



Postcolonial Borderlands: Black Life Worlds and Relational Place in Turin, Italy

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Abstract

The emergence of Italy as a receiving country of postcolonial immigrants from all over Africa and other parts of the economically developing world involves the reproduction of deeply rooted prejudices and colonial legacies expressed in territorial concepts of belonging. Yet geographical discussions of borders seldom begin their explorations from the vantage point of what Hanchard has called, “Black life worlds”, complex experiences of place among African diasporic populations in relationship to race. This paper examines situated practices, negotiations, and meanings of place, identity and belonging among first generation African-Italians in Northern Italy whose experiences suggest that the borders between Africa and Europe are far more porous than they appear to be. This essay develops a theory of relational place to study the meaning of place in Black life worlds as indexed by the everyday materiality of bodies in relation to racial discourses and practices, and the profound interweavings of Africa and Europe through space and time. The essay examines African-Italo experiences in relation to the transformation of political culture in Turin, the rise of ethno-nationalism, and legacies of Italian colonialism.

It is not just the dominant ideas and political practices, but the marginal, the implausible, and the popular ideas that also define an age.

Michael Hanchard (2006, 8)



Introduction

Maria Abbebu Viarengo spent the first twenty years of her life in Ethiopia and Sudan before her father brought her to Turin, Italy in 1969. Italy was no stranger to Maria who had previously visited the country not only in actual terms but through her imagination as a young person schooled in Italian language and history while growing up in a place briefly part of the Italian colonial empire and where Italy had left enduring cultural footprints. In her partially published autobiography, Maria describes the gradual re-awakening of the African dimensions of her identity she had felt constrained to withhold until the late 1980s when a growing number of Africans appeared in the Piedmont region. Her memories of Africa had always been present and she had retained some cultural practices, but could seldom openly exhibit this knowledge. Compelled to assimilate and conform to dominant Northern Italian cultural practices and submerge the African cultural parts of her identity, Viarengo experienced an ambiguous sense of belonging. She was routinely treated as different and an outsider, even though her father was Italian, she spoke the official language and regional dialect better than many Italians who appeared white and are therefore unmarked, and she too was an Italian citizen. Viarengo wrestled with her multiply textured, relational identity, including memories of her early life and an ongoing affective connection with Africa, her relationship with her African mother, her Italianity, and feelings of alienation fostered by the way she was perceived in Italian society. In her autobiography she narrates a double experience of rupture when both her sense of belonging in Turin was frequently dismissed and the parts of her identity that were Oromo remained underground, along with the history of Italy's relationship with East Africa (Ponzanesi, 2004). Of the sense that she was being defined as non-Italian through the racializing gaze of others, she wrote:

“I have heard people call me, hanfez, klls, meticcia, mulatta, cafelatte, half-cast, ciuculatin, colored, armusch. I have learned the art of pretense; I have always looked like whomever others wanted me to look like. I have been Indian, Arab, Latin American, and Sicilian (74, quoted in Ponzanesi, 2004, 161).

Her physical appearance socially read as a signifier of spatial and temporal distance from northern Italy or proximity to the Arab, Indian, or other worlds, Viarengo's experiences resonate with Frantz Fanon's mid-20th century descriptions of being “black in relation to the white man” in Europe. Fanon describes trying to meet the white man as a man, but instead encountering a consciousness of his body as a negation, and developing what he refers to as a “third person consciousness.” He narrates being woven by the white man out of “a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” about what blackness means to white Europeans, and this throws him into a feeling of imprisoning dislocation by taking him far off from his own presence (110-11). One of the central problems Fanon narrates is that of a discontinuity between his self-conception as a man who had been formed, reared and educated in Martinique to be a kind of black Frenchman and finding himself socially invisible

in France where he is denoted an essential outsider, eternally belonging to a territory elsewhere in space and time. Fanon struggles against the experience of being “over-determined from without” and unable to exist apart from his external appearance in French society where as he writes, “I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. The people in the theater are watching me, examining me, waiting for me. A Negro groom is going to appear. My heart makes my head swim.” Yet he refuses to accept this “amputation.” (140) In her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Abandoned Baobab*, Ken Bugul describes a similar yet distinctive experience of a Senegalese woman schooled in European history, literature, and culture who travels to Europe to unite with her ancestors, “The Gauls.” In Belgium she finds instead that she is expected to perform a blackness with no resemblance to the subjectivity she developed while learning to identify herself not via opposition and hierarchical relatedness to Europeanness, but rather through interrelatedness, and participation as an African-European (Bugul, 2008). In Europe, Bugul’s character lives a sort of triple consciousness of herself as a Senegalese, French, and black.

A common link in the experiences of Viarengo, Fanon, and Bugul is that all were expected to internalize a binary, Manichean racial gaze of themselves as black and erase or marginalize the culturally African dimensions of their subjectivities. It was taken for granted in the Western episteme that the only power Africanness could hold would be through expressions of the exotic, and not quite human. Even Africans were expected to perceive African histories through an orientalist lens, recognizing in these instances Italian, French, and Belgian cultures and economies while accepting an absence of reciprocal recognition. In post-Enlightenment European thought, reciprocity and recognition are considered key features of human relationships, yet they are not routinely thought to include mutuality between people of African descent and European purveyors of knowledge. As in Fanon’s rethinking via race of Hegel’s theory of the slave-master dialectic, there cannot in the colonial situation (and in modified form post-colonial) be any genuine reciprocity of mutual recognition because colonizers don’t respect the others’s culture, or in metaphorical terms the master does not recognize the slave as human (Gibson, 2003; see Lucht, 2012).

