the past in ethical terms.[3] These black female figures are merely ghosts that reveal the impossibility of talking about colonialism or the absence of a process of decolonization in Italian history (Pinkus 2003, 312).

Referring to the notion of *time lag* theorized by Homi Bhabha, O'Healy interprets the appearance of the dancing black women in Federico Fellini's *Le notti in Cabiria* (1957) and in Michelangelo Antonioni's *La notte* (1961) as serving a much greater purpose than simply invigorating the otherwise monotonous atmosphere of the night clubs frequented by the protagonists (181). In both films, the spectators initially perceive the black woman on the screen as a non-offensive presence that reinstates the colonial order of hierarchical otherness and presumed racial inferiority (O'Healy 2009, 181–182). Yet, O'Healy argues that the presence of these female "foreign bodies" serves to project Italy's colonial past onto its current cultural scene in order to unsettle rather than entertain viewers (181). As Bhabha aptly notes in his discussion of the time lag that occurs when the present attempts to protect itself from a past that threatens to bring back to the surface memories erased by an entire nation, the colonial past ultimately resurfaces in the cultural present of the ex-colonizers and forces them to confront their repressed memories (143–144). The past, once projected into the present, redefines the identity of the ex-colonizers by calling into question their sense of self (Bhabha, 1995, 143–144). Part of their identity reemerges from the past like the missing piece of the puzzle that had been hidden.[4]

Pinkus discusses Michelangelo Antonioni's *Eclisse* (1962) in terms of the absence, or eclipse, of colonialism in Italy's collective memory. The film takes place in the Roman peripheral neighborhood of EUR, which was initially conceived as a space to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the foundation of Italy's East African Empire (Pinkus 2003, 302). Transformed into a residential area after the war and more conveniently connected to the city center by means of urban transportation and a greater availability of cars and Vespas, EUR functions as a delineation of the new Italian geography (Pinkus 2003, 303). Pinkus defines EUR as a "no-where"—a place that, by obscuring its initial plans and objectives, becomes a stage for a narrative that disorients Antonioni's viewer

when memories of a colonial past are unexpectedly evoked. The film's key sequence follows Vittoria while she converses with two other women of the liberation movement taking place in Kenya during those years, and then, suddenly, the fair-skinned protagonist appears in blackface dancing to tribal music (Pinkus 2003, 308–310). Through this attentive editing strategy, Italian colonialism arises as a *nonevent*, or an event that instills anxiety, and is thus eclipsed or hidden by something else (Pinkus 2003, 300). In Pinkus' opinion, Vittoria's sudden appearance in African tribal clothing, the reference to the decolonization of the former British colony of Kenya, and the setting in a place that has been stripped of colonial ties are all elements that reveal the spectral nature of Italian colonialism, present only in its absence (312–313).

An analysis of writer and journalist Ennio Flaiano's novel *Tempo di uccidere* (1947) and Francesco de Robertis' film *Il mulatto* (1949) can be included in, and contribute to, the framework of Pinkus' and O'Healy's analyses of 1950s and 1960s Italian cinema. The plot of both works revolves around a black female character that appears only briefly and yet determines the narrative action. *Tempo di uccidere* provides a literary counterpart to the emergence of the colonial black female body as a specter in Italian cinema, as O'Healy has demonstrated. The novel focuses on the rape and murder of an Ethiopian woman, Mariam, as a means of reintroducing the injustice of a colonial discourse that represented native women as inferior to and more wanton than Italian women. The Italian protagonist's attempt to erase any trace of his involvement in Mariam's death and the woman's involuntary reemergence within the plot provide a narrative template in which the colonial past resurfaces in the figure of the black female character, which becomes the bridge between past and present in postwar film and literature. Likewise, *Il mulatto* indirectly confronts the theme of colonialism, suggested by the allusion to colonial mixed-race progeny in the film's title and by the inclusion of a black female character, the Black Madonna of Montevergine, who represents, though in a rather unusual way, the same colonial ménage of Italian men and indigenous women presented in *Tempo di uccidere*.

To better understand how the figure of the black female becomes a likely euphemism for colonialism, we can consider Flaiano's observation that every project of colonial expansion in Italy relied on celebrating the beauty of indigenous women (qtd. in Schneider 1984, 107). Recalling his participation in the Ethiopian Campaigns in his war diary, *Aethiopia: Appunti per una canzonetta*, Flaiano interprets Italian colonialism in light of popular songs such as *Tripoli bel suol d'amor* and *Faccetta nera* whose sexual allusions "filled hospitals with broken hearted lovers" (qtd. in Corti and Longoni 1990, 265). In the context of colonial expansion,

indigenous women represented the promise of compensation for soldiers who departed for Africa and provided a welcome distraction from the brutalities of colonialism. In addition to considering the evolving correlation between black women and colonialism during the transition from the Fascist era to the immediate postwar period, I also analyze *Tempo di uccidere* and *Il mulatto* in terms of the theoretical notions of mimicry and Levantinism explored in previous chapters, as well as the authors' contrastive modes of envisioning a national Italian identity in the postwar years. These critical perspectives help to underline Flaiano's controversial stance regarding Italian colonialism and De Robertis' attempts to reconcile with the colonial past.

My analysis is also enlightened by Cristina Lombardi-Diop's discussion of "redemptive hygiene," or rather the rapid development of a cult of cleanliness in postwar Italian homes and the influx of cleaning and personal care products. In "Spotless Italy" Lombardi-Diop assesses the "whitening" of Italian society between the 1930s (under Mussolini) and the 1960s, that was used to create a cohesive image of national identity and to provide incentives to economic development during the period of postwar reconstruction. During the postwar years, Italians lacked ethnic uniformity not only because of interracial unions in the colonies but also because the inhabitants of the rural South, who starting in the 1950s became the manpower of the industrial North, still "bore the shame of a backwardness long felt as a burden" (Lombardi-Diop 2011, 2). The lack of cohesion was further amplified by the new societal role to which women aspired in return for their contribution during the war and in the liberation from Fascism (Lombardi-Diop 2011, 3). In this sense, Lombardi-Diop views the omnipresence of the ideal of cleanliness in postwar Italy as allusive to a figurative process of removing blackness and the signs of "Southern poverty, colonial Africa, women's desires for public and sexual emancipation" which caused anxiety in public opinion (2011, 2). Beyond serving as a subliminal impetus to cleanse the Italian conscience of its colonial and Fascist past, the attention to hygiene also promoted a traditional female model, in which caring for the home and family was the woman's responsibility, and allowed the impoverished South to be accepted into the nation as equally sanitized and "white," thereby reconciling the contradictory elements of Italy's "uneven national cohesiveness" (Lombardi-Diop 2011, 2).

The discussion of a *redemptive hygiene* facilitates my interpretation of the reemergence of the colonial past as a sin in need of expiation in both *Tempo di uccidere* and *Il mulatto*. *Tempo di uccidere* explores how the desire to atone for colonial violence remains hypocritical as long as it coexists with the egotistical refusal to take responsibility for one's actions.

In Flaiano's novel, the desire for expiation alongside the absence of repercussions for those who committed crimes is translated in the protagonist's initial conviction that he has contracted leprosy as a result of his rape of an Ethiopian woman, followed by his providential return to Italy, healthy and unpunished. Marilyn Schneider's examination of the biblical rhetoric inscribed in *Tempo di uccidere* supports my argument that the lieutenant's miraculous recovery, by means of an indigenous-looking Archangel Gabriel painted in a hut-chapel of an Ethiopian village, is not unlike that found in *Il mulatto,* which similarly relies on divine intervention to explain the positive outcome of the plot. The sins of the film's protagonist, Matteo, are expiated by the mediation of the Black Madonna of Montevergine, who deems the ex-convict worthy of forgiveness for having willingly assumed custody of his illegitimate mulatto son, Angelo. Once the moral caliber of the protagonist is restored, the character of Angelo is shown to be expelled from Italy. In this way, the plot successfully avoids depicting the acceptance of a black individual into a society that desperately aspired to appear white. As in *Tempo di uccidere*, expiation occurs without repercussions and the function of the mixed-race character in the film, much like the contraction of leprosy in Flaiano's novel, disappears as soon as Matteo's moral redemption is complete.

Postwar Italy: Haunted by the Ghost of Colonialism

In the wake of Italy's losses during World War II, which continued to weigh heavily in the memory and spirit of the country's population, Ennio Flaiano published his 1947 novel *Tempo di uccidere* about a wartime conflict from which Italy instead had emerged as the victor. The plot of *Tempo di uccidere* follows the story of an Italian lieutenant whose need for a dentist spurs him to abandon his military camp and sets him on a path that eventually leads him to kill an Ethiopian woman, Mariam. The murder throws the lieutenant into a state of physical and psychological distress, but it is not remorse for having killed the woman that assails him so much as his fear of having contracted leprosy from Mariam and of being denounced for this evidence of physical contact with her.

As scholars such as Marisa Trubiano and Loredana Polezzi have intimated, the novel immediately reveals itself as a story about the impossibility of depicting in writing Italy's 1935 war victories in Ethiopia. Flaiano, who participated in the Ethiopian Campaigns, presented his novel in the form of an imaginary tale that appropriated discursive practices of the past to expose the flipside of the historical coin in a game of "mirrorings and reversals" (Polezzi 2007, 39; 52). The author incorporated repertorial

images of Italy's colonialism in Africa, the Italian colonizer and the colonized in order to expose liminal spaces between historical accounts and fictional narratives, not only in Fascist, propagandist representations of the Italian colonial enterprise, but also in the actual cultural discourses that existed in postwar Italy (Polezzi 2007, 60; Trubiano 2000, 159; 2010, 41; 49–52).[5] By re-proposing characters and themes familiar to the same audiences to which the African colonies had been presented as regenerative spaces for Italian masculinity, Flaiano exhumed an imaginary Africa if only to mobilize its destruction (Polezzi 2007, 59; Trubiano 2000, 154; 2010, 43). At the heart of the author's narration lies the pursuit of the Italian identity that had emerged after the war because, as Michael Antze and Paul Lambek point out, "when identity is not in question, neither is memory" (qtd. in Andall and Duncan 2005, 14).

The most explicit peculiarity found in *Tempo di uccidere*, discussed at length by Trubiano, is its distance from the literary tradition of Neorealism, which had taken root in the postwar years and in which the heroism of the Resistance and its fraternal, joint struggle had become a recurrent theme (2000, 148; 2010, 39). Whereas much Neorealist literature seemed to offer a portrait of an exceptionally heroic moment of Italian history, Flaiano refused to follow this trajectory or provide a glorified depiction of the war (Trubiano 2010, 41), writing instead "an oneiric surrealistic novel about the Italian campaign in Ethiopia" (Trubiano 2010, 38). Flaiano chooses to narrate the events of the war through a protagonist whose "uncertain" and "indecisive" perspective (Trubiano 2000, 149; 2010, 41) prohibits readers from a clear view of the story which in turn prevents them from trusting his interpretation of the events (Trubiano 2000, 179–180; 2010, 68), a strategy that ultimately reveals the implicit moral of the novel. Unlike Neorealist literature centered around the heroic battle against Fascism, forged by political dissidents, proletariats, and brave partisan soldiers, in *Tempo di uccidere* the characters, places, and the war itself fade into the background of a fantastical story that follows an inept antihero unable to defend himself or others (Polezzi 2007, 55; Trubiano 2000, 153; 2010, 41).

As Trubiano explains, Flaiano was aware of his powerlessness to counter popular representations of wartime victories diffused in 1930s films, songs, and newspapers that had led Italians to mistake words for reality (2000, 153-154; 2010, 54–55). Instead, the Ethiopian Campaigns could only be retold within a fictional dimension capable of expressing "the impossibility of achieving complete understanding and clarity of vision" (Trubiano 2000, 170; 2010, 60). Flaiano was convinced that the truth could not be conveyed in an artistic form since "any system of representation in which reality is perceived to be completely knowable" would have been

"offensive" to him "by this time in his career" (Trubiano 2000, 180; 2010, 40). Thus, Flaiano's personal memory of the Ethiopian Campaigns could only foster an experience of *mal d'Africa* as "the symptom of a repressed historical reality" (Polezzi 2007, 58) for it revealed the impossibility of telling the truth about Africa or of recounting his experience in Ethiopia through a realistic representation. A similar perspective is found in an interview by Nino Ferrero in *Filmcritica* in which another writer, Enrico Emanuelli, elucidates the moral message of his short story entitled *Una lettera dal deserto* (1946)[6] and offers an explanation of the distress caused by this type of *mal d'Africa*:

> Tempo fa scrissi un racconto [...] di una sessantina di pagine che si svolge durante la guerra in Africa, ma la violenza non è quella della guerra; è una violenza talmente esplicita quella della guerra che l'ho data per scontata... sono le altre violenze, che sono collaterali alla guerra, e la violenza più grave viene esercitata sul protagonista di questo mio racconto dalla sua famiglia, quando lui ritorna dopo quattro anni di prigionia; cioè lui ritorna interamente cambiato, mutato dall'esperienza che ha fatto [...] e trova che non è in sintonia con gli altri. (Ferrero 1963, 359)
>
> A while back I wrote a story [...] about sixty pages long that takes place during the war in Africa, but the violence is not that of the war; I took for granted the very explicit violence of the war... it is other kinds of violence, collateral to war, and the worst violence is done to the protagonist of my story by his family when he comes back after four years of imprisonment; rather, he comes back completely changed, transformed by his experience [...] and discovers that he is no longer in sync with the others.[7]

The narrator of *Una lettera dal deserto* is a soldier who, like Flaiano's lieutenant, had fought in Africa. Upon his return home, he pretends to co-operate those who preferred to suppress the horrors of the war and welcomed him home as if nothing had happened ("you have not changed a bit").[8] However, the urge to express the truth prevails over his silence when he discovers the letters that he had written from the frontlines and had been saved by his mother. They have been kept in chronological sequence as if to preserve the order of the "established truths" and "solid points of reference"[9] for his family and friends. When they ask him to recount the details of his final letter—which he never sent, but to which he had referred in several lines ("I have been reflecting in these final days on many things that I'm not sure that I would be able to repeat")[10]—he resolves to share the contents of the letter in the hope of alleviating his anguish.

