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LO SCAFFALE

a cura di Riccardo Morri

Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity

Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (a cura di)

New York, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2012, pp. 320.

The book's introduction and three of the essays with which it begins (by S. Mezzadra, S. Ponzanesi, and M. Mellino) compellingly stake out the boundaries of the field of postcolonial Italian studies. The editors and contributors make clear that a) the object itself, postcolonial Italy, does in fact exist in ways that are central to contemporary Italian experience as well as collective historical memory and b) "postcolonial" Italy is not simply a tacked-on derivative of the more 'dominant' traditions of postcolonial studies, but that it instead adds a fresh and vital perspective on European and global postcoloniality. Rather than simply importing a theoretical framework from other imperial contexts, this important and long-awaited volume charts a uniquely Italian road to postcolonial studies—excavating intellectual trajectories of subalternity from Gramsci to Pasolini, as well as less well-traveled itineraries, such as the one proposed by Teresa Fiore in her theorization of the dual meaning post-'colonia,' which

accounts for the children of Italian emigrants in the Americas who 'return' to Italy with full citizenship but with only partial acceptance as 'Italian.' The book's contributors—prominent scholars in the Italian and Anglo-American academies—engage postcoloniality from the perspective of a variety of disciplines—history, economics, anthropology, literature, cinema, and pop cultural studies. *Postcolonial Italy* names, as the editors and their contributors note, not simply a given chronology or temporal moment in a given geopolitical space—the contemporary Italian peninsula—but also a methodological disposition, an incitement to productively practice interdisciplinarity.

Postcolonial Italy takes the lens that was critical to colonial surveillance, management, and representation and turns it back upon itself. Both wide-angle and microscopic lenses are deployed in the volume; its readings range from surveys of the status of Italian postcolonial studies itself to close readings of lesser-known or marginal texts, such as the 1970s Blaxploitation films of Luigi Scattini (R. Giuliani Caponetto), Pasolini's Eritrean writings (G. Trento), Claudio Noce's film *Good Morning Aman* (D. Duncan), and the travel narrative of 19th-century Italian Orientalist and Muslim masquerader Giovanni Finati (B. Spackman).

In a way that runs diametrically counter to the imperial cartographic phantasmagorias of “grande Italia” and “mare nostrum,” *Postcolonial Italy* maps a new Italy, one that is no longer confined to the Italian peninsula and its islands, and thereby isolated from its ‘unofficial’ or ‘spontaneous’ colonies in the Americas nor from its former colonies in the Mediterranean and the Horn of Africa, but is instead linked to them across the *black Atlantic* and the *black Mediterranean* through migratory labor routes, flows of global capital, and transnational aesthetics. If colonial maps represented in order to contain territories and peoples, *Postcolonial Italy* maps in ways that open new spaces in the Italian geography of the everyday, traversing both novel and re-configured spaces—from Rome’s 8 tram to Largo Argentina (A. Portelli), to Nigerian-Italian video production companies in Brescia and Turin (A. Jedlowski) and the popular radio network produced by Rete G2—“second generation” Italians who work on diasporic and transnational identity formation and citizenship (C. Clò).

Race is of course among the most important epistemological mechanisms of colonial power and nation formation, and Italy, despite decades of avoiding sustained theoretical and critical debates about race, is no exception. Romeo conceives of the exclusion of race from contemporary Italian cultural debates quite persuasively not in terms of “repression” but in terms of an “evaporation”—a discourse that is temporarily invisible, though nevertheless pervasive,

and always bound to reappear. Lombardi-Diop discusses the “postracial” nature of Italy—where, as she argues convincingly, “widespread racism permeates political discourse, societal behavior, and popular culture, yet race is often unnamed and ultimately silenced.” Both of these readings render visible and explicit the racial politics that subtly underpin contemporary Italian social relations.

The volume also rejects neat distinctions between center and periphery/ metropole and colony. The task, as Mellino compellingly argues in his piece, refiguring Chakrabarty’s charge to “provincialize Europe,” is to “de-provincialize Italy” by “rethinking Italy’s historical involvement in the rise and spread of a capitalist modernity in which the globalization of both modern European-Christian, humanistic culture, and the ‘color-race line’ were complementary strategies of colonial capitalist rule over different territories, subjects, and cultures” (85-6). Mellino’s call to “de-provincialize Italy” is among the most provocative moves proposed here, and one that all of the essays in the volume undertake.

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