In Fanon’s analysis of the lived experience of blackness in relation to a white racial gaze, race operates in the West not just as a category of exclusion, but as a kind of knowledge and power that produces subjectivities (Frankenberg, 1993; Ferreira da Silva, 2007; Smith, 2013). The Western subject is aware of itself *because* it can exercise power over others and others cannot exercise power over it. However, since it’s not possible to employ power without being affected by others, the Western subject is anxious. He addresses this anxiety by separating himself from what Andrea Smith drawing on Denise Ferreira da Silva describes as affectable others:

In essence, the western subject knows itself because of 1) its apparent ability to exercise power over others; and 2) the inability of others to

exercise power over it. The “others” meanwhile, are *affected* by the power of the Western subject...but they cannot *effect* power themselves. The anxiety with which the western subject struggles is that the western subject is in fact not self-determining. After all, nobody is actually able to exercise power without being affected by others. Consequently, the manner in which the Western subject addresses this anxiety is to separate itself from conditions of “affectability” by separating from affectable others. This separation is fundamentally a racial one- both spatially and temporally. That is, the western subject is spatially located in the West in relationship to the “affectable” Third World others. It is also temporally located in modernity in relationship to “primitive” others who are never able to enter modernity. The western subject is a universal subject that determines itself without being determined by others: the racialized subject is particular, but aspires to be universal and self-determining.²

What Smith suggests is that the post-enlightenment subject is in a sense compelled to adopt an epistemology that understands the self as constituted over and against other selves, resting ultimately on the oppression of others (Smith, 2013). However, this worldview is regularly contradicted in lived experiences and situated practices that contest and rework forms of cultural domination and express far more ambiguous, relational, and fluid subjectivities. Gloria Anzaldúa explores this alternative understanding and framing of experience through the concept of ‘border culture,’ including a social consciousness that rejects binarist thinking and insular definitions of social life, recognizing and accepting the relationality of being (Anzaldúa, 2012). For people like Maria Viarengo, we might describe the complex experience interconnectedness across space and time as the experience of the there-being-here and the here-being-there. As Jackie Brown suggests in her exploration of blackness in Europe, a lived open ended connection between places, parts or counterparts represent the collective trajectories of people of African descent in the colonial and post-colonial politics of race (Brown, 2009; also see Walcott, 2003).

In Italy, and specifically Northern Italy where over the past two decades a racialized geographical discourse of local and absolutist identity has struggled for social control, people of what has been referred to as ‘black Europe’ or ‘Afro Europe’ are crafting themselves as culturally fluent (Carter, 2013) against considerable pressures to remain in the shadows (see Orton and Parati, 2007). Although as Donald Carter suggests, “The basic problem of considering what it means to be a problem, in Du Bois’ phrase, remains a constant and refracts the lived experience of people bound both by social invisibility and a hyper-visible status as newcomers,” an emergent black Italia is creating a new version of Italianness (Carter, 2010). Even first generation Africans like Viarengo who

² Smith, p. 265.

relocated to Italy some twenty to forty years ago carried with their luggage especially from urban Africa profound and mobile traces of interweaved Wolof and French, Oromo, Piedmontese and Italian, Somali and Roman Italian and other complex, multiple subjectivities forged through the relationality of African and European places. These first generation Africans in Italy weave African-Italo identities and relational places in Turin that are neither discrete nor oppositional, but rather porous, pointing globally outward as well as inward in multiple directions. Building on Doreen Massey's pathbreaking argument that social relations at numerous spatial scales instantiate places and subjectivities, I am suggesting here that post-colonial borders are spatial imaginaries concealing lived experiences of relationality and interconnection (Massey, 1993).

I use what I call relational place as a concept that enables examination of the meaning of place in the lived experiences of African-Italos as indexed by the everyday materiality of bodies in relation to racial discourses and practices, and the profound interweavings of Africa and Europe through space and time. Relationality of place operates along a number of spatial scales, including the state through which a constellation of influences and exchanges historically generated during the colonial period are ever-present in ongoing postcolonial cultural interchanges and interdependencies, each with their own place specific forms and meanings. Relational place is also engendered by everyday experiences of racialization in Italy, the power to apply a state of invisibility to certain categories of persons and the conferring of a kind of sub-personhood, a devaluation of the person seen as superfluous. Colonial and ongoing histories and experiences of being "overdetermined from without" in Italy further encourage some to live fluidly, their multi-textured subjectivities transcending geographical boundaries as well as ostensibly contradictory discursive terrains.

Viarengo is from a former Italian colony, while many others living in Italy today spent their youth in diverse parts of Africa colonized by other European nations. These postcolonial Africans share diverse yet overlapping cultural histories of colonization and racialization. Stuart Hall has argued that the subjectivity of such social agents is always in the process of production via material and discursive struggles over belonging in relation to racialized national boundaries instantiated in everyday practices that seek to diminish their histories and participation in European modernity (Hall, 2003). Hall suggests that while African diasporic peoples are united by shared histories of powerlessness and the pursuit of freedom and or inclusion, the highly diverse African or Black Diaspora always also speak *from somewhere*, from material and discursive places and positions (Hall, 1991, 2003; see Brown, 2005). So that while Maria Abbebu Viarengo struggles to be recognized in Turin as Italian and Oromo and is linked transnationally with African and diasporic places, she also very importantly awakens each morning and falls asleep every night in Turin, so her subjectivity is generated distinctly through her daily practices there. African-Italo subjectivities

are crafted in relation to their situated practices in Turin, a place with its own peculiar cultural-political contours and relationship to the rest of Italy.