As he explains, the letter would have described three of his comrades, Petriccione, Ognibene, and Salvini, who, before dying, had held "in their hands and hearts,"[11] the truth of the violence experienced and perpetrated

in Africa and had understood their role and responsibility in the horrors. He had inherited this knowledge from them in a yellow envelope sealed by Salvini, the captain. Yet, the world of Salvini's widow and the narrator's family, of Italy during the process of reconstruction, is unwilling to hear the truth, exposing the narrator's *mal d'Africa* as a malaise caused by the impossibility of recounting a traumatic experience because of the absence of a willing audience. At the end of the story, the content of the last letter succeeds only in stigmatizing his fellow soldiers, viewed by his family as pigs, madmen, and imbeciles, and the narrator himself as "a little bit of all of those things."[12]

Unlike Emanuelli, Flaiano believes that the truth can never be made fully accessible to the readers who must discover it on their own (Trubiano 2000, 169; 2010, 90). The author's task is simply to stimulate a sense of uneasiness by making the reader complicit in the protagonist's thoughts and willingness to defer to the convenience of silencing those who had been in Africa. After Mariam's murder, the lieutenant buries the body and hides all traces of his presence, satisfied that he has fulfilled "his duty" and convinced that he "must continue to act in silence." He takes comfort in his knowledge of the "countless accomplices" that wish for him to remain silent and he feels that once Mariam is buried, "the crime is no longer" his.[13] The lieutenant's *mal d'Africa* does not stem from the impossibility of exposing the violence perpetrated in Ethiopia, but rather from the final realization that he lacked a role and a mission in Ethiopia, that he was not even the protagonist of a war in which victors and victims were identified as such almost by chance.[14] For Polezzi, the lieutenant's *mal d'Africa* is expressed in the "final sentence, in which the link is made explicit between the protagonist's identity and his participation in an act of violence" (55). His final remarks ("Killing Mariam now seemed to me an inevitable crime") explain the origin of the malaise that accompanies him throughout the story ("More than a crime it appeared to me…an illness…revealing me to myself"),[15] and elucidate the role of Mariam's corpse in exhuming the colonial past and forcing Italians to reexamine themselves as well. Trubiano concurs with this interpretation and agrees that the origin of the protagonist's demise is his inability "to live up to the image of the heroic soldier and his preoccupation with maintaining that image in others' eyes" (2000, 176; 2010, 65). His fear of not corresponding to the image that he should have projected of himself is expressed in the novel through the narrator's oppressive sense of being observed, which is tantamount to being judged (Trubiano 2000, 177; 2010, 66). He claims to doubt that there is any task "more oppressive than being watched."[16] His fear of a judgmental gaze is the reason for which he gets lost in the brush, since although he evaluates the possibility of turning back to search for the

right road, he decides against it merely to avoid encountering the workers who had given him directions, fearing their ridicule (Trubiano 2000, 176; 2010, 66). Even Mariam's death is caused by his fear of judgment ("She would have laughed: 'What a frightened *signore* I've found'"),[17] since he decides not to wake her to explain that he had seen the shadow of an animal roaming in the vicinity and that it would be wise to lie in ambush.

To be observed is to be deprived of the exclusive power of how others are represented. As Homi Bhabha has discussed, in the transition from observer to observed, colonial authority is forced to recognize the instability of its identity. The colonizer is revealed as both subject and object, and thus loses his dominion, as soon as the colonized returns his gaze, upsetting the supposed boundaries between superior and inferior (Bhabha 1995, 81).[18] Bhabha argues that the colonizer compensates for his anxiety by establishing an ideal self-image of himself to which the colonized can attempt to aspire through mimicry (85–86). In *Tempo di uccidere*, Elias, a young Ethiopian reminiscent of the character of Mahmud in Rosolino Gabrielli's *Il piccolo Brassa*, is the perfect mimic man because he has learned "to speak Italian almost fluently, without using verbs only in the infinitive,"[19] and his military uniform has been improved by a military cap and wristwatch. Ironically, Elias's task is to preserve an identity model that the lieutenant himself is unable to embody, to the point that Elias avoids looking at him, embarrassed to see his superior "reduced to such a state," "with a long beard, tattered shirt and without the badges indicating" his rank.[20]

In a previous episode, Trubiano remarks, the lieutenant had feared that the camp corporal might report him for his unsightly appearance and behavior, as he frequented the homes of locals and ate sitting on the ground "like a gypsy"[21] (2000, 177; 2010, 66). Claiming that such conduct made him unrecognizable as an Italian official, the corporal asks rhetorically what the natives would make of him. The lieutenant's role in Ethiopia relied on the prestige conveyed by external signs, such as his military uniform, and a form of conduct that reflected his belonging to the dominant group, since, as Bhabha explains, such visibility was fundamental in exercising colonial power and, while the colonized must be identifiable, authority wished to be immediately recognizable as well (112).

In his reading of Homi Bhabha, David Huddart highlights the ironical consequences of colonial discourse on the colonizer, who not only does not feel like his *invented* self, but also becomes increasingly convinced that there was never a "self" at all, nor will there ever be (65). The corporal attributes the deteriorated image of the Italian soldier, as represented by Flaiano's protagonist, to his assimilation and act of 'going native' ("he asked me what my idea was in going native").[22] The act of filing an official

complaint would suggest the possibility of the official's rehabilitation, since a written report might have had the function of preventing him from repeating the same mistake. However, in the encounter between the protagonist and Elias, the hope of the lieutenant's reform is dispelled by the fact that no report is submitted. The lieutenant's comments further signal the undeniable superiority of the boy, now that the copy (Elias) has adhered to the ideal model that has become an unattainable goal for the original (the lieutenant):

> Il mio dizionario era diventato molto povero e sarebbe diventato sempre più povero: poche parole per tutti gli atti che mi erano concessi: mangiare, dormire, guardare, sperare. (*Tempo di uccidere*, 211)
>
> My vocabulary had grown very limited and would become increasingly poor; a few words for all the actions that were conceded to me: eating, sleeping, watching, hoping. (*A Time to Kill*, 209)
>
> Scopersi nel suo sguardo non tanto la curiosità di sapere quello che era successo quanto la certezza che ero ormai debole e indifeso. Era stato vinto, spodestato. (*Tempo di uccidere*, 243)
>
> I discovered in his gaze not so much the curiosity to know what had happened to me as the conviction that I was now weak and defenseless; I had been beaten, deprived of authority. (*A Time to Kill*, 240)

Over the course of the novel, we learn that the lieutenant's problem is not so much that he is the object of the Other's gaze, which precludes his access to the ideal self-image that he would like to inhabit, but rather that he is not really observed at all and is not the focal point of the others' gaze or attention (Trubiano 2000, 176; 2010, 65). At the beginning of the novel, when the lieutenant meets Mariam as she bathes in a pond, his certainty of possessing the observer's advantage is reinforced by his contemplation of the woman, whom he claims to have noticed only because of the white turban holding her hair. Subsequently, however, Mariam undermines the lieutenant's position as 'bearer'[23] of the colonialist look, accorded him by a tradition of literary representations, by continuing to wash herself calmly, undaunted, despite having seen him.[24] Flaiano engages both the reader and his protagonist with the "mirroring and reversal" strategy, which is exemplified by the lieutenant's disappointment in failing to enticing Mariam's interest or desire of him. The comforting sense of empowerment the Italian reader and character experience as they see themselves through repertorial representations of Italy's presence in Ethiopia is disrupted by a contradictory view of the Italian civilizer, which instills a sense of inadequacy whenever, like in this case, he is barely noticed by the natives.

As Mariam continues bathing unconcerned by the white man's presence, Trubiano has also observed, the lieutenant *reverses* what suddenly appears an unfavorable position for himself in the scene by prompting a reinstatement of his own prominence through transforming Mariam in his mind into an optical illusion, one of those African "mirages" commonly spotted by exhausted travelers in literature so familiar to the reader (2000, 175; 2010, 65). As the lieutenant muses to himself ("I thought that one of us could be a mirage, but that I myself could not be"),[25] Derek Duncan similarly suggests, he relies upon "traditions of representation" belonging to western culture in order to afford himself, once again, the vantage point of the colonialist observer (110).[26] Either an illusion of the eye or the reflected image of the lieutenant himself in the pond (as implied in the French word 'mirage,' which refers to one's reflected image in the mirror), Mariam and her careless attitude elucidate the meta-literary quality of a novel in which "the reader is called on to revisit the scenes, to understand the artifice" of colonialist fantasies (Trubiano 2000, 162; 2010, 51), and acknowledge the falsehood of prior and current representations of Italy's colonialism.

The lieutenant's ability to regain, though not without difficulty, his position of advantage accorded by this reliance on literary representations of "imperialist scopophilia" in his encounter with Mariam (Duncan 2005, 110), is weakened in later episodes of the novel, especially with the appearance of the old *askari*, Johannes, who shelters him in his village when the latter, convinced of having contracted leprosy from Mariam, refuses to return to the military camp, fearing repercussions. During his stay with Johannes, the lieutenant resents how his image as an Italian official is threatened by the *askari's* insolence and refusal to treat him with the respect he deserved ("he no longer called me lieutenant and for the first time I did not have the heart to point it out to him").[27] Moreover, during the days spent in the village, Trubiano points out, Johannes ignores him, most of the times allowing only his eyes to "rest on [him], considering [his] person as part of the landscape,"[28] forcing the lieutenant to devise means of making his presence known (2000, 176; 2010, 65):

> Talvolta ero preso dall'ira a tal punto che afferravo un ramo e mi avvicinavo al vecchio battendomi gli stivali, pronto a colpirlo in pieno viso se avesse fatto il minimo cenno di noi. Ma allora fingeva di non vedermi. E io gli giravo attorno, impaziente provocandolo con quei colpi secchi contro il cuoio degli stivali; finché gettavo il ramo lontano [...] con rabbia parlando ad alta voce e mostrandomi pronto a ogni eccesso. (*Tempo di uccidere*, 202)
>
> Sometimes I was seized by such anger that I would grab hold of a stick and approach the old man beating my boots, ready to strike him directly in the

> face if he gave the slightest indication of acknowledging us. But then he pretended *not to see me*. And I circled around him impatiently, provoking him with sharp blows against the leather of my boots; until at last I threw the stick away, speaking angrily at the top of my voice and showing that I was prepared to go to any lengths. (*A Time to Kill*, 200; emphasis added)

Johannes's indifference and insolence unsettle the lieutenant's sense of prestige, though it is his encounter with Mariam that opens up a gap between that which Duncan has defined as "the lived dimension of colonial experience" and the colonial identities fabricated by the regime (111). Already in the scene at the pond, the lieutenant had sensed that Mariam's striking appearance required fearful acknowledgment[29] ("she was really one of those types of beauty that one accepts with fear"),[30] demonstrating both his desire for physical contact with her and his fear of the potential consequences of such an encounter. The fear of the black woman pointed to the possibility of her role as "the conduit through which other social and cultural borders" were violated (Duncan 2005, 108). The prospect of tainting the Italian genetic fabric becomes conflated in the novel with the equally unsettling concern of 'going native,' which the lieutenant believes might result from assimilation with Africa or Africans (Duncan 2005, 112–113). Previously in this book, I have illustrated how the native woman incited this process of racial and cultural contamination by serving as the channel through which the white man was exposed to Africa's primitiveness and savageness (McClintock 1995, 24–28; Ponzanesi 2005, 166) which, according to the expectations of the Fascist regime, needed to be eradicated (De Napoli 2009, 78).

Mariam's death spares Enrico the embarrassment of racial contamination and the risk of undesirable offspring. The problem, however, is that his contact with Mariam (a constant reminder of which is represented by the wound on his hand that he mistakes for leprosy) ends up infecting him with a form of cultural contamination that has the effect of debilitating the external signs of his prestige and way of living, and eventually compromises his moral conduct (Polezzi 2007, 54), leading him to murder Mariam, consider the possibility of suicide and desertion, and contemplate the homicide of two fellow soldiers. The lieutenant's encounter with Mariam places him halfway between "the position of power" he believed to be entitled to and the "subjunctive habitation" of colonial power (Duncan 2005, 111).

It is interesting to compare Flaiano's fictional portrait of an Italian army official with that of Lieutenant Amedeo Guillet ("the Italian Lawrence of Arabia"), who was profiled in a 1941 issue of *L'azione coloniale,*[31] a magazine that had served as an important instrument for

spreading news concerning the Italian colonies under the regime since the early 1930s. Among the various intriguing aspects of Guillet's story, one first notes his decision, made entirely of his own initiative and without following the orders of his superiors, to oppose the English in Eritrea after the Italian army had already surrendered in 1941. Leading a group of Amhara *askaris*, Guillet had slowed the advance of the English troops in Eritrea, providing eight months of hope to the Italians who were witnessing the inevitable loss of their colonial territories. It is difficult to believe that an official who had disobeyed his superiors in order to carry out a private war against the English was able to garner such success among his compatriots by means of one of the most popular Fascist press agencies.[32]

The article's exceptionality consisted not only in focusing on an insubordinate soldier, but above all in having featured an official who had changed his identity and had gained popularity for having successfully passed for an Arab. His flawless command of the Arabic language and conversion to Islam and his adoption of indigenous dress had enabled him not only to erase all traces of himself and to avoid being captured by the English, but were also—as Guillet himself confirms in his interview with Elisabetta Castana—signs of the profound esteem in which he had always held his men and the populations in Libya, where he had spent many years. His nature as an independent thinker had naturally compelled him to challenge the dogma imposed by the race laws and instead establish a close and privileged relationship with the colonial subjects.