Among people from former European colonies, the meanings of place and belonging are frequently fraught, connected with interlocking and conflictual histories and collective identities dominated or at least strongly influenced by and continually bound together with European political and cultural institutions and modern European racialized formations (Winant, 1994). This is not to suggest that there has not been a great deal of resistance and synthesis or that African political and cultural institutions were erased; on the contrary, African cosmologies and practices have been reproduced within colonial ruptures and forms of displacement in what Stuart Hall, borrowing Leopold Senghor and Aimee Cesaire's metaphor describes as a continuous "Présence Africaine" that is a source of inspiration, agency, and creation. Yet there is also always in African Diasporic formations a "Presence Européenne," a troubling aspect of identity because the European presence has been so overwhelming, introducing the issue of power by imposing, excluding, forcing, and appropriating. Hall cautions that movements among former colonized that locate the *Présence Européenne* as external or separating what it represents from their cultural identities rooted in Africa are problematic, for the many dimensions of the European influence are irreversible and its presence continuous (Hall, 2003).

As Philomena Essed asserts, there has been a backlash against race studies since the unification of Europe in the early 1990s, and anti-racist practices have been widely suppressed and ridiculed on both popular and academic fronts (Essed, 2009). At the same time there has also been a tremendous rebirth and emphasis on individual and collective agency and the celebration of differences, including the rediscovery of cultural histories and the reassertion of distinctive social landscapes. While it is clearly important to attend to the various and complex ways that social actors resist the influences of the state, neoliberal capitalism and other forms of hegemony and to avoid simplistic top down approaches, it is also true that while agency is alive, it is not "simple and unfettered" (Wilson, 2013). Human agents blunt and rework oppressive influences, but they also incorporate, appropriate and synthesize the dominant influences they experience as pleasurable or believe may satisfy their curiosities and desires. I am suggesting an analytical approach that attends both to the persistence of racial formations and attendant racialized national and diffuse boundaries social actors produce in everyday practices, and the ways social actors may rework hegemonic racial orderings and borderings (see Van Houtum, 2013) through their own lived experiences. People like Viarengo and others who may be invisible in Italy because they signify a territory (Africa) that exists discursively outside and in hierarchical opposition to Europe, in contrast embody in their everyday material and symbolic practices both Africa and Europe

relationally instead of hierarchically.³ This may apply not only to African-Italos, but to others whose lives have been touched to various degrees by European colonization (see Gilroy, 1991; Hesse, 1993; Brown, 2005; Keaton, 2006; Carter, 2010; Hine et al., 2010; Andall and Duncan, 2005, 2010).

That links between identity and place have become complex in a world of increasing and routine mobility and displacement is not a new area of theoretical inquiry. However, since the first burst of path breaking reflections on the topic in the early 1990s (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Clifford, 1988, Appadurai 1990; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Basch and Glickschiller, et. al, 1994; Malkki, 1992), much of it suggesting that displaced social actors form multiple attachments to geographically distant places through daily experiences, memories and transnational communications, there has been a tendency to gloss the operation of race in the West as a pivotal center of knowledge and power that produces subjectivities and the social historical structures to which they are linked (see Marable, 2008; Merrill, 2011). What are the experiences of place among migrants and refugees for whom being seen as African means being perceived as racially different and 'out of place' or as what Nirmal Puwar calls, "space invaders"? (Puwar, 2004). Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy offered early and noteworthy responses by focusing on how people from the Caribbean and African countries drew together various dimensions of their identities as participants in distinction from monolithic and absolutist conceptions of British identity as white, male, and upper class. Where racialized constructions of place have been addressed, there has been a tendency to conceive of these problems not from the vantage point of those who experience racialization directly in their everyday lives, but in generic terms around categories of difference conceived broadly as 'intolerance,' 'xenophobia,' or 'cultural racism' toward immigrants in general whom local populations perceive as threatening to their ways of life (Taguieff, 1990; Miles, 1993; Stolke, 1995)⁴. As important as these studies are, they have fostered approaches that tend to minimize the continuing gravity of racialized ontologies, the specific contingencies as well as opportunities of place for postcolonial people of African descent.

³ By exploring the discursive and regulative trends that are driving the African-Italian binary, I do not by any means intend to suggest that the underlying economic and political forces are not crucial in maintaining this border culture. Indeed, I have written elsewhere about the racialization of Africa as a surplus population, which currently supports the erosion of labor protections and promotes the hyper-exploitation of workers (Merrill, 2011).

⁴ In geography discussions that engage materiality and race have recently emerged (eg, Arun Saldhana, 2007; Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Slocum, 2008). This is important work that however seems to be motivated by a sort of red herring: the claim by some scholars in the 1990s that 'race' is socially constructed and therefore does not really exist. Characterizing the critical race scholarship as wholly focused on representation, the politically motivated ideology of color blindness is sidestepped (e.g, Twine and Bradley, 2013). This work is compelling, yet the leading scholarship is generally not addressed to experiences of people of African descent in Europe or the United States, and there has been an argument about situated, embodied practices in geography for some time which does in fact examine how material practices are implicated in relations of power and privilege without reducing the important discursive and representational dimensions of materiality. At the end of the day, this literature doesn't seem to go much beyond earlier social theoretical discussions of place and identity that I refer to above.

The flip side of an avoidance of the enduring significance of race to subject formation is apparent in studies that tend to conceive the lives of people in the African Diaspora as if they were operating in self contained social worlds or in-between spaces relatively autonomous from wide social, cultural, and political processes (cf. Gregory, 1999; Brown, 2005). Even the most influential work of African Diasporic studies over the past two decades, arguably Gilroy's seminal work, *The Black Atlantic* in which he clearly problematizes common struggles across African Diasporic spaces and places in the North Atlantic, tends to reify diasporic space (Brown, 2010). While the rediscovery and assertion of the significance of African histories, contributions of Africa and the African Diaspora to the contemporary world are extremely important, there is as Jacqueline Nassy Brown has pointed out, some danger in conceiving of diasporas as places with symbolic if not materially embodied boundaries. As Brown argues, racialized identities are produced through experiences in specific places (Brown, 2005).

I am making a number of analytical arguments about the study of place in urban Europe. First, in African diasporic movements what Manning Marable described as a system of global racial apartheid plays an important role in the formation of identities in relation to place. But as racialization is no more uniform nor static than the subjects whose lives are affected by it, the way that race intersects with place and identity will differ across space and time. I am also suggesting that when place is conceived ontologically from the vantage point of black life worlds, it is often relational and contingent instead of oppositional and discrete. This is particularly apparent among post-colonial African-Italos for whom daily life references multiple locations in Africa, Europe, and other parts of the world. One must attend to the application of knowledge, needs, and desires acquired in places colonized by Europe, interchanges between individuals, and practices through which knowledge of and participation in local place is generated. I am suggesting that postcolonial borders are imagined discursively as fixed by persistent racial hierarchies through which, as Puwar has pointed out, certain bodies are tacitly designated as space invaders and that this highlights the boundaries of who can pass as the universal human and who is perceived to be located outside the human (Puwar, 2004). I am also suggesting a conception of place as in practice relational, where through historical and current constellations of knowledge and experience the many local worlds of Africa and Europe are deeply intertwined and unbounded. Black experiences are situated in places that are products of past and ongoing interconnected power relations and cultural exchanges (Pred, 1990, 2000; Keaton, 2006; Brown, 2005; Ifekwunigwe, 1999; Carter, 1997; Twine, 2011; Lipsitz, 2011).

There is currently a heightened anxiety over the meaning and identity of place in contemporary Europe where a moral landscape is produced via a geopolitical and biopolitical border between Africa and Europe, or what Van Houtum describes as a process of 'B/ordering and othering,' This is a diffuse and omnipresent border that has generated powerful discourses often embodied in

practices among African-Italos and Italians. In Turin there is a political effort to define place as closed, fixed, and relatively culturally homogenous, which I will discuss below. However, African-Italos produce new subjectivities and in the process tacitly or deliberately stake out territory and redraw boundaries. In spite of the effort to reassert colonial like, oppositional borders between Africa and Europe (Van Houtum, 2013), these African-Italos and their descendents are as Stuart Hall put it, “taking back the Empire” as they assert in various ways their presences in the territories of former European colonial powers. They are part of a renewed cycle of African Diasporic formation in which increased flows of migrants and displaced peoples are forced to move from war or in search of work, in what Achille Mbembe described as an “unprecedented revival of the imaginaries of long distance” (Mbembe, 2011, 6). Scholars of Africana Studies have begun to note that the cultural fabric of Europe is being transformed as first and second generations of Africans challenge monolithic, Eurocentric definitions of belonging, racialized logics, and exclusionary practices (Gilroy, 1991; Hall, 1991; Keaton, 2006; Brown, 2005; Carter, 2010). Their experiences in Europe are different from those of other immigrant populations whose presence may also be contested. As Barnor Hesse suggested in a seminal volume on place and identity politics edited by Keith and Pile, “Immigration is distinctive for blacks whose settlement in Europe is always enmeshed in racial antagonisms that affirm ambivalences and equivocations in the conditions for settling” (Hesse, 1993). Settlement is not a discrete moment for these newly arrived Africans whose countries of origin have been profoundly connected with Europe. Overturning simple teleologies, they are claiming place in a Europe whose history is theirs, and participating in the making of new histories.

There are few studies of African diasporic experiences in relation to place and identity, especially in the new cycle of African diaspora formation in Europe. And because the racially essentializing logics of Western Modernity continue “to project a nightmarish shadow over the formations of Black cultural and political identities” (Hesse, 1993, 166), critical scholarship on the black diaspora must by necessity engage with issues of power, race and racial inequality. My discussion brings the separate geographical literature on place and critical race scholarship focused on the African Diaspora into dialogue by conceiving of place through the prism of race and the lived experiences and cultural identities of people whose lives in Europe are connected with Africa. Exploring contemporary meanings of place and belonging from the vantage point of Black experiences¹ may offer insights into the intersections of place and race. Exploring the production of place from the perspective of racialized subjects suggests that in contra-distinction to political and popular classifications, the national, ethnic, and even racial borders between Africa and Europe are indeed relational. They are porous, overlapping, and ambiguous. Conceiving them through such a perspective can only generate greater understanding of identity in the rapidly shifting and complex landscape of global human relations and configurations.

In what follows I explore briefly the experiences, negotiations, and meanings of place and belonging among diverse first generation of Africans in Turin with whom I have done extensive ethnographic research for two decades (e.g., Merrill, 2006, 2011). Since 1990, I have interviewed and observed hundreds of people of African descent living in Turin from a variety of countries including Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Rwanda, Congo, Cameroon, Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal, Cape Verde, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. In the early years and subsequent visits I developed social networks and built relationships with informants that enabled me to carry out this research. From 1990-1, I was involved in a social and labor study of migrants conducted by I.R.E.S., Piemonte in 1990-1, which enabled me to establish many trusting relationships. At this time it was also relatively easy for me to approach Africans when I encountered them in various public sites and meetings. In later visits when I conducted research on the inter-ethnic women's center, Alma Mater, I built met new informants and have continued to do this during more recent visits (Merrill, 2006). I conduct intensive participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, and scour newspapers for articles that resonate with reports from my informants. My ethnographic research is informed by anthropological theory highly inflected by critical geographical, feminist, and critical race theories. My informants are by no means an homogenous group of people, however, the majority have lived in Italy for upwards of twenty years and are between the ages of 35 and 60. They represent a generation of Africans whose early lives were deeply influenced by Italian, French, or British colonialism, who learned to speak a European language through formal education and spoke one or more African languages with family and friends. My informants are from families with some measure of material means whose parents may or may not have been formally educated. Many are from families with relatively high social status based on culturally specific forms of social capital in their countries of origin. Some are of a privileged group of Africans who traveled to Europe to attend a university, while others were forced by economic necessity to abandon their schooling while in high school or college in their countries of origin. Some of my informants are Muslim, some Catholic, a few are Protestant, and many are secular. Some are women with children married to Italian professionals, others are women or men married to a compatriot with and without children living in Italy or in Africa, and some are single mothers who have never had stable, long-term formal sector employment Italy. A number are social, political activists, working with and for African migrant populations in Turin. Those who are activists tend to be financially secure, yet they share with those who struggle to survive materially the experience of being 'overdetermined from without' and the experience of a sort of triple consciousness of oneself as African (in various ways), black, and Italian although not always with the same emphasis. The Italianness that these African-Italos have developed is in some ways distinctively Turinese.