Plagued by an identity crisis and "no longer at all what he had been when he had arrived in Africa, no longer an Italian, no longer an official, no longer a Catholic,"[33] Lieutenant Guillet had assumed the name of Ahmed Abdallah Al Redai, had prayed according to Muslim practices and traveled with his Eritrean companion, Khadija, all of which was accomplished without the regime finding cause for objection. This article proves that the ideal model of the Fascist soldier, immune to the seductions of Africa, had ceased to exist even in the channels dedicated to diffusing Fascist propaganda. Against the political backdrop of the race laws and Italy's loss of control over the colonies, Guillet's glorified appearance in *L'azione coloniale* is representative of the decline of the Fascist regime, even amid attempts at rekindling public consent through an example of Italian heroism. It is not surprising that Guillet's identity crisis and his decision to distance himself from the patterns of acceptable behaviors imposed by the regime regarding race and culture were not sufficient deterrents for the magazine, which, on the contrary, displayed the lieutenant in Arabic dress with his Eritrean partner, inaugurating the legend of the "comandante diavolo."[34]

Guillet inhabits that which Duncan defines a "third space consciousness," a phrase he borrows from Edward Soja to describe the cultural space in which "polarities of colonial discourse (colonized/colonizer, black/white, colonialist/anticolonialist) that intimate a reification of identity are refused in favor of a more fluid negotiation of subjectivity in the colonial sphere" (102–103). For Duncan, this space arises from the divide between the colonial identities (of the Italian versus the colonial subject) contrived by the regime and the actual identities of the colonizer and the colonized in the colonies, in which Fascist rules and prohibitions were continuously renegotiated. The imaginary transcultural space discussed by Duncan relates to Gil Hochberg's understanding of Levantinism as an ideal, hybrid space in which diverse cultures coexist, interact and meld with one another so that the dichotomies between European and African, white and black, self and Other can no longer be sustained.

Prior to the cultural contamination of Flaiano's lieutenant, Guillet's levantinization, made public by *L'azione coloniale*, had already dismissed the ideal image of the Fascist soldier. The difference between the two forms of cultural hybridism consists, however, in Guillet's commitment to a subversive heroism that can be likened to the heroes of the Resistance, whereas Flaiano's lieutenant is not permitted to inhabit a heroic dimension and is instead confined to a state of confusion in which he has lost all points of reference and, stripped of the masks of colonizer and colonized, reveals his weakness. Guillet's cultural melding is enabled by his willful appropriation of an identity model that challenged the binary opposition separating Italians from non-Italians, superior from inferior. Instead, the efforts of Flaiano's lieutenant to correspond to the Fascist ideal prevented him from moving beyond it and caused him to experience the condition of cultural hybridism as a disease or a kind of beastialization.[35]

In the last chapter of the novel, the lieutenant returns to the camp after a long absence of nearly a month and discovers that no complaints have been filed against him. As the lieutenant re-examines his experiences, he realizes during a conversation with a second lieutenant that his fears had been without cause, since the events that have transpired have been interpreted in such a way as to absolve him of any responsibility. With his return to Italy, the story concludes without offering the reader any consolation that the lieutenant will in some way bear the consequences of the crime he committed. Even the leprosy he had supposedly contracted in Ethiopia disappears, perhaps cured by the miraculous intervention of the Archangel Gabriel, whose image painted in the hut-chapel of the village where he had slept for days is eventually interpreted by the lieutenant as a covert reminder from the Holy Spirit that he "still lived in God."[36] Flaiano's stance against efforts of cleansing Italy's collective conscience

about the colonial past consists in the strategy of creating discomfort in order to force a reflection on the conduct of the Italians in Africa and the ways in which their actions were represented, or repressed, by complicit parties in Italy who were able to conceal a range of crimes of colonialism (Trubiano 2000, 178-180; 2010, 49–52). In a moral journey reminiscent of Dante's allegorical path to salvation (Schneider 1984, 114–115), the lieutenant's desire for expiation stands alongside an egoistic desire to refute personal responsibility. His redemption, as Schneider suggests, differs from Dante-the-pilgrim's because it is a "cynical triumph of moral injustice" (116). Ultimately, the novel intimates divine intervention most clearly in the act of forgiveness accorded to both the protagonist and postwar Italian society, since only a true miracle could redeem them.

The conclusion of *Tempo di uccidere* harkens back to the analysis of Enrico Castelli and Davide Laurenzi regarding the "reflected gaze" ("sguardo riflesso"), or "reflexity," which is a concept that the scholars borrow from Jay Ruby (*A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*) and George W. Stocking, Jr. (*Observers Observed*) to describe the Italian films of the postwar period that promoted a critical reflection on the collective view of otherness and Africa, proposing strategies that forced the protagonist and the audience to see themselves in the gaze of the Other. Castelli and Laurenzi identify the use of reflexivity in, among others, Ettore Scola's film, *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa* (1968), in which an Italian publisher turns the search for his brother-in-law, who is lost in Angola, into an opportunity for ethnocentric tourism. Dressed for a safari and ready to seize the wonders of Africa, he is taken by surprise when he realized that his gaze, captured by his amateur movie camera, is made ridiculous by the professional camera of an elegant African man intent on "filming the living stereotype of the ethnocentric tourist mentality" that the publisher embodied (Castelli and Laurenzi 2000, 349–350). The reflected gaze makes the Italian protagonist uncomfortable as he realizes that he has become the ethnographic specimen of a film on the exotic-colonial mentality (Castelli and Laurenzi 2000, 349–350).

Tempo di uccidere is also overrun with this kind of "reflexivity" thanks to the interplay of "mirrorings and reversals" that forced the protagonist to occupy the role of the observed rather than observer solely, depriving him of the kind of certainty provided by a unilateral observation of the Other and provoking the reader's critical reflection of the perception of the colonies and the legend of the Italians as "brava gente," or essentially good people, which persisted in the postwar period. At the same time, as Polezzi rightfully comments, it was difficult for Flaiano to perceive the real, material Africa outside "of the layers of his fantastic

figurations of it" (60), as *Tempo di uccidere* was bound by an aesthetic and a mode of representation that belonged to the past (43). Even when the novel encouraged a reflection on what colonialism must have been for the ex-colonized, it nonetheless failed to speak for the Africans or their perspective. In the novel, the reciprocity of gazes is not matched by a reciprocity of representations beyond the opinions that the lieutenant believed that Mariam, Elias, and Johannes had of him.

From a literary perspective, we have to wait fourteen years before the release of a novel written about Italy's colonialism in which the reciprocity of gazes accounts for the point of view of the Other. Although it takes place during the time of African decolonization, Enrico Emanuelli's *Settimana nera* (1961) repositions Italian colonialism at the center of the narration in order to emphasize the persistence of past practices during Italy's Trusteeship Administration (1950–1960) in the former colony of Somalia. The novel revolves around Enrico's obsessive passion for a Somali woman, Regina, who acts as a piece of furniture in the home of another Italian, Farnenti, whom he lends to several *signori* (masters) along with his house. The protagonist convinces himself that Regina does not mind his visits because she sees him differently than other Italians. The gaze and the representation that are conveyed by the narrator-protagonist in the novel reach a point of crisis when Enrico realizes that he has long been the object of observation and conversation for Regina and Uolde Gabru, a Somali political activist, as they named him "the *signore* of the golden tiger."[37] The bracelet decorated with a golden tiger given to Regina is the signifier of Enrico's violence and is symbolically chosen by Uolde Gabru to represent and name him.

My examination of *Tempo di uccidere* elucidates the link between representations of black femininity and colonialism in Italian postwar literature, and shows that colonial nostalgia was embedded in a network of cultural and political discourses aimed at crafting an Italian national identity in need of redemption from the colonial past. Linking the act of forging a positive Italian identity with colonial nostalgia is a useful aid in understanding why Flaiano becomes so focused on the protagonist's inner struggle between his desire to play the role of the good civilizer and his fear of not being an adequate match. When revisiting the colonial scene, I have discussed different forms of nostalgia at play and contrastive modes of experiencing *mal d'Africa*. In my examination, *mal d'Africa* expresses itself as nostalgic longing for a colonial past that provided Italian society with a sense of self-fulfillment. Given the state of distress inherent within the definition of *mal d'Africa*, I have examined instances in which the process of remembering unfolds contradictions and feelings of inadequacy that were normally silenced by the nostalgic longing felt

by the Italian public opinion when the novel was first published. Flaiano presents a plot that exhibits multiple forms of *mal d'Africa* simultaneously in view. In *Tempo di uccidere*, *mal d'Africa* is not meant to bring back an idealized colonial time since the author's anguish is motivated by the impossibility of picturing Africa outside the discursive practices of the past. For Flaiano's lieutenant, *mal d'Africa* is similarly experienced as a distress which is caused by the realization of lacking a prominent role in the story. With the lieutenant's final exoneration, *Tempo di uccidere* also provides an insight into the type of *mal d'Africa* suffered by postwar Italian society and implicitly suggests that the practice of cleansing the conscience of crimes committed in Africa was crucial for Italy's recovery from the devastation of the war.

"Not Quite Black": *The Tammurriata nera* and the Black Madonna in Francesco De Robertis' *Il mulatto*

Francesco De Robertis' film, *Il mulatto* (1949), revisits the scene of a rape and offers a unique depiction of the black female figure through a series of role reversals. A superficial consideration of the film reveals what may initially appear to be a rather conservative and defensive portrayal of the Italian characters as victims rather than perpetrators. Contrary to what we find in Flaiano's novel, the plot of *Il mulatto* develops not around the rape or assault of a black woman by an Italian, but rather on the story of an African-American soldier whose rape of an innocent Italian woman, Maria, is the first in a series of unfortunate events that culminates in both of their deaths and the need to address the political fate of their child. Just as Maria, whose depiction as a self-sacrificing Marian figure safeguards her character's innocence, the character of her husband, Matteo Belfiore, is likewise portrayed as a rather reputable individual; although he has been imprisoned for theft, it is clear that he is not a violent criminal. In contrast to Flaiano's representation of the culpable Italian lieutenant, both Maria and Matteo are introduced as fallible but essentially genuine and honest characters whose external circumstances, rather than moral constitution, are the sole cause of their plight.

Moreover, with respect to the remote setting and colonial space depicted in *Tempo di uccidere*, the setting of *Il mulatto*, which takes place on the island of Ischia, is characterized by its greater physical proximity to mainland Italy and its indubitable collocation within Italian territory. The film follows the character of Matteo, who, following his release from a five-year prison sentence, finally meets Angelo, the young boy who had been born to his wife during Matteo's imprisonment. The mere thought

of Angelo's existence had enabled Matteo to accept his wife's premature death and had made his years in prison bearable, yet his anxious desire to see his son and embrace his role as a father vanishes when the two meet and Matteo realizes that Angelo is a mixed-race child. Through the explanation of his friends, Don Gennaro and Catarina, Matteo learns that his wife had been sexually assaulted during the war by an intoxicated African-American soldier stationed in Naples with the American liberation troops. After several unsuccessful attempts to annul his guardianship of Angelo, Matteo develops a true bond and sense of affection toward his wife's son. His newfound sense of peace, however, is threatened by the unexpected arrival of Angelo's biological uncle, Joe, during Angelo's birthday party. Observing the effortless and natural interaction between Angelo and his uncle, Matteo decides to allow Angelo to leave with Joe.

In her analysis of *Il mulatto*, Shelleen Greene argues that the film reflects the tendency of historical and cultural documents of postwar Italy to foster and promote proximity to the country's new ally, the United States, especially in the wake of the Marshall Plan, which had provided Italy with necessary financial assistance during the period of postwar reconstruction (121). In Greene's opinion, De Robertis' adoption of the theme of interracial relationships is far from coincidental. The topic is common in Hollywood various films of the period, such as *Pinky* and *Lost Boundaries,* which were released the same year as *Il mulatto,* and Greene argues convincingly that the film's overarching themes and use of a political backdrop that highlights the collaboration and alliance between Italy and the United States are examples of strategic choices made by the filmmaker in order to facilitate the film's distribution and favorable reception in the American market (118–120). In fact, the American version of *Il mulatto*, titled *Angelo,* was released in 1951 and contains only a few slight changes, while the majority of the plot was left intact (Greene 2012, 120).

The link between Italy and the United States is established in one of the opening sequences of the film, in which a female American tourist appears on screen. The woman's attractive whiteness, accentuated by her revealing outfit, inspires Don Gennaro to serenade her with *Come faccette mammeta* (1906), a classic Neapolitan song about the transformation of a blonde, fair-skinned girl into the beautiful woman to whom the song is dedicated. Foreshadowing the events surrounding Angelo's conception and birth, the song makes no mention of the paternal figure who is excluded from the story of the girl's birth and development. Moreover, the visual and auditory references, through the image of the blonde tourist and the lyrics sung by Don Gennaro, will later serve to heighten the anomalous nature of Matteo's family, in which the presence of a biracial child contrasts starkly with the image of Italian society as 'predominately

white.' Additionally, the juxtaposition of the white American with the white Italian woman in the song establishes a further parallelism between Italy and America, and it is important to consider that, at the time of the film's release, only Caucasian US citizens enjoyed the full rights of citizenship.[38] The blonde woman in the song and the American tourist thus exhibit the phenotypical characteristics necessary for inclusion at a time when the question of national belonging was uncertain in Italy. Finally, the analogy established between the women supports Greene's view that the United States, having already grappled with racial issues on a cultural and legal level, provided a precedent and a model to which the characters and the filmmaker can refer in order to address the question of Angelo's physical and national identity (120).[39]

By considering the presence of offspring born from a white mother and a black father, *Il mulatto* addresses a common phenomenon in postwar Italy, especially considering that once the Allied forces arrived to liberate the country from Fascism, liaisons between black or dark-skinned American soldiers and Italian women were common and often resulted in mixed-race offspring. Given the frequency of such relationships, it is worthwhile to explore the reasons for which De Robertis intentionally removes Angelo's biological parents—the black American soldier and the Italian woman, Maria—from the plot through the deaths of both characters. First, Angelo's status as an orphan accentuates the question of his national and cultural belonging and, secondly, the plot development aims at safeguarding the honor of both the female Italian character and the African-American character. Maria's relationship with a black man is justified in *Il mulatto* because it results from sexual violence rather than consent or desire, much in the same way that De Robertis is also careful to craft his depiction of the American soldier in such a way as to avoid offending Italy's new political ally, the United States, and reiterating hackneyed Fascist propagandist representations of African-American soldiers as rapists who posed a threat to the wives and daughters of Italian men. For this reason, it is alcoholism, and not race, that is revealed as the primary cause of the soldier's violent behavior, and the soldier's death serves as a further means of safely removing Angelo's biological father from view while also immortalizing him as a fallen soldier who sacrificed his life in the struggle to liberate Italy from Nazism and Fascism.