I begin by discussing the transformation of Turin's political culture and situated practices in relationship to African-Italian belonging and a reformulated

racialization of place over the past two decades. I discuss the rise of nativism, and the resonance of Italian colonialism with current images, practices, and configurations. I then examine the lived experiences of subjectivity and place among first generation African-Italians in Turin and suggest that their experience of being-in-the-world can best be described as being in relational places that syncretically link Africa and Europe.

Racialized Space

I've been working in Turin since 1990 when the first wave of the political battles over immigration crested, and have since returned for shorter field work visits every two or three years (see Merrill, 2006). During these two decades I have heard and observed people of African origin struggling to carve for themselves and others places of dignity and inclusion in Turin. The initial period was marked by dramatic vulnerability when some of the most common problems included an absence of residence papers, repeated rejection for jobs they were qualified to do, and the payment of exorbitant rent for substandard housing. During later visits I sometimes caught them breathing sighs of relief as they or members of their families found work after having been unemployed for many months, their cooperatives were awarded grants from the municipal, regional governments or the European Union for intercultural initiatives, residency permits were renewed, or they'd managed to find a landlord to rent them a reasonable apartment. At other crossroads I found them disquieted, frustrated, describing family members dying in African conflicts while the Italian and other European governments did nothing to help or contributed to the conflicts, losing jobs or not receiving wages from an employer, not making enough money to cover rent, experiencing *and* being blamed for crime, losing work to competition from Eastern Europeans, or not being heard by anyone with authority in the Italian government, trade unions, or political parties. But until the summer of 2010, I had never sensed from my African and Italian informants such a converging and encompassing sense of despair and desperation. The "crisis" or crisis of unemployment, precariousness of work and vulnerability to job loss, rising costs of living and lowered salaries, high taxes, and cut backs to or erasure of government entitlements were a constant refrain among my Italian informants. Almost all of my African informants were either unemployed or working part time with temporary and very low paying contracts, usually in the informal economic sector. Some talked about leaving Turin.

These stories were also instantiated in the practice and experiences of place, what the late Allan Pred referred to as the 'situated practices' of everyday life (Pred, 1990, 2000) that intersect with some very dramatic transformations in Turin's political culture. Beginning in the early twentieth century Turin's workerist culture emerged along with an active trade union movement that developed in response to the rapid expansion of the Fiat auto industry and its many subsidiaries. For several decades, this workerist culture has been struggling for air in the face of the crushing forces of technological management, deindustrialization, and global neoliberal policies. Labor historian, Francesco Ciafaloni characterized what was

happening in Turin as “I think the worst situation in two hundred and fifty years,” typified by the “rovesciamento” or capsizing of the partnership between trade unions and government that had sought to represent and protect workers from exploitation. By 2010, most of the trade union leadership had become professionalized, following middle class habits and ways of life, modeling themselves after managers of large firms or heads of offices in public administration and using their positions as stepping stones for positions of greater authority, for instance in politics (Ciafaloni, 2011). These leaders had bargained away almost fifty years of labor gains and agreements. Worker traditions were so degraded and labor so debased that there was little if any difference by 2010 between the working conditions for those with trade union representation, and those working in “lavoro nero” or the informal economy where the most egregious forms of exploitation have been well documented (Ciafaloni, 2011). And perhaps the worst part of all of this, according to many of my Italian informants, was the loss of culture, which as one complained bitterly, “Once you kill a culture, you can’t revive it.” There was an overwhelming sense that the world had forever changed, but not for the better. Vanishing were the shared desires for equality, trust in leadership, and general regard and responsibility for each other, including those who owned little or nothing. Perhaps most disconcerting was the fading away of collective consciousness, political and social participation, and the rise of political apathy especially among youth who either did not vote or supported political parties that promoted highly localist and binary ‘us vs them’ ideologies in defense only of the rights of those who appeared to be Italian, and against ‘foreigners.’

Turin has long assumed a paradoxical culture, focused internally on its closely-knit social and political networks as well as its outward connections to a world of workers. (Bagnasco, 1986, 1990; Belligni et al., 2008). That is why it is somewhat puzzling that that the Northern League, a party with a divisive, tightly communitarian and anti-immigrant ideology promoting images of a territory under threat of invasion and pollution by people that follow inferior ethno-cultural beliefs and practices recently won the regional elections in Piedmont.⁵ The Italian Communist party advanced an inclusive ideology that incorporated many Catholics and internal migrants from agricultural zones in the South and Veneto. Gramsci, founder of the party, was from Sardinia. An industrial city, home of the company that was one of the principal engines of Italian economic expansion but also home of the Royal House of Savoy, the city was until recently both provincial and expansive. And on the surface, this inclusive, universalist texture has been nurtured

⁵ The 2010 local and regional elections saw a surge in support for the anti-immigrant right. 13% of the national vote went to the Northern League. Bossi’s party won governorship of Piedmont and the Veneto, and expanded into areas outside its Po valley homeland, into ‘red’ Emilia Romagna where it won 14% of the vote. The League may not be as overtly racist as other European extremist parties such as the National Front in neighboring France, but its policies include turning back would-be immigrants at sea (as against the Geneva Convention), and setting up centers for identification and expulsion- policies that have already been implemented.

over the past two decades as municipal and regional governments have embraced economic and cultural union with Europe and supported the construction of several multicultural sites such as the Alma Terra, the Gate, the Centro Interculturale and negotiations for the construction of the second mosque in Italy (the other is in Rome).

A noteworthy development is that every warm summer night of the week until the wee hours of the morning with the exception of Sunday, one can observe bars and restaurants with tables stretched on sidewalks and in piazzas packed with young Italians. The Italian press refers to these youth soirees as “La Movida,” actually a Spanish term for the end of the Black Satanic Mills of industry and the culture of tourism and consumerism. Yet as tempting as it is to characterize this in uplifting terms as evidence of globalization and expanded wealth in Turin, many of these consuming youth are unemployed⁶. This spectacle of contented consumerism and sociality conceals the ugly underbelly of growing poverty, unemployment, poor working conditions, very low birth rates, intolerance and anti-Islamic, anti-black racism that the non-analyst may not see (Saraceno, 2000; Aburra, 2012; Merrill, 2006; Carter, 2010). Turin of Piedmont, like much of Northern Italy and other parts of Europe is entangled in a scramble to contain any transformation within the logic of its own inwardly directed and spatially inscribed notions of ontologically pure, traditional and authentic ways of being.

As Italy seeks to grapple with its new identity as part of the European Union and as a country of immigration, some effort has been made by local governments and NGOs to foster acceptance of cultural differences. But in general the country has relapsed into regionalism, localism or nationalism, while multicultural society has been regarded with suspicion (Di Maio, 2009). The International Labour Organization (ILO) has suggested that in the past two decades in Italy there has been a sort of ‘involution’ in terms of anti-racism and egalitarian norms (ILO, 2000). The Italian zeitgeist has changed, as a significant portion of the population dismisses anti-racist norms. Populist rhetoric, frequently based on old prejudices and stereotypes has returned to characterize public debates. Many no longer believe there is any need to be hospitable to those who may appear different from people perceived to be Italians (Volpato et al., 2010)⁷. These attitudes are promoted by

⁶ There falling employment among Y youth employment in Piedmont has been falling over the past decade. The age group with the most intense decline in population is between 15-24 years of age. See Progetto Giovani, Ires Piemonte, <http://www.ires.piemonte.it/osservatori/192-cantiere-progetto-giovani.html>.

⁷ Whiteness in Italian society is a problematic and understudied topic. In relation to Western and Northern Europe, Italians have not been viewed as truly ‘white’ but we might say rather as ‘almost white’. However, within Italy itself there is considerable tension around the classification of Southern Italy by Northerners as primitive, backward for which Africa was the governing metaphor until the arrival of African migrants in large numbers beginning at the end of the 1980s. In a trenchant critique and analysis, Joseph Pugliese argues that whiteness is constitutive of hegemonic Italian identity and the history of anti-southern discrimination and exploitation can be compared with the treatment of recent immigrants from the Global South. Pugliese describes what he refers to as a “tactical blackening” of Italy by Neopolitan youth in the face of a “virulent and violent caucacentrism” (Pugliese, 2008, 2).

politicians currently in power, embodied in the remarks by the Italian Foreign Minister and member of the European Parliament, Mario Borghezio, who following the July 2011 tragedies in Norway said that the anti-multicultural positions of the perpetrator of the mass murders, Breivik, “Could certainly be agreed with.” Borghezio said that the Oslo killings were, “The fault of multiracial society,” which he described as “disgusting.” (NYT July 28, 2011)⁸. Turning their back on complexity, Borghezio’s party, the Northern League (la Lega), advances the social imaginary of a pure and culturally homogenous territory under attack by centralized government as well as ethnic and cultural pluralism.

The Northern League has gained considerable influence over dominant political narratives since the early 1990s, especially in the North. That this party found fertile ground in Piedmont, Veneto and other northern regions may be explained by feelings of rupture and displacement triggered by major political and economic transformations over the past several decades. Italy’s receptiveness to populist arguments may also be explained by its unique localist and regionalist cultures, each with its own peculiar dialects, artistic expressions, folk customs, and cuisines now perceived to be threatened by European Union membership and other aspects of hypercapitalism (Watts and Pred, 1992). The Northern League’s populism is rooted in profound belief in the value of belonging to a group or culture as a family, something that Douglas Holmes has described as ‘integralism’ (Holmes, 2000). This subsumes the belief that the distinctive values of different cultures and societies are fundamentally incommensurate. The Northern League has painted itself as a party that is protecting Northern culture and ways of life from attack and effacement by Rome, also seen to syphon off Northern economic gains for redistribution in the South. The European Union has in a sense provided an opportunity for such regional claims by recognizing their validity.