The arrival of the soldier's brother in Italy reinforces the assault as an accident, and Angelo's uncle further redeems his brother through his willingness to take responsibility for his brother's actions and assume custody of the child if necessary. Finally, as noted above, the fallibility of the two paternal figures, Angelo's biological and adoptive fathers, presents them as complementary rather than contrastive figures. Rather than

serve as the foil to the character of Angelo's biological father, Matteo's character is no less ambiguous or problematic than that of the black soldier. Aside from his status as an ex-convict, Matteo also fantasizes about shirking his responsibilities. When he discovers the color of Angelo's skin, Matteo refuses to accept the "negro" child even when the Mother Superior explains that he is legally responsible for Angelo since "he was born to Maria Dosella, married to Matteo Belfiore."[40] Later, when he brings Angelo to a cliff to gather flowers for a tabernacle to Jesus, Matteo cannot help but imagine that, were the child to accidentally slip and fall from the cliff's edge, his problems would find an immediate solution.

Despite Matteo's initial impulse to reject Angelo, he gains the capacity and the desire to love the child thanks to the divine intervention of the Black Madonna, who enters the story soon after Matteo learns that Angelo is not his biological son. In hopes of finding a positive resolution to Angelo's situation, Don Gennaro hangs an image of the Madonna in Matteo's home, creating a unique triangularity that disrupts the initial family unit created by Maria, the black soldier and Angelo. Through the introduction of the sacred image, Angelo's biological parents are replaced by surrogate parental figures, Matteo and the Black Madonna, whose racial identities show a further reversal, since it is now the paternal figure that is white while the maternal figure becomes black. The *ménage* formed by Matteo, Angelo and the Madonna is also reminiscent of the colonial family, since unions between black women and Italian men often led to biracial offspring, but by associating the black woman of the colonies with the Virgin Mary, the maternal figure not only loses all erotic attributes but also suggests that Matteo will only be able to accept Angelo through Christian compassion. Moreover, the image of the Black Madonna reinforces a feminine model essential to Italy during postwar reconstruction.

Since Angelo's biological mother is physically absent, the only women who actually appear in the film are Catarina and the Mother Superior, while the other two female figures, the Black Madonna and Lady Justice, appear as illustrations in two of Don Gennaro's paintings. In this way, the film cleaves two frequently opposed categories of women found in representations of postwar Italy, that of the chaste female and devoted mother—promoted by the new Republic—and that of the highly eroticized female. This opposition, discussed at length by scholars such as Penelope Morris in *Women in Italy: 1945–1968,* is problematized in *Il mulatto*, in which the boundaries between reality and image, black and white, victim and perpetrator, are constantly scrutinized.

Morris explains how, due to the conditions of war in which husbands and fathers were often removed from the home in order to engage in

combat, fight for the Resistance or, worse, because they were deceased, many women were forced to become the providers for their families and, aside from the few fortunate women who managed to find and maintain stable jobs or garner financial support from other family members, women were often forced into poverty or prostitution (3). In this context, in contrast to the predominant, romanticized image of the wife who anxiously awaits her husband's return, extramarital affairs with foreign soldiers, or with the few Italian males who remained in the vicinity of these women's homes and workplaces, were rather common (Morris 2006, 3). For example, in Mario Tobino's 1952 novel, *Il deserto della Libia,* the infidelity of wives and female companions stationed in Africa is presented as so commonplace that new soldiers are welcomed into the "club of cuckolds" upon arrival. While Italian military husbands away at war could not claim to be more faithful, especially considering the number of illegitimate children born in the colonies and raised in religious orphanages, extramarital affairs presented considerably more severe consequences for women than for men. Provided there was proof of adultery, a woman could lose custody of her legitimate children and face imprisonment, "while children born out of wedlock" were left to carry the "stigma of illegitimacy" (Morris 2006, 3). The stigma of being born to a black father, which was for various factors considered to be greater than the stigma of being born to a black mother, provides a crucial key to interpreting the scope of De Robertis' film. By discussing Angelo's problematic integration within Italian society, the film not only addresses the question of how to preserve the future of the Italian family, but also the degree to which the legitimacy of the child's identity depends on that of its parents.

Il mulatto combines real and figurative depictions of chaste, devoted women and mothers through the characters of the Black Madonna, Catarina, and the Mother Superior, while the initial association between the character of Maria and the Virgin Mary is gradually revealed to be unfounded and ambiguous. Much in the same way that her relationship with the black soldier is shrouded in suspicion, the use of the song, *Tamurriata* nera, in the plot also functions as a backdrop for the problematic relationship between Matteo and Angelo, as there is an obvious parallel between Angelo's story and the song's description of Ciro, a black child born to a Neapolitan woman. Greene underlines the ambiguity surrounding Ciro's birth in her analysis of the lyrics, in which a female voice who attributes the child's skin color to having been startled during the pregnancy by the sight of a black man, alternates with that of a male voice that questions the mother's sincerity. The stanza sung by the female voice takes on more ambiguity with the verse *a volte basta una guardata* ("sometimes all it takes is one glance"), which neither clarifies

who is responsible for initiating the gaze nor explains whether it was the woman's desire for the black man or her fear of him that led to the birth of her mulatto child (Greene 2012, 137).

Just as Don Gennaro's rendition of the Neapolitan song, "Come faccette mammeta," is complemented by the presence of the white American tourist at the beginning of the film, the lyrics of *Tamurriata nera* capture Matteo's emotional turmoil and fear of being coerced into assuming custody of a child conceived by his wife with another man under potentially dubious circumstances, especially when he remains unconvinced by Don Gennaro's rational explanation of Maria as an innocent victim who "died without guilt or sin" after being "violently snatched by a drunk Negro."[41] Although Don Gennaro insists that only "fate," "chance," and "circumstances"[42] can be blamed for the events that led to Angelo's birth and Maria's death, none of these elements clarifies Maria's degree of consent. Tormented by his suspicions, Matteo's doubts about Maria lead him to question the intentions of the other women in his life, including Catarina, one of the few wholly innocent characters in the film. Despite his sincere desire to reestablish a family with Catarina, in a moment of violent mistrust, Matteo slaps her and accuses her of hiding the truth from him for her own purposes: "Congratulations on your ploy. It worked well. Let him believe that he has a son, let him dream about it every night so that the shock written all over his face will become so unbearable that he'll run straight into my arms."[43]

Although Matteo's accusations toward Catarina are unsubstantiated, the order of events and plot development clearly aim to validate Matteo's suspicions of Maria and, just as Angelo's biological father is likened to the character of Matteo insofar as both men are shown to be honorable yet deeply flawed father figures, Angelo's biological mother is allusively compared to Don Gennaro's ambiguous representation of Lady Justice. When Matteo and his friend appeal to the judicial system and meet with a legal expert, the Cavaliere, the audience encounters Don Gennaro's painting of Lady Justice, which had been commissioned by the Cavaliere himself. The allegorical depiction of the semi-nude, bare-breasted woman, in which Justice is portrayed with parted legs and as incapable of keeping her two scales aligned, alludes to Matteo's skepticism toward women in this moment. When the Cavaliere criticizes the crooked scales, Don Gennaro defends his representation as "an introspective, symbolic mistake [...] meaning that since Lady Justice is human, she can never be perfectly balanced."[44] This view of human or female fallibility provides an overt reference to Maria's own capacity to err, and Don Gennaro's justification fails to console Matteo or inspire him to forgive his wife, but rather confirms his suspicions. Yet, considered from outside Matteo's perspective, *Il*

mulatto might also allude to the historical reality of women who, perhaps like Maria, engaged in relationships with men like the black soldier in the film out of necessity. In fact, numerous examples of female prostitution, as noted by Mary Wood in "From Bust to Boom," are found in black neorealist films contemporary to *Il mulatto*, such as *Tombolo paradiso nero* (1947) and *Senza pietà* (1948), which include depictions of Italian women who welcomed African-American clients in response to the precarious economic conditions of war (57).

In the middle of the conversation between the Cavaliere, Matteo, and Don Gennaro, we find an explicit reference to colonial mixed-race subjects in a scene in which the characters acknowledge the frequency with which Italian men took black women as companions. When Don Gennaro explains that Matteo's wife had "made a Negro son" but that the father is white, the Cavaliere is unfazed and, acting under the assumption that Matteo is the father, remarks flippantly, "if his wife was black, what could he do?"[45] Only later does the Cavaliere understand that the child is not the result of a colonial union between Matteo and a black woman, but was instead "made in Italy,"[46] as he euphemizes. Matteo's desperation leads him to consider succumbing to his suspicions and accusing his wife of adultery as he realizes that tarnishing the memory of his wife might be his only means of freeing himself of his legal obligations to the child.

Yet, Matteo soon learns that he cannot be released from his guardianship on the basis of suspected adultery since, as the Cavaliere informs him, "the current law does not consider skin color as proof of adultery" and because the "code considers only real cases" and thus "the father is such if the child was conceived during the marriage" unless it can be proven that "between the father's departure and the birth of the child, 300 days passed during which there was no physical contact between the spouses."[47] The Cavaliere suggests that Matteo and Don Gennaro refer to a newspaper article documenting a well-known precedent, perhaps in reference to Luigi Bianchi's request in 1949 (the year of the film's release) to disown his child of color, which was famously denied by the Florentine judges. In her article, "Gli italiani e il razzismo. Tammurriata nera," the historian Giulia Galeotti notes that, following the event, the deputy Silvio Paolucci proposed a law regulating paternal rights (Article 235 of the civil code) according to which obligations of paternal guardianship could be absolved if the child's race differed from that of its mother's legal husband (Galeotti 2010, n. pg.).

Il mulatto thus combines references to popular cultural, traditional folklore and songs, figurative arts, historical colonial practices, and legal debates surrounding citizenship rights in postwar Italy in order to address the issue of national and racial belonging in Italian history. Although De

Robertis' film focuses largely on the phenomenon of mixed-race children born during the occupation of liberation troops, it also re-proposes the question of colonial *meticci* who, beginning in 1947, became eligible for Italian citizenship provided they received legal recognition from their Italian fathers. As Greene justly notes, although *Il mulatto* presents race and skin color as the aspects that set Angelo apart from the community in which he lives (124), from a legal point of view Angelo's skin color is not the element that defines his racial difference from Matteo, since colonial *meticci* had been granted citizenship since 1947. While the legal matter of his belonging is already resolved, the problem of identifying and enacting an effective means of integration into Italian society emerges as the true issue at the root of De Robertis' film.

The events surrounding Angelo's birth shed light on the common attempt to identify a compromise that would lessen the hostility caused by illegitimate children and re-establish peace within the Italian family. The essays in Morris's volume confirm the importance of family for postwar Italian governments and for the Catholic Church. The family unit provided an important foundation for Italy's reconstruction, which explains why, despite the steps toward female emancipation—including female suffrage—the new Italian Republic did not bring about radical changes in the female condition (Morris 2006, 5). Morris points out that the Catholic Church and the Christian Democracy managed to secure the votes of the female electorate even while maintaining a traditional image of women in their campaigns only because the Fascist dictatorship and the war had seemed never-ending (6). The desire for a return to normalcy and stability translated into a willingness to reinstate a social order based on a familial unit that depended on the traditional female model of wife and mother (Morris 2006, 6).[48] De Robertis' film successfully communicates the need to leave behind the horrors and errors of war in order to return to normalcy. Morris further argues that, because the return to normalcy required an act of forgiveness for the transgressors, Italians turned to the figure of the Madonna to facilitate the process of absolution:

> There was an idealization of women, and mothers especially, but at the same time great mistrust of them, particularly of real, sexual women who were seen as corruptible and easily led astray. The widespread idea that such women were in need of protection and tutelage, but that society also needed to defend itself against the threat they represented [...] surfaces in various contexts [...]. The contradiction between the two images of womanhood could only be resolved in the impossible example of the Madonna who was both mother and a virgin. (6–7)

Morris' definition helps illustrate how in De Robertis' film the reconciliation between the two female models occurs through the figure of the Madonna. At the same time, one wonders why the director chooses a black Virgin Mary over the classic image of the Madonna who, in sharing the name of Matteo's wife, would have had the capacity to exonerate Maria and eliminate any doubt about her consent in Angelo's conception. Moreover, anxiety about belonging is revealed to be more a question of appearance than essence. If Angelo were white, Matteo could easily dissipate all doubts regarding his paternity since that child would have automatically been viewed as his son in the eyes of society. With a mixed-race child, Matteo's reintegration into Italian society becomes more complex and the film's peculiarity is not that it makes the color of Angelo's skin a crucial narrative element as much as it searches for a solution to this biracial child that would simultaneously allow someone in Matteo's situation to also have a future. Compared to Fascist propagandist works, De Robertis' film reveals that colonial *meticci* as well as "made in Italy" biracial offspring were a more common occurrence than Italians wanted to admit.