As Tim Creswell has pointed out, in the creation of place the definition of what lays ‘outside’ plays a critical role in defining what is ‘inside’ (Creswell, 2004). The Lega, which has achieved growing influence, re-defines Northern Italy as a culturally and territorially distinct site where ‘out of place’ foreigners are threatening the purity of local identity. People from Northern and Subsaharan Africa in particular are perceived as belonging elsewhere, in the culturally-geographically distant and anachronistic spaces of their origins, to the ‘South of the South’ (Huyseeune, 2006). This is part of an old, colorist spatial imaginary of Southern Italy as a distinct world in a manner contiguous with Africa (Merrill, 2006). The Lega sees the northern River Po basin of an imagined Padania as

⁸ Another telling example comes from the Italian Prime Minister himself. When Sylvio Berlusconi remarked that Barack Obama was “Young, handsome and even has a good tan” the conventional wisdom in Italy seemed to be that Berlusconi was just being Berlusconi. But as Jeff Israely suggested, “That’s telling in itself. In many ways, mainstream Italian society is several generations behind the rest of the West when it comes to race. In supposedly polite company, one can still hear the word, Negro, (pronounced neh-grow) which essentially translates to the N word.” He added that Northern Italians joke that dark-skinned Southerners are “Moroccans” (Time World, Oct . 1, 2002).

belonging to a Celtic-Germanic culture and European Italy as opposed to the Greek-Latin culture of African Italy, i.e. the Mezzogiorno and beyond (Cachafeiro, 2002; see also Pugliese, 2008). The party has responded to the recent transformations in the Italian economy by self-consciously inventing a newly imagined community and manipulating territorial imagery to advance a reified sense of cultural and economic differentiation. This ethnic absolutist discourse with a strong sense of Insider or 'Us' identity has gained growing traction in replacing the Left/Right and class oppositions that had dominated Italian politics until the early 1990s (Agnew and Brusa, 1999). The Lega gained a foothold in the early 1990s in the wake of several seismic transformations, including political collapse of the parties that had for decades been seen to defend industrial workers, the erosion of racialized communitarian ways of life and the tertiarization of the economy as against what was seen as the corruption of the state and its Southern Italian public sector representatives. Building on integralist practices of belonging, the party also endorses and promotes widespread prejudices against 'coloured immigrants' (Cento Bull, 1996, 179). Their exclusivist discourse is currently aimed particularly toward 'Arabs' and people as distinctive phenotypically as some Southern Italians whom Umberto Bossi, leader of the Lega depicts as the least assimilable among foreigners or people perceived as the most culturally distant from the host population (Cento Bull 1996)⁹.

Scholars have interpreted political representations of a unified Italian identity (in this case Northern Italian) and the cultural borders between Italy and Africa as fabricated, contradictory, and fleeting. Yet the Lega's electoral triumphs and deepening influence on political narratives and culture are hard to dispute. Moreover, the exclusionary discourses and images of Africans and Arabs used to re-invent Italian identities currently circulating in the media did not appear out of an historical vacuum. The fascist regime delegitimized Africans and Jews as part of its campaign to create national unity, introducing Italians to anti-semitism and recirculating old narratives that European culture had employed to dehumanize Africans for centuries. And today, Lega narratives and posters bear striking resemblance to those that circulated during Fascism. The targets have changed; the strategies have remained the same (Volpato, et al., 2010). Thus, many Italians

⁹ The Northern League was initially a regionalist part that created an imaginary of its own pseudo northern Italian culture based on social and economic differences from an underdeveloped Southern Italy, symbol of a corrupt and parasitic state. Yet one needs to realize that the discourses of race and racialized science in Italy were formulated around distinctions between Northern and Southern Italians, the latter allegedly born with atavistic 'primitive' traits found among African 'savages.' This racial discourse was indeed put forward in Turin, where Cesare Lombroso was a Professor of Psychiatry and Criminal Anthropology and where he wrote his *L'Uomo delinquente*, postulating that Southern Italians and Africans were genetically predisposed to criminality. One of Umberto Bossi's slogans is, "Africa begins at Rome" (Agnew and Brusa, 1999). The Lega sees its mythical Padania as a culturally monolithic territory especially threatened by the cultural differences long associated in Northern Italy with the South - which, again, includes Africa. The party uses criminalizing images and discourses about Africans, Muslims and other newcomers to promote its parochialist fixation on the purity of Northern cultural space. Its political posters supply telling examples of an exclusivist politics (Huyseune, Portelli, Cento-Bull; Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg et al. 2005).

today respond to the growing presence of Africans and other migrants through the optics of old ideas embodied materially in daily practices (Merrill 2004; 2006). Indeed, the fact that there has been an ongoing effort to suppress from Italian collective memory and consciousness any negative features of the colonial experience and especially the crimes perpetrated in the African colonies explains in part the current redirection of old ideas and attitudes toward immigrants (Carter, 2010).

Italian colonial amnesia and the related myth that Italian colonialism was benign are deeply embedded in popular consciousness in spite of a recent flourish of excellent critical historiography (Ben-Ghiat and Fuller, 2008; Palumbo, 2003).¹⁰ There is widespread popular resistance to acknowledging and even wishing to know about Italy's colonial past, so it lurks in the shadow, contributing to a prolonged 'moment of danger' as it guides current perceptions and practices (Labanca 2005; see Pred 1995, 2000, 2005). The legacy of Italian colonialism includes some atrocious acts of containment and extermination as well as racial segregation and preoccupation with hierarchy and differentiation between Italians and colonial subjects (cf. Ben-Ghiat and Fuller, 2005; Barrera, 2003; Andall and Duncan, 2005). Moreover, as Italy expanded into Africa it projected an image of a distinct national identity in opposition to black people, marked as other (Ponzanesi, 2004). Such patterns of spatial differentiation and distinction do more than linger in the Italian collective unconscious; they permeate current perceptions *and* practices and are reinforced through a variety of legislative and institutional mechanisms (Merrill, 2006, 2011). One Lega official recently proposed washing down the buses that 'blacks' had ridden and creating segregated compartments. According to my informants as well as those of Jacqueline Andall, Italians are most hostile to people with dark skin and perceived to be from Africa (including Egypt) whom they perceive as belonging to "unacceptable" immigrant groups (Andall, 2005). African-Italos frequently experience microaggressions in their daily interactions in Turin, acts that project social borders suggesting their illegitimacy and invisibility in relation to 'pure' Italians.