While signaling the presence of several allusions to Italian colonialism, my interpretation of the film *Il mulatto* does not entirely depart from the position taken by Greene in her analysis of the film in relation to a cinematic tradition that, in her view, directly contributed to the silencing of Italy's colonial history. Even if De Robertis' cinematic work cannot be collocated specifically within the "canonical body of neorealism" (121), Greene notes various traits that invite a comparison between *Il mulatto* and contemporaneous films such as *Vivere in pace* (1947), *Tombolo paradiso nero* (1947), and *Senza pietà* (1948), all of which belong to the subgenre that Mary Wood has defined as "neorealismo nero" (125). Angelo's biological father and the figure of the African American G. I. evoked the parallelism typical of black Neorealism between racial marginalization in the United States and the similar condition of social isolation in Italy,[49] both of which are depicted in the film (Greene 2012, 152). This parallelism served to shift the subject of Italy's discriminatory practices during the colonial and postcolonial periods out of the foreground. Greene's opinion is supported by Saverio Giovacchini's article, "Living in Peace after the Massacre," in which he interprets the success of the African American actor, Kitzmiller, as a novelty within Neorealist cinema, in which his filmic persona was used to evoke and sublimate, rather than directly confront the racial hierarchies of the past (153). Neorealist cinema, in Giovacchini's view, in many ways had been progressive in its themes and strategies, and yet it washed over Italy's colonial history in a dexterous

game of substitutions in which Kitzmiller's blackness alluded to but also neutralized the less favorable moments of colonial history (153).

In accordance with this reading of the film, I would argue that the allusions made by the Cavaliere to interracial relationships in the colonies, as well as the family portrait consisting of Matteo, Angelo and the Black Madonna, which reinforces the existence of this phenomenon in the colonial life, are innocuous fragments of colonial memory that are strategically inserted in the film plot. De Robertis does not allow the figure of the African American soldier to appear onscreen, but instead replaces him with the surrogate image of the black Venus, which, by alluding to well-known colonial practices, served as proof that the Italians lacked racist intentions and, on the contrary, had quite willingly lived with black concubines.[50] Unlike Greene, however, I believe that the film aims at a broad resolution of the debate over biracial children and I avail myself of the analysis offered by Pamela Ballinger to suggest that there is a surprising similarity between the conclusion of *Il mulatto* and the legislation surrounding mixed races from the colonies in the postwar period. As Ballinger explains in her article "Borders of the Nation, Borders of Citizenship," in 1947 the colonial *meticci* became eligible for citizenship, though the granting of this right required official recognition from the Italian father. This theme is addressed by *Il mulatto*, which follows Matteo's moral development and decision to assume responsibility for Angelo's upbringing. The inclusive policies adopted with regard to biracial colonial offspring were modified, however, with a 1953 law that urged mixed-race colonial offspring to maintain citizenship in their countries of origin (Ballinger 2007, 733). A parallel to this modified legislation is found in the conclusion of the film, in which Angelo is entrusted to a community more similar to his own ethnicity. De Robertis' film exemplifies the attitude of the newly formed Republic with regard to all individuals that might have presented a threat to the image of an ethnically homogenous Italian population—a population that did not, in fact, exist, but whose image nonetheless became necessary to propagate.

In terms of the Black Madonna, while skin color and her role in Matteo's story re-propose colonial dynamics, these implications are neutralized by the lack of an erotic charge, since the black woman is depicted in the painting as a Madonna and is thus void of the sexual connotations associated with the black Venus. Additionally, the black Madonna represents the Other made popular by religious cult, and her presence allows Matteo to accept Angelo and for Angelo to be accepted. Thanks to the Madonna of Montevergine's skin color, racial differences are settled and overcome.

Recent studies on the iconography of black Madonnas help to establish a link between the dark-skinned Madonna in the film and the colonial black woman on which I base my analysis. Beginning in the tenth century, there was a proliferation of black Madonnas in Europe, the cult of which inspired two international conventions held in 2010, *Il volto oscuro del divino* and *Nigra sum*. The overarching goal of the conventions was to establish the historical and cultural reasons that determined the depiction of the Madonna as a black figure. The transformation of the Madonna from white to black to satisfy specific ideological needs is particularly applicable to my discussion of *Il mulatto,* since the film addresses the theme of the difficult integration of a black individual in a white society, although my intention is not to resolve the problematic issues regarding the black Madonna, but only to look closely at her role and function within the film.

Claudio Bernardi's essay "Vergine, Madre, Regina, Madonna Nera" and Xavier Barral's "Madonne brune che non lo erano in epoca romana" follow the development of a devotional tradition that brought the East closer to the West. Both scholars seem support the thesis of a later darkening of the complexion of Madonna statues that were originally rose-colored or beige. Blackening the face of the Madonna, as Bernardi observes, was a common practice in Europe during the Romanesque or late-Romanesque period, when many artists drew inspiration from figures in Byzantine icons whose complexions appeared darker due to changes caused by the silver-colored foil that usually surrounded their faces (348). The faces of the Byzantine icons, dark by accident, were later replicated in medieval statues and paintings that aspired to flaunt an eastern or Egyptian origin, which would grant them a certain prestige (Barral 2010, 107; Bernardi 2010, 348). Works of art from the East, the cradle of Christianity, were associated with a typology of sacred representation that, by virtue of its origin (as demonstrated by the color of the skin and the type of clothing worn by the Madonna), held greater cultural authority (Barral 2010, 107).

The two scholars agree that historical, theological, and liturgical analyses of medieval iconography of black Madonnas arose in later periods, particularly in response to accusations of idolatry put forth by Protestants during the Counter-Reformation. The Jesuits, in particular, maintained that the darker Marian icons and statues attested to their antiquity and claimed that the dark color of the Madonnas' skin should be viewed as indicative of artistic backwardness, demonstrated by the lack of chromatic sensibility or attention (Barral 2010, 107; Bernardi 2010, 348). The scholar Guido Gentile has similarly argued that the ability to claim a link

with early Christianity, since some paintings of black Madonnas were attributed to Luke the Evangelist, validated the legitimacy of the cult of images in the controversy with the Protestants (83).

Bernardi's essay focuses on the inherent contradictions in black Madonna iconography, which represents "a flashy exception in the Medieval religious panorama" underlining associations of blackness in medieval art with evil (348). Bernardi also mentions the medieval theological debate regarding a verse from the Song of Songs (1:5–6) that reads "Nigra sum, sed formosa" (I am black, but beautiful), which played a fundamental role in the rising popularity of black Madonnas (348). The verse from the Song of Songs gave rise to numerous interpretations that arrived at similar conclusions and according to which the Madonna's blackness was redeemed by her beauty, which transformed what had been considered to be a defect into a positive attribute. Expanding the verse's meaning to negritude, which during the Middle Ages was considered as a sign of inferior condition, the Madonna's subalternity (being both female and black) would be transformed through God's incarnation into a state of light, perfection, and grace (Bernardi 2010, 348). In this perspective, the black Madonna was the patron saint of an "ugly" human race who, thanks to her intervention, could be redeemed (Bernardi 2010, 348).

Adriana Valerio's study, "L'identità di genere nel culto della Madonna nera di Montevergine," provides an account of the popular opinion of artists and the faithful who considered the Madonna's dark complexion as a synonym of repulsiveness.[51] Valerio's study is particularly interesting for it examines the repulsiveness of the Madonna of Montevergine, which is precisely the one that appears in De Robertis' film. She explains that, among all of the Madonnas in the Campania region, the Madonna of Montevergine was considered the ugliest because she was black (245). According to Valerio, it is impossible to ignore the identification of the faithful with this Madonna by virtue of her ugliness, which earned her the nickname *Mamma Schiavona* ("big slave momma"), thanks to which she became a symbolic place of refuge "for the diverse, the slaves, for those who were somehow ugly in the eyes of the world and seeking consolation" (245). The Madonna's presumed ugliness determined her fate, since being ugly or different made her more relatable to the people who found true comfort only in her (Valerio 2010, 245). In fact, *Mamma Schiavona* was believed to be more miraculous than the others:

> For those faithful to this black Madonna, the ascent of Montevergine represents the integration of diversity, the hope for unity, the subversion of traditional values, the aspiration to gather and unite that which life divides and shatters [...] They offer songs, *tammoriate* and dances

> to Mamma Schiavona, who accepts all and forgives all. Mary does not divide, but unites. In her diversity, because she is black like the slaves and those *from far away lands*, because she herself is called "big slave momma", she welcomes the differences of those who are, against their will, "other": the enslaved, the marginalized, those who feel different, the *femminiello,* and those who are seen as dissonant and thus unappreciated. (Valerio 2010, 248)

In *Il mulatto*, association between blackness and ugliness is suggested when the Mother Superior and Don Gennaro attempt to subdue Angelo's blackness (and thus his repulsiveness) through a process of mimicry. Angelo is raised in a religious orphanage and educated by Christian nuns; once he is entrusted to Matteo's custody, Don Gennaro attempts to teach him table manners as well as how to sing and play an instrument, and he convinces Matteo to bring his son with them to work in the evenings. Angelo's assimilation into Matteo's family seems to come to completion when the child is dressed in a white pinstriped suit that resembles that worn by the two other musicians in the group, Don Gennaro and Matteo. In his attempt to become white, Angelo is shown washing himself continuously, as if the color of his skin could be washed away. When these efforts prove insufficient in making Matteo feel affection for the child, Don Gennaro appeals to Christian compassion as a last resort. The disinterested nature of Christian love emerges most clearly when the "other" lacks the qualities that would make him loveable, able to be looked at, and thus beautiful. Angelo disgusts Matteo until the moment in which he calls upon the Madonna of Montevergine, who is the advocate of feelings of tolerance created by *caritas.*

The appearance of the hybrid figure of Mamma Schiavona in Matteo's life and community would initially seem to suggest a process of Levantine-type mimicry since she is a "white but also black"[52] Madonna, as Matteo proclaims when his internal journey of growth comes to completion at the end of the film. The white Madonna who is gradually made black over the centuries is a Levantinized figure that imitates the faces and clothing of Byzantine icons and embraces the marginalized, the enslaved, the ugly, and those who come from "far away lands," in Valerio's words, in order to erase cultural and ethnic differences. In promoting the integration and coexistence of individuals from different cultures and ethnic groups, the Black Madonna of Montevergine embodies the ideal condition of the Levantine; she encompasses, and thus destroys, the binary opposition between European and African and between white and black, and in the film she seems to promote the image of an Italian society that can finally embrace its heterogeneity. Nevertheless, the fear of ethnic

diversity and new gender relations within a more emancipated female model, as Lombardi-Diop has discussed, was more prevalent than many Italians were willing to admit in the postwar period. It is therefore not a coincidence that the film insists on those features that suggest cohesion and homogeneity, at least on a fictional level, including the classical Neapolitan musical repertoire, Catarina's traditional Campania clothing and exemplary character, and the events through which Matteo's life is gradually reconstructed toward a traditional lifestyle with the intention of forming a standard Italian family in the future.

Upon closer examination, the themes surrounding the plots of *Tempo di uccidere* and *Il mulatto*, including the responsibilities of Italian women, race, skin color, the threat of contagion, and the ex-colonizer's judgment of himself, correspond with the components outlined by Lombardi-Diop in her discussion of female emancipation, colonialism, and the threat posed by the poor South to Italian whiteness. All of these elements instilled anxiety in the Italian public, which consequently sought ways of exorcising these fears during the postwar period. While the end of Flaiano's novel, in which the protagonist returns home and remains unpunished for his crime, leaves the reader in a state of uneasiness, the plot of *Il mulatto* tries to remedy this state of moral confusion by reconstructing a feeling of confidence through Matteo's expiation. Moreover, if the Italian character in *Tempo di uccidere* urges readers to reflect critically on colonialism and Italy's role in Africa, De Robertis' film seems to begin where Flaiano's novel ends in order to guide the audience toward a gradual recovery of certainty and security that would allow the characters and spectators to start over.

Both the novel and the film address the question of guilt and expiation in relation to a black female figure and an Italian woman. Writing letters to his wife is a pleasant habit that occupies the days of Flaiano's lieutenant. The only witnesses of Mariam's murder, his wife's letters metaphorically place her at the scene of the crime, transforming her into "the dearest accomplice"[53] among all. When no complaints are filed against him, though, the lieutenant decides to dismiss the Italian woman upon return to Italy[54] fearing that she "would make [him] forget everything, even [his] deplorable weakness."[55] In *Il mulatto*, the character of Matteo, an ex-convict from the South in search of a position in the new Italy, is morally rehabilitated from his crime of theft not after serving five years in prison, but for the *caritas* demonstrated toward his wife's mulatto child. Angelo and the Black Madonna, however, do not provide the means through which Matteo is readmitted into the body of the nation; it is his association with the exemplary character of Catarina, and his intention

to form a family with her, that determines his definitive reinsertion into society.

Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, in their volume *Bianco e nero*, provide a valuable contribution to this discussion by associating Italian whiteness with "social meanings," including class, regional and territorial origin, and gender relations (42). The scholars argue that in Liberal Italy whiteness was derived from class identification and its relation to the South, whereas during the Fascist period, whiteness was a racial identification based on the difference between Italians and colonial Africans (42).[56] In the postwar period, whiteness became a commodity made accessible by will or the adherence to a culture of hygiene that, in a metaphorical sense, associated blackness with abjection, impurity, filthiness, sickness, and contagion (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 70; Lombardi-Diop 2011, 13). In this context, whiteness not only referred to the perception of the body, beauty, and the home, but also reached the moral and racial spheres of the nation (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 68; 110; Lombardi-Diop 2011, 13). Italian women became the linchpin of a culture dedicated to "whitening" Italians; it was their responsibility to rearticulate the nation's identity, not from a standpoint of race in a biological sense but by serving as a channel for the "profound and private understanding of the position of each person in the moral and national project" for whiteness (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 110; Lombardi-Diop 2011, 12).

The poor and criminal South, embodied by the character of Matteo, is symbolically rehabilitated and readmitted into the body of the nation in a historical moment in which, as Giuliani notes, southern Italians "entered into the factories and into the productive system of the North" (6). In *Il mulatto,* Matteo's reentry into society coincides with the realization of the impossibility of creating a family with Catarina that included Angelo since the "child would have always separated"[57] them. Not only is Catarina the quintessential, coveted woman, she also embodies the model of a South free from the stigma of poverty and submissiveness. She is a woman who survived the war thanks to her honest work of weaving baskets that she exports into northern Italy. Her status as an artisan provides her with economic independence, but prevents her from aspiring toward greater emancipation as it keeps her rooted in a southern Italian tradition.

On the other hand, Angelo's character plays an equally crucial role in the film, as proximity to him makes Matteo (and his southern Italian community) look whiter by contrast. Furthermore, his presence fosters a reconsideration of the delicate topic of mixed-raced children and revisits the colonial scene in light of Christian compassion and through a kind of religious iconography that makes those who were different seem familiar

or close. Like Greene, I believe the film intends to distance itself from Fascist policies opposed to interracial unions by opting for the inclusion, if only temporary, of Angelo in Italian society in order to question the xenophobia that characterized Mussolini's rule. Nevertheless, the plot does not generate any sort of change with respect to the practices of the past since the film's resolution and Matteo's ability to build a traditional family rely on Angelo's departure. In Greene's opinion, the film suggests that the difference between past and present politics lies in the decision to send Angelo to America with his uncle, which is based not on racial motives, but in accordance with a political line adopted by other capitalistic democracies like the United States (131). In the end, the ambiguity of *Il mulatto* lies in its promotion of a reconsideration of colonialism through the examples of a mixed-race child born in Italy and a Black Madonna figure, with the aim of obtaining forgiveness and absolution from the past. Although colonialism is not directly addressed in the film, *Il mulatto* provides interesting points of intersection with regard to *Tempo di uccidere,* in that both narratives can be characterized by their exploitative representation of black or hybrid characters as the means by which Italian characters confront the violence of colonialism and are metaphorically cleansed of colonial guilt.

My discussion of representations of the hybrid figures of the African-Italian and the Italian Levantine in this chapter is cultivated by a sense of concern for contemplating the legacy of Italy's colonial enterprise and how its past political and popular representations still resonated in Italy's cultural life after the war. Ballinger discusses how difficult it was for the *meticci* to assimilate in Italian society in light of the equally challenging inclusion of repatriated noncitizen and citizen Italian nationals[58] who, after Italy's defeat in World War II, were forced to leave the ex-colonies or former Italian possessions—territories in which many of them were born and to which they were sentimentally and culturally attached. The European mass exodus from the colonies or former possessions constitutes the first substantial wave of migration originating from non-European countries toward Europe that was followed by the foreign migration of present-day (Ballinger 2007, 724). The mass repatriation of Europeans has remained, according to Ballinger, an invisible phenomenon since visible migration has always been characterized by a racial demarcation through an ethnic difference between the migrant, in respect to the host community (724). The repatriated Italian nationals, instead, were considered *insiders* and their access to citizenship, if they were not yet citizens, was facilitated by their being white and European (Ballinger 2007, 739).

Nevertheless, the acquisition of citizenship did not necessarily translate into the inclusion of repatriates in the Italian social circuit as

demonstrated by the use of epithets (the Slav, the African) which were attributed to them as evidence of their differentiation from metropolitan Italians (Ballinger 2007, 737). In Ballinger's view, there existed a sort of suspicion toward the repatriates who returned to a devastated country struggling with high unemployment and limited housing (737). In addition to the blame for competing over jobs and housing, they also had to deal with being held accountable for a painful past (colonialism and Fascism) and being accused of an ambiguous membership in Italian society for having lived most of their lives elsewhere (Ballinger 2007, 724). My examination of *Tempo di uccidere* and *Il mulatto* captures this very struggle of postwar Italy to offer a coherent and stable representation of the Italian national subject and makes my interest in the *meticcio* and Italian-Levantine figures even more significant since it confirms that the notion of Italian collective identity and the criteria of membership in Italian society were not natural and fixed, but rather a fluid, permeable, and historically disputed domain.

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Conclusion

In attempting to break down the lines between truth and fiction, whether in cinematic, literary, or political practices of Italy, we often find that there is no clear line between black and white. Frantz Fanon, in his Introduction to *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952), states that "There is a point at which methods devour themselves" (7), meaning that the very attempt at sharp clarification becomes a way of falsifying reality. In examining the goals of Fascist narration strategies in propagandist works, how they were achieved, and—more importantly—how the methods used to achieve them often undermined themselves, I have argued that in a world far from being black and white, it is important to direct our attention upon those who escaped and confused the very notion of binary ethnic distinctions. With this purpose in mind, *Fascist Hybridities* focuses on mixed-race colonial offspring and Italian Levantines, problematic social figures who threatened to and were difficult to place within the stiff binary racial system in which superiority was genetic and race corresponded to specific moral behaviors and cultural life-styles. Throughout my work, I have used the term *meticcio* (plural *meticci*) to underline the degree to which such derogatory terminology stemmed from the anxiety that individuals of mixed Italian and African descent caused in Italian society under Mussolini. Although the dark-skinned *meticcio* and the native-looking Levantine effectively belonged to the white Italian community (mixed-race children were granted citizenship until 1940), they were nonetheless outsiders with a significant power to invalidate the Fascist objectives of creating a unifying definition of Italian racial identity and promoting an image of Italian society during the 1930s as organized, disciplined, and racially and culturally homogeneous.

My work looks beyond the Italian historical context to underline how, with respect to other colonial histories, the Italian perception and the positive acceptance of the colonial *meticcio*'s social and political status followed a unique historical pathway. During early colonialism, as Giulia Barrera and Barbara Sòrgoni have argued, Italian legislation had intended to safeguard the future of mixed-race offspring in order to assure them a

place in the society of their Italian fathers (200–201; 107–108). During this time, anthropological arguments were made in an attempt to prove that male features were dominant in an interracial union, and thus the children born of a white father and a black mother were closer to their fathers (Barrera 2002, 200–201; Sòrgoni 1998, 107–108). In the years following the 1935 Ethiopian Campaigns, the Italian male population in the colony increased exponentially. Miscegenation risked producing a class of biracial individuals who, provided that their physical appearance was similar to white men, could obtain citizenship. Aside from the abstract ideological arguments concerning Mussolini's view of Italian racial purity, there were also practical reasons for preventing individuals like the colonial *meticcio* from obtaining citizenship, as s/he endangered the demographic colonization of Ethiopia. Because the *meticcio* population was uniquely situated between the African demographic, which was viewed as a source of cheap labor, and the Italian colonial population, which sought to gain control over significant portions of land, the right to citizenship threatened to shift the biracial population from the former group to the latter, creating obvious social and economic tension within the existing order (Sòrgoni 1998, 209–210). For this reason, colonial African-Italians were reinserted into the indigenous population in 1940.

Among the Allied forces that liberated Italy from Fascism there were black and dark-skinned soldiers whose liaisons with Italian women produced mixed-race offspring. Yet, as found in the Fascist era, such examples of ethnic blending were equally met with efforts to deny this social reality. Due to the anxiety caused by biracial offspring, the scarcity of works in postwar Italy that addressed ethnic intermixing is not surprising. As a consequence of the Second World War, Italy lost its dominion over the colonies, which in turn precluded historical and colonial revisionism in postwar Italian society. In contrast to the Harlem Renaissance and its influences on the *negritude* literary movement in France and the explosion of *negrista* literature in the Caribbean, Italy did not produce any artistic reappraisals of the ethnic and cultural crossing between different groups within its society.

Ethnic communities living within Italy's territory during the Fascist *ventennio*, on the mainland and in the colonies, represented only one of various internal threats to the Italian identity. In addition to the fear of a physical degeneration of the Italian race through interracial unions, the Fascist regime was wary of the influence and potentially devastating effects of various foreign models on Italian culture. The proliferation of foreign goods and the emergence of a mass consumer society were associated with the risk of imitating foreign cultures and jeopardizing Italy's cultural background and sense of national identity (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 9–12; 61; 225–226;

Cannistraro 1975, 6–7; Ricci 2008, 158). In response to the availability of foreign goods, tabloids, and films, which provided consumers and audiences with a potential alternative to the lifestyle and role models promoted by Fascism, Mussolini devised several modes of diffusing a common system of values by creating Fascist sports clubs, state welfare programs, and developing cultural activities that penetrated all aspects of daily life, whether in the home, the workplace, the school or in community spaces dedicated to recreation (Ben-Ghiat 17–18; Cannistraro 67–73; Landy 7).

With regard to the supposedly pernicious influence of foreign models on the Italian way of life, I have described the measures adopted by the regime to safeguard the racial and cultural patrimony of its emigrants residing abroad, taking into specific consideration the community of Italians living in Egyptian Alexandria. Alexandria, though not an Italian colony was an important Italian emigrant destination during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and home to four influential Italian modernists, Tommaso Marinetti, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Enrico Pea, and Fausta Cialente, whose writings demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to the political and moral undertones of Mussolini's racial and cultural program. From a literary perspective, I have focused on the cultural hybridism of Egyptian society, which provided readers of a dissident Italian literature produced in Alexandria with an alternative model of cultural identity that challenged the binary view of Italians versus non-Italians and of Italy's supposed racial superiority with respect to other ethnicities.

I have further argued that the phenomenon of Italians "going native" (also known as *insabbiamento*) as a result of a prolonged and close contact with local populations of Africa remains ignored in Fascist propagandist works even though, as Olindo de Napoli asserts, it must have been widespread in Italy's colonies considering the legislation that punished Italian citizens who were caught in acts of social promiscuity (66). While Fascist propagandist literature of the 1930s is reluctant to represent characters that undermined the Fascist policies aimed at regenerating and protecting Italian customs and lifestyles, the dissident literature of Enrico Pea and Fausta Cialente exhibits a mosaic of Italians experiencing a cultural identity crisis.

My analysis began by taking into consideration the social positions occupied by Italian immigrants living in Alexandria and Italians residing in Italy's colonial territories who were expected to assume the role of colonizers, since emigrants and colonial residents most likely shared a similar social status and socio-economic background. Instead of attracting wealthy Italians, Ethiopia and the African empire were envisioned, much as they had been during Francesco Crispi's late-nineteenth-century colonialism, as social and economic holding grounds for Italy's surplus

working-class population (Ben-Ghiat 1996, 131; Burdett 2007, 122–123; Fuller 2008, 61; Larebo 1994, 284). Since the goals of the colonial novel were to positively affect the public opinion about life in the colony, writers of this type of literature were obviously hesitant to recount the actual living conditions of the Italians residing in Italy's African territories. In this way, even if not intended as representations of colonial life, Cialente's and Pea's writings provide a realistic picture of the conditions of economic hardship likely experienced by members of the lower classes who had immigrated to Italy's African colonies. Though not necessarily optimistic, representations of working class Italians in Cialente and Pea's dissident literature can be considered positive in that they offer a more truthful insight into the life of destitute Italian emigrants that differed from the image propagated by Fascist colonial literature.

Fascist Hybridities draws on recent scholarship that has highlighted how the introduction of racism into Italy's dominant ideology was not the sudden result of the Fascist alliance with Nazi Germany, formalized by the 1939 Pact of Steel, but rather can be viewed as the result of a long series of nationalistic initiatives which ended up identifying Italian membership along racial lines. Initially, the ancient lineage of the earliest peoples living in the Italian peninsula (the Italic peoples), the cultural heritage of the Ancient Romans and the moral values inspired by the Roman Catholic Church provided the common roots in which Italians could recognize themselves. Before the 1936 creation of the Empire of East Africa, Italian whiteness was not a phenotypic feature but a status that legitimized citizenship based on cultural and historical heritage (the membership in the Italic stock) and derived from conformity to Fascist policies that taught proper ways of being citizens, and behavioral discipline (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013, 42). The use of culture and historical spirit, and thus lifestyle, to define race eventually failed to provide a convincing criteria for supremacy in Fascist Italy. Mussolini's lifelong effort to reinforce Italian racial supremacy culminated with the promulgation of the 1938 racial laws, which were primarily targeted against Jews and black colonial subjects, among whom he planned to include the *meticcio* population.

The question of the racial inferiority of *meticcio* offspring was an issue of contention, as historian De Napoli has eloquently explained, since Italian racial identity was not considered self-evident within Fascist ideology. Unlike the German nation, in which the German population was claimed to be naturally and innately synonymous with the German race, the "making" of Italians implied a conception of race that was reliant on the myth of Imperial Rome, according to which Italian identity was defined not by biological elements, but rather in terms of the creative force of man and his will (De Napoli 2009, 22; 123–124). Ancient Romans,

and their Italian descendants, were considered to belong to a superior lineage because they had been successful in creating an empire (De Napoli 2009, 123–124). Mussolini's program of cultural reform that would incite ideological and behavioral change in Italian men and women was meant to facilitate the making of Italians.

The orientation of Fascist racism toward theories that defined race in strictly biological terms served to exclude colonial mixed-race individuals from Italian society despite the fact that this same group had previously benefitted and gained citizenship from a concept of race based on the notion of an "Italic stock." Before the 1936 creation of Mussolini's Empire of East Africa, eligibility for citizenship was determined not only by physical resemblance to white men but also by lifestyle, upbringing, and assimilation in Italian culture (De Napoli 2009, 22). The notion of an Italic stock and the regime's policies of cultural regeneration, however, were challenged by the Levantinized Italians residing in Alexandria and the so-called *insabbiati* in Italy's African colonies, who no longer shared the culture, perceptions, and ideals of their fellow citizens. By adapting to local customs, they had become removed from the Italian community and its culture. Their presumed disorderly lifestyle in which sense of racial and cultural self, honor and loyalty to Italy had been lost, was viewed as a sign of their distance from the cultural ideals and Italian whiteness promoted by Fascism.

The cultural mixing of the Levantines and *insabbiati* called into question the criteria according to which Italian membership had been assigned prior to 1938, and it equally invalidated the conditions of the new orientation of Fascist racism after 1938. Yet, with the gradual shift of Fascist racism from an emphasis on cultural and spiritual characteristics to the prominence given to biological traits, as delineated in the 1938 *Manifesto della razza*, Levantines and *insabbiati* could legitimately be re-inserted in the Italian race on the basis of their genetic belonging. Nevertheless, Fascist racism did continue to rely on historical and cultural factors as well, as evidenced by the continued use of the myth of an Italic stock to define membership in the Italian community and by the discriminatory policies against Jews. Unlike the colonial subjects who had lived in a subordinate and distinct position with respect to the Italian population of mainland Italy, the anti-Semitic biological discourse posed significant challenges to the legitimacy of the regime's claims because Jews had been part of Italy's social and economic fabric since the Risorgimento (De Napoli 2009, 141; Raspanti 1994, 80).

The premises of the discriminatory policies against Jews, who were excluded from definitions of racial belonging following the 1938 racial laws because of their supposedly diverse biological makeup, cultural

background, and moral values, become questionable in light of other groups, such as the Italian Levantines and the *insabbiati* of the colonies. Like the Jewish population of Italy, this category of Italian citizens, whose lifestyles and beliefs did not necessarily adhere to the social or economic doctrines of the Fascist regime or to Roman Catholic values, obstructed the system of cultural and racial classification. In summary, the oscillation between biological racism and the Aryan discourse and nationalist and spiritualist forms of racism based on sociohistorical factors reveals the ambiguity and malleability of the defining elements of ethnic and cultural belonging.

Regarding the social reality of interracial unions in the Italian colonies in Africa, I have argued that literature of Fascist propaganda, even prior the 1940 law barring mixed-care offspring from citizenship, replaced the historical hybrid of the *meticcio* with the constructed hybrids of the *askari* and *passer.* In light of the fact that the intermediary position of the *meticci* complicated the binary structure of black and white, rulers and ruled, and threatened to destabilize the basic assumptions of Mussolini's colonization policy in Ethiopia, it was hoped nonetheless that mixed race individuals could be controlled through fiction. Rosolino Gabrielli's and Arnaldo Cipolla's novels indirectly address the issue of the biracial children of Italian colonists and reveal how Fascist propaganda literature filtered out the elements beyond its control.

However, through novels such as *Il piccolo Brassa* and *Melograno d'oro*, one observes how literature affiliated with the regime was neither able to completely fulfill its purpose of condemning miscegenation, nor draw clear boundaries between ruler and ruled. The anxieties about Italian racial purity and superiority that Cipolla and Gabrielli wished to resolve or suppress are in fact brought to light and dangerously unleashed by their works. White prestige relied on the existence of an Italian identity that was immediately visible and recognizable, and that could be established as a model to be copied and admired by the colonized. Nevertheless, the Italian protagonist and the reader in *Il piccolo Brassa* are made to emulate an "ideal model" provided by Mahmud the *askari*. Likewise, one cannot but wonder if *Melograno d'oro*'s narrative strategies really succeed in condemning miscegenation. Cipolla reenacts the carnal image of the black Venus and sustains it through recourse to metaphorical vocabulary underlying her deadly allure. The sexual danger projected onto the black woman reflects the fear of the social and ethnic threat the regime sensed coming from the mixed race offspring, but the response that fear might have prompted, I have argued, was thwarted by the readers' more powerful erotic attraction to the native woman.

In my analysis of these novels, I have looked beneath the surface and have attempted to show how the fear of interracial unions and cross-cultural integration are present even in works, such as the colonial novel, that intentionally aim to reverse or suppress the visibility of such questions in order to spread Fascist ideals and support the image of a uniform Italian identity. Thus, I have suggested that in both mainstream and dissident literature of the 1930s, it is possible to see the underpinnings of Fascist ideology and the attempt to market an alternate image of society by limiting the visibility of undesirable or contradictory elements. In terms of the counter literature of the 1930s, I have examined Pea and Cialente's dissident literature, and its function of exposing the cultural and socioeconomic diversity that more accurately characterized the true experience of Italian immigrants in Africa, contrary to the emphasis in Fascist discourse on Italian supremacy and uniformity.

Pea and Cialente's portrayals of Alexandrian society depict the very lack of a singular cultural identity or attachment to the Italian motherland and thus provide an apt example of what I have discussed as Italian Levantinism. Whereas mainstream culture under Fascism was subject to a discourse of cultural homogeneity and loyalty to Italian territory, including the regime's religious, historical, racial, and economic policies, Pea and Cialente undermine the view of Italian race as a narrow or clearly defined category and instead demonstrate the inevitability of exposure to foreign cultural influences. Finally, their novels challenge Fascist representations of Africa and their descriptions of life in Alexandria offset Mussolini's efforts to distort the reality of life in the colonies, as in other communities with large populations of Italian immigrants, and to mask the economic, gender and social hierarchies that were preserved and encouraged as a means of maintaining control over these individuals.

As in my analysis of mainstream and dissident literature, my examination of 1930s propagandist cinema has likewise been aimed at showing how filmmakers attempted to inspire consensus with Mussolini's regime. In particular, I have argued that films like *Lo squadrone bianco* and *Sotto la croce del sud* were made with the intention to persuade viewers to adopt behaviors consonant with Fascist ideology and to suppress desires that were discouraged by the regime. At the same time, these films, much like the colonial novels, often unintentionally expose the fears, contradictions, and rhetorical strategies of the Fascist regime even while attempting to provide positive behavioral models and to reinforce definitions of national identity based on the supposed racial inferiority of the colonized population. The protagonists of these films were meant to exemplify the values, desires, and heroic potential of the average Italian

man and to inspire loyalty and deference to the Fascist state. The hero's journey, which often traces the shift from individual desires toward the obedient embrace of Fascist ideals, was meant to mirror that of the new Italian citizen and his role in bringing order to Italy's domestic and foreign territories.

In my analysis of Genina's film, I have discussed the efforts of colonial propaganda to portray the colonial lifestyle as one that afforded a higher social status and allowed Italians to take part in what was described, as in the LUCE newsreels, as a mission to modernize Ethiopians. I have focused, however, on the disruptive effects of modern culture shown in the film's depiction of Mario's past life with Cristiana, which the protagonist ultimately abandons in the name of a simpler lifestyle. Although one of the objectives of the film was likely to convince members of the lower classes who were about to move to the colony to develop a sentiment toward the State and overcome the desire for greater material well-being, Genina's film ultimately condemns the very progress that Italians were supposedly bringing to Ethiopia.

Likewise, my analysis of Brignone's *Sotto la croce del sud* focused on how the film, in attempting to depict the removal of mixed-race individuals from a united white community, unwittingly deconstructs itself. Through his villains, two *meticci* defined as "Levantines" throughout most of the film who are eventually sent away, Brignone touches on issues not only of racial but also cultural diversity and hybridity and the only solution he offers for addressing the problems created by these liminal figures is to exclude them from the Italian community entirely. The ambiguous status of his antagonists as both "*meticci*" and "Levantines," or rather as racially and culturally diverse, reveals how definitions of Italian national belonging had become not only a question of biological and racial belonging, but also of cultural identity and integration in foreign environments. By exposing the tenuous nature of definitions of Italy's racial and cultural patrimony, Brignone's film actually contradicts the notion that Italians shared a common genetic, cultural, and spiritual heritage.

In the cultural climate of postwar Italy, characterized by the alternation between a kind of collective amnesia and the nostalgic recollection of only those experiences and memories of Africa that were unproblematic, the colonial past occasionally resurfaces in the plotlines of films and novels through black female characters whose primary function seems to be that of eliciting the revisitation of the colonial scene. I have argued that the act of recollection in *Tempo di uccidere* and *Il mulatto* provides readers and viewers with a means of coming to terms with the past based on a process of reflection on the self, as aptly discussed by Dennis Walder and Seth Graebner, a process that recalls the Italian protagonists' experience

while continuing to suppress that of the Other. Both the novel and the film address the question of guilt and the desire for expiation, which is eventually granted by a series of miraculous events, including the divine intervention of a Madonna.

The main difference between the two works is that Flaiano's *Tempo di uccidere* urges readers to reflect critically on colonialism and Italy's role in Africa through the story of an indolent lieutenant who fires his weapon not to defend himself and his fellow Italian soldiers in war, but to avoid being discovered with an Ethiopian woman with whom he spends a night while searching for a dentist to cure his toothache. Despite this homicide, Flaiano allows his protagonist to eventually return to Italy unpunished, thus leaving the reader in a state of moral uneasiness. *Il mulatto,* on the other hand, revisits the colonial scene through the lens of Christian compassion and the religious iconography of the Black Madonna with the aim of obtaining forgiveness and absolution from the past. The character of Matteo, an ex-convict from the South in search of a place in the new Italy, whose moral rehabilitation is achieved not through his five-year prison sentence, but rather through the *caritas* demonstrated toward his wife's mixed-race child. De Robertis' film begins where Flaiano's novel ends in order to guide the audience toward a gradual recovery of moral values that would allow characters and spectators to start over in postwar Italy.

The palpable obsession with racial purity during the Fascist era may help explain Italy's current defensive posture against foreign immigration and—despite the history of Italian diaspora and nearly sixty years of colonialism in Africa—the view of Italian society, whether domestic or foreign, historical or contemporary, as homogeneously white. My focus on the Fascist period prepares for further study of contemporary Italian society, its political and popular culture, which may benefit from a comparison with the propagandist literature and cinema of the 1930s. My interest in representations of the hybrid figures of the African Italian and the Italian Levantine is particularly relevant when considering the legacy of Italy's colonial enterprise in present-day debates on foreign immigration and legislation on Italian citizenship which still draw upon an understanding of identity and belonging based on criteria of blood and ancestry. Individuals born and raised in Italy by foreign parents are aliens in the eyes of the law despite their Italian cultural upbringing. Their very existence exposes the contradictory and problematic terms of Italian membership because, as scholar David Ward has pointed out, Italy's defensive stance against foreign immigration "bear[s] not much so on the fear of difference, but the fear of equality" (91). Recent developments on xenophobia toward foreign immigrants living in Italy within the past forty years have the tendency of avoiding any mention of biological racism by

disregarding the concepts of inequality and racial inferiority and substituting a coveted "authentic cultural identity" which Italians believe that they have a right to defend and protect (Ward 1997, 91). The conclusion implied by Ward is that foreign immigrants and their Italian-born offspring are labeled as non-citizens perhaps not so much due to their lack of an Italian bloodline but because their cultural heritage is interpreted as being so dangerously close to the host society's customs that any claim of an "authentic Italian cultural identity" is no longer sustainable. By directing my attention to the *meticcio* and Italian Levantine, marginal figures who destabilized the very notion of Italian identity, my analysis throughout this book has exposed the contradictions at the basis of the criteria of who counted as "Italian" and on what grounds Italian membership was not natural and fixed, but rather a fluid, permeable, and historically disputed domain, in response to political and social exigencies of the time.

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Notes

Introduction: Race to the End. *Meticci* and Levantines in Literary and Cinematic Representations of Colonial Experience in Africa

1. While aware that Africa or the Dark Continent, and Africans are generalizations that deny the heterogeneity of the peoples, cultures, societies, histories, and economies of this continent, the use of these terms in this book reflects the perspectives of relevant ideological discourses in which Africa and Africans existed mostly as abstract constructs.
2. In the years immediately following Italy's unification, the greatest burden of the new fiscal measures affected southern Italy, where agriculture remained the principal source of economic growth. The decline of southern agriculture was caused by the investment of available capital in the northern industries and by the fall in prices of produce following the massive importation of American grain at low costs, and the anti-French policies undertaken by the Crispi government during the mid-1880s, which broke commercial ties with France, causing the South to lose its biggest market for the export of local produce.
3. The term *meticcio* (plural *meticci*) is used in this book with reference to individuals of mixed Italian and African descent. My adoption of this term, widely used in colonial documents and legislation, serves to underline the degree to which such derogatory terminology stemmed from the anxiety that this ethnic group caused in Italian society during a period in which the desire to appear homogeneously white was threatened by the offspring of Italian colonists and black colonial subjects.
4. I am indebted to David Huddart's insightful discussion of mimicry and its relation to concepts such as colonial anxiety and visibility in his volume *Homi K Bhabha* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

1 Art of Darkness: The Aestheticization of Black People in Fascist Colonial Novels

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appreciation to the editors of the volume, Justus Makokha, Russell West-Pavlov, and Jennifer Wawrzinek, for the opportunity of being included in their volume and their support.

1. The term *meticcio* (plural *meticci*) is used throughout this book with reference to individuals of mixed Italian and African descent. My adoption of this term, widely used in colonial documents and legislation, serves to underline the degree to which such derogatory terminology stemmed from the anxiety that this ethnic group caused in Italian society during a period in which the desire to appear homogeneously white was threatened by the offspring of Italian colonists and black colonial subjects.
2. For a thorough investigation of this practice in film, see Giorgio Bertellini's article "Colonial Autism" and Cecilia Boggio's study "Black Shirts/Black Skins" in *A Place in the Sun* (Berkeley: University of California P, 2003), and Ruth Ben-Ghiat's article "Envisioning Modernity" (*Critical Inquiry*, 1996). Jacqueline Reich addresses this topic in her forthcoming volume, *The Maciste Films of Italian Silent Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2015)
3. This is a disguise that permits a light-skinned black to pass as white. Passing is a transformation facilitated by signs present in the physical appearance of the passer such as skin color, hair, teeth and gums, and facial traits.
4. On this topic, see Haile Larebo's *The Building of an Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) in which the author explores the realization following the conquest of Ethiopia that the framework upon which the Fascist Campaigns had been built was myth-based.
5. In his volume *La prova della razza* (Milano: Mondadori, 2009) 123–124, De Napoli discusses the irresolvable ambiguity between the main tenets of Fascist ideology and the racist stance that became an essential component of Fascist policies starting in the late 1930s. The myth of Imperial Rome, for example, was considered an essential element and one of the foundations of Fascist Italy, according to which Italian identity was initially defined not by biological elements, but rather in terms of the creative force of man and his will. Ancient Romans, and thus their Italian descendants, were considered to belong to a superior lineage because they had been successful in creating an empire. The antithesis between the notions of a shared Roman culture and the use of a biological racism was never resolved.
6. See also David Huddart's insightful discussion of mimicry in his volume *Homi K Bhabha* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
7. Translations from Italian in this chapter are my own unless otherwise stated.
8. Giulia Barrera in *Colonial Affairs* (UMI, 2002) 54, discusses how Italians constantly lauded the military strength and obedience of *askari* soldiers. In the debate about letting Eritreans or Libyans enter the officer ranks, the native soldiers were never allowed to advance up the military ladder as the disadvantages overrode the advantages.
9. Rosolino Gabrielli, *Il piccolo Brassa* (Palermo: Industrie Riunite, 1928) 166.
10. In her essay "Orphans for the Empire," in *A Place in the Sun* (Berkeley: University of California P, 2003) 245, Patrizia Palumbo finds several hidden

invectives in *Balilla regale* which passed unnoticed by Fascist censorship and revealed the author's hope for a non-Fascist Italy.

11. Maria Pagliara, in her essay "Faccetta nera," in *I best seller del ventennio* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1991) 440–443, points out that colonial novels, such as Gino Mitrano Sani's *La reclusa di Giarabub* (1931) and *Femina somala* (1933), entrust the task of a factual narration to the voice of their main characters who, by way of letters or confessions, describe events in the first person. Facts and experiences were told in first person narration as if they had actually been lived. The desired effect was to be able to create more drama in the story, allowing the reader to feel involved in the protagonist's experience that was to be emulated.

2 The Dissident Literature of Enrico Pea and Fausta Cialente

1. Most scholars agree on the need to differentiate between the Italian "state" and the Italian "regime" under Fascism. "Regime" here refers specifically to the totalitarian body under Fascism in Italy.Although Mussolini's rule began in 1922, the beginning of his dictatorship is often placed in the 1930s or, as Adrian Lyttelton has argued, with Mussolini's 1925 speech, in which he took responsibility for Matteotti's murder.
2. Mabel Berezin's article "Political Belonging," in *State/Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999) 357–360, carries out a compelling discussion of the term "identity" and its meaning in modern Italy in the attempt to describe Mussolini's efforts to forge a new "identity" (broadly understood) for his fellow citizens. Berezin explains that, within the wide range of possible identities (national, political, social, cultural, ethnic, regional, etc.) comprised in the broad categorization of public and private identities, Fascism ignored the fractionalization of private and public, and collapsed all multiple identities into one monolithic model as, supposedly, the embodiment of the Italian self, the essence of being authentically Italian. For an in-depth discussion of identity and citizenship in Italy, see also Sabina Donati's volume *A political History of National Citizenship and Identity in Italy, 1861–1950* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013).
3. France held a tight grip on Egypt as the main investor of the Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal. However, starting in 1876, Great Britain took over France's role in controlling Egypt, successfully buying out Khedive Isma'il Pasha's shares in the Canal and thus becoming one of the principal investors in the company.
4. Translations from Italian in this chapter are my own unless otherwise stated.
5. On this topic see Gianluca Gabrielli's volume *L'offesa della razza* (Bologna: Patron, 2005) 20–22.
6. Despite the fact that the Dodecanese archipelago was as Italian protectorate and not a colonial possession during the Fascist regime, Valerie Mcguire argues that Fascist authorities treated their residents as colonial subjects.

3 Fade to White: Cinematic Representations of Italian Whiteness

1. Augusto Genina, *Lo squadrone bianco* (CINES 1936). Translations from Italian in this chapter are my own unless otherwise stated.
2. Genina, *Lo squadrone bianco*.
3. Genina, *Lo squadrone bianco*.
4. Genina, *Lo squadrone bianco*.
5. Guido Brignone, *Sotto la croce del sud* (Mediterranea 1938).
6. Guido Brignone, *Sotto la croce*.
7. Guido Brignone, *Sotto la croce*.
8. Brignone, *Sotto la croce*.
9. Brignone, *Sotto la croce*.

4 Levantines and Biracial Offspring in Postwar Italy

1. Ruth Iyob, in her essay "From Mal d'Africa to Mal d'Europa" in *Italian Colonialism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), examines the causes of *mal d'Italia,* a variation of *mal d'Africa* that afflicted the Eritrean ruling class, whose strong attachment to Italy stood in contrast to the violent postcolonial regime in their country. According to Iyob, the growth of the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, in the aftermath of War World II, brought about a process of positively rereading the colonial past that helped the Eritreans to legitimize their battle for independence from Ethiopia. On the interplay between *mal d'Africa* and *mal d'Italia*, see also my own article on the cinematic careers of Eritrean actresses Zeudy Araya and Ines Pellegrini that appears in *L'Africa in Italia* (Rome: Aracne, 2013).
2. Unlike Loredana Polezzi, Patricia Lorcin in *Historicizing Colonial Nostalgia* (New York: Palgrave, 2012) 9, distinguishes between imperial and colonial nostalgia, with the former stemming from the loss of a colonial empire and the latter expressing the grief over the loss of the sociocultural standing previously accorded by colonial rule.
3. My discussion here refers to Dennis Walder's analysis of colonial and postcolonial nostalgias, in his study "Writing, Representation, and Postcolonial Nostalgia" (Textual Practice, 2009) 938, when the scholar highlights the "ethical responsibility" required whenever one revisits the colonial past or any past, and the ease of falling prey to a "narcissistic" and "selective" nostalgia. Colonial nostalgia, more often than not, provides society with an overall sense of "self-enhancement," Seth Graebner explains in his *History's Place* (New York: Lexington Books, 2007) 12, that helps recover a past that instills anxiety.
4. See also David Huddart, in *Homi K Bhabha* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 83–84, when he eloquently explains Bhabha's view of cultural identity as never self-sufficient and always variable; although national identity may appear stable, tangible, unchangeable and logical to those who belong to it, it also depends on those who do not belong to it and is branded by them

in a game of comparison between themselves and the Other, and it further changes with time and in the retrospective comparison with the past.

5. Marisa Trubiano's insightful comments in *Ennio Flaiano and His Italy* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2010) 41, as well as in her earlier study *La verità è che sono* (UMI 2000), shed light on Flaiano's aims at dismantling Fascist pompous rhetoric concerning Italian colonialism while simultaneously revealing "the porous foundations of a reconstruction of a country built on its denial of its role in the history of colonialism."
6. Enrico Emanuelli's *Una lettera dal deserto* first appeared in 1946, with a different title, in the magazine *Costume. Quindicinale di politica e cultura*, and was subsequently published by Il Saggiatore as short story in 1960.
7. Translation from Italian of Ferrero's interview is my own.
8. Enrico Emanuelli, *Una lettera dal deserto* 18. Translation from Italian of passages from *Una lettera dal deserto* is my own.
9. Emanuelli, *Una lettera dal deserto* 18.
10. Emanuelli, *Una lettera dal deserto* 20–21.
11. Emanuelli, *Una lettera dal deserto* 54.
12. Emanuelli, *Una lettera dal deserto* 57.
13. Ennio Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* (London: Quartet Books, 1992) 110. This entry refers to the translation of *Tempo di uccidere* by Stuart Hood.
14. In the novel, the lieutenant is convinced that the shots that killed Mariam trigged a series of accidental deaths in the village where her family lived. The manifestation of accidental deaths in Ethiopia, which establishes the idea that death happens by chance, is a recurring theme in the novel.
15. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 262.
16. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 32.
17. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 40.
18. See David Huddart's analysis of Bhabha's discussion of the "returned look" as a factor defining the visibility of both the colonized and the colonizer (43–44).
19. Ennio Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 237.
20. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 237.
21. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 73.
22. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 73.
23. I owe this expression to Laura Mulvey who describes, in her *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989), classical Hollywood cinema's codes as reflecting ways of looking and desiring that are entitled solely to male audiences whom she defines 'the bearers of the look.'
24. I am grateful to Rosanne Pelletier for calling my attention to the interplay of gazes in this scene.
25. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 21.
26. Derek Duncan's study "Italian Identity and the Risk of Contamination," in *Italian Colonialism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005) 110, clarifies that the "sighting of a naked woman bathing" is such a "classic instance of imperialist scopophilia," and Flaiano strategically re-enacts it in order to reveal the inner workings of colonial discourse and the ways by which it manipulates reality to satisfy its specific purposes.

27. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 198.
28. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 204.
29. I am grateful to Rosanne Pelletier for bringing this passage in the novel to my attention.
30. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 20.
31. *L'azione coloniale* used to be a Fascist propagandist magazine with multiple publications throughout the year, and my search of the 1941 issue in the archives of the Biblioteca Alessandrina in Rome and the Biblioteca Nazionale in Bologna has been unsuccessful. However, it appears in Elisabetta Castana's documentary, which provides a decent view of both the article and relevant images.
32. According to the international law of war, as the historian Luigi Goglia clarifies in the television documentary on Guillet directed by Elisabetta Castana, the defeated army's act of surrendering sanctioned the end of hostility and obligated everyone to obey.
33. Quoted in Elisabetta Castana, *Amedeo Guillet* (RAI Educational, 2008).
34. Lieutenant Guillet's private war against the English was only one of his acts of insubordination during a life and a career marked by decisions unimaginable for an official serving under the Fascist regime. According to Castana's documentary for the Rai Educational channel, in 1936 Guillet refused to marry his partner, Beatrice Gandolfi, whom he later married, in order to oppose the Fascist matrimonial law that granted married soldiers military promotions. The law was aimed, especially for those departing for the African colonies, at reinforcing the sense of civic responsibility toward their race and at preventing relationships with local women. Guillet's decisions were not limited to contesting Fascist military regulations; during a hospital stay in Tripoli in 1938, he helped a Jewish student continue her studies of Medicine, which had been forcibly suspended with the promulgation of the race laws. Subsequently, Guillet met a young Eritrean woman, Khadija, with whom he was romantically involved until his return to Italy, and he never kept this relationship hidden during his military service despite his awareness of the possible legal and military repercussions.
35. The term *imbestiamento*, used by Ruth Iyob in her article "Madamismo and Beyond" in *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave, 2005) 233, is more denigrating than the expression *insabbiamento* (previously used in this book) and emphasizes the degree to which the process of indigenization was stigmatized by the regime and negatively perceived by Flaiano's lieutenant, whose malaise is directly caused by the loss of the identity fabricated by the regime.
36. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 230.
37. Enrico Emanuelli, *Settimana nera* (Milano: Mondadori, 1961) 192.
38. During the 1950s, African-Americans did not have the benefit of full citizenship rights.
39. Cristina Lombardi-Diop, in "Spotless Italy" (*California Italian Studies*, 2011) 10, also underlines the influence of American culture on Italian customs as a factor that changed behaviors and lifestyles in 1950s and 1960s Italy.

40. Francesco De Robertis, *Il mulatto* (Scalera Films, 1949).
41. De Robertis, *Il mulatto*.
42. De Robertis, *Il mulatto*.
43. De Robertis, *Il mulatto*.
44. De Robertis, *Il mulatto*.
45. De Robertis, *Il mulatto*.
46. De Robertis, *Il mulatto*.
47. De Robertis, *Il mulatto*.
48. See also "Unmasking the Fascist Man" (*Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2005) by historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat which discusses the consequences of the war in terms of "masculinity crisis" and confusion about gender roles following the loss of the male role in controlling the family finances.
49. On this topic see also Charles Leavitt's article "Impegno nero: Italian Intellectuals and the African American Struggle" (*California Italian Studies*, 2013).
50. See also Daniela Baratieri, *Memories and Silences Haunted by Fascism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010) 112–113.
51. Xavier Barral, in his essay "Madonne brune che non lo erano in epoca romana" in *Proceedings of Nigra Sum* (Casale Monferrato: ATLAS, 2010), 108, cites the example of a conversation on art between artist Paolo Tedeschi and one of his students in the book *Storia delle belle arti* (1872), in which the teacher describes Constantinople as "a city and a court full of servants, women and courtiers, in which painters, at the priests' orders, made images of Christ ugly and scary and Madonnas black as if they were Tartars or Ethiopians." Barral also notes that in an essay on the physiology of fourteenth-century painting published in the *Nuova Antologia* (1878), bishop Giovanni Battista Toschi accused Byzantine painters of making Madonnas "hideous in every way" with "skin the color of chocolate."
52. De Robertis, *Il mulatto*.
53. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 111.
54. I am grateful to Rosanne Pelletier for drawing my attention to the lieutenant's intention of breaking up with his wife following his return to Italy. See also Maria Pagliara's essay "Faccetta nera" in *I bestseller del ventennio* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1991) on the different role played by the Italian woman vis-à-vis the native female character in propagandist colonial novels. Flaiano reverses a quite conventional ending in which the Italian male protagonist's racial awareness would naturally lead him toward an Italian woman or otherwise incite his reunion with her.
55. Flaiano, *A Time to Kill* 111.
56. Previously in this book, I have mentioned the insightful analysis by Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop who observe, in *Bianco e nero* (Milano: Mondadori, 2013), 42, the changes that the Italian "color line" undergoes in the transition from the post-unification to the Fascist period and finally the postwar period. In the Liberal period, the color line separated "real" Italians (the petty urban bourgeoisie of the North) from the less-white rural populations of the South. Fascism claimed the whiteness of the internal black (the

South) through the concept of Italic stock and by contrasting it with the blackness of colonial Africans.

57. De Robertis, *Il mulatto*.
58. With the expression repatriated noncitizen Italian nationals, Pamela Ballinger refers to individuals born abroad to two (or one) Italian nationals holding an Italian citizenship, or to Italian citizens who spontaneously acquired a foreign citizenship. By repatriating to Italy, Italian nationals were eligible for Italian citizenship.

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