The Lega's expanding influence on and resonance with popular sentiment regarding the exclusive place of Northern Italy in modern racial hierarchies, which Pugliese explains as a "virulent and violent caucacentrism" seems to now permeate quotidian practices in Turin (Pugliese, 2008). This resonance, I might add, is also inspired by an Italian longing for a place in the neoliberal world order from which Italians have in the past felt excluded or as second class Europeans. As neoliberal politics and technocratic governance have struggled for hegemony, over the past

¹⁰ There is a growing literature that grapples with the myths and realities of Italian colonialism, beginning with Angelo Del Boca's seminal works, *Gli Italiani in Africa orientale: Nostalgia delle colonie* (1984), and *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani Miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte* (1988). Also see work by Nicola Labanca, eg., *Storia dell'Italia coloniale* (2000). In English, see the collections by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller's *Italian Colonialism* (2006) and Patricia Palumbo's *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (2003).

decade especially there has been an effort to visibly remove identifiable foreigners from central locations to the shadows of Italian neighborhoods.

In the 1990s the city appeared to have been becoming culturally diverse, as one would frequently travel or shop adjacent to people of color, some of them culturally identifiable because wearing colorful African print skirts or dresses, white robes, taqiya (caps), and headscarves. Once highly visible in the city and particularly in the residential areas around the Porta Nuovo train station, shops in the San Salvario neighborhood, on the streets in the retail arcades along Via Po, and in the Sunday “balon” where there was an multiethnic market in Piazza della Repubblica, people of African descent are now much less frequently seen in central places. They travel and live in the city, but remain less visible in their flats and workplaces or the black spaces of occupied buildings, detention centers, and homeless shelters (Merrill, 2013). Informants report the heightened and more frequently chilly reception, the microaggressions they may experience regularly in the course of daily activities. Donald Carter describes a collective sadness among African migrants in Turin, both about the dilution of their own languages and cultural practices as their children are raised in Italy and become Italian and from a sense that they are still frequently just Africans or “Neri” (blacks), or some other euphemism denoting their outsider status. Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence that in some quarters in particular such as San Salvario, and the more peripheral neighborhoods of Barriera di Milano, and Porta Palazzo, people of African descent are part of the fabric of everyday life, “As quarters settle with the everyday coming and going of newcomers their presence seems as constant as the traffic in large cities and small villages” (Carter, 2013).

Place politics can be exclusionary and reactionary where one group such as the Northern League seeks to define itself with a monolithic, territorial sense of belonging as against perceived outsiders (Keith and Pile, 1993; Creswell, 2004; Adams et al., 2001; Puwar, 2004). Yet as Doreen Massey suggested, from an analytical perspective places can be conceived as products of interconnecting flows and routes between people, ideas, and things (Massey, 1993). Instead of conceiving of Europe as a distinct, geographically bounded discursive place, I think it is crucial to re-imagine its cartography through the ontology of people in the African Diaspora with relational corridors to and from multiple parts of Africa, part of a single social formations produced through the continuing legacies of the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, cultural exchange, capitalist expansion, and human movement. The life experiences of many people born in Africa and living in Italy are far from simply and singularly ‘African’ any more than they are simply and only ‘Italian.’ For many, Italy and Africa constitute overlapping worlds, or trans-syncretic, relational places. As Achille Mbembe has suggested, ‘African identities’ are not monolithic, they are multiple, straddling several different cultural, local, and regional identities (Mbembe, 2001). In Heideggerian terms, the being-in-the-world of these African-Euros is a polymorphic being, a being-in-relational places. This being in the world has to be grasped as simultaneously African and European.

African-Italo multiple subject positions contest and displace the Lega's monocultural perspectives, suggesting porous and unbounded, relational ways of belonging and participating in contemporary social landscapes.

Remapping Borders

In her pathbreaking study of race, identity, and the French educational system, Trica Danielle Keaton suggests that a second generation of African Muslim girls are perceived and spatially marginalized in France as 'other,' even though the French state doesn't officially recognize racial and ethnic minorities. According to its color-blind political philosophy and state policy, the French educational system equalizes by sublimating differences to 'common cultural' norms. Nevertheless, these teenagers from the Maghreb and West Africa living in projects located on the urban peripheries are seen as less than fully 'French.' Socialized in French public schools, the young women embody and practice a French cultural 'habitus' of learned dispositions and taken for granted practices, yet frequently feel they must conceal the parts of themselves that participate in the cultural and religious habitus of their parents. Their subjectivity is shaped by a sense of not being recognized as authentically French along with their identification with the African and Arab worlds perceived in France as alien, dangerous, and other. Challenging dominant discourses of belonging, these young women self-define as French or as young women with multiply textured, hyphenated Afro-French or Arab-French identities. Through these young women insist they belong in France, positioning themselves as part of overlapping, polymorphic cultural worlds. Keaton suggests that material practices contradict myths of national (racial) identity and cultural borders: "The world, including France, belongs to no single people – despite popular perception to the contrary- and the cry of *je suis francais (e)*, '*c'est mon pays* now opens the gates of fortress France to its children of various African (and Asian) origins; opens the doors, that is, to these "being perceived" (88-9).

Struggles over identity and belonging faced by second generation Africans and Arabs in Keaton's study can be compared with the experiences of first generation Africans in Italy. Both first and second generations are widely perceived in Italian society as holding illegitimate claims to cultural citizenship, each inhabiting multiple cultures straddling Africa and Europe (Andall and Duncan, 2011).¹¹ For decades Maria Abbebu Viarengo wrestled with the various parts of her

¹¹ Conflicts around racialized identity and citizenship have been expressed in at least two widely known controversies on the national stage. The first surrounded the crowning of Denny Mendez as Miss Italy in 1996. Mendez was born in the Dominican Republic and later moved to Italy when her mother married an Italian man. The controversy began when two of the panel judges reportedly said that a black woman could not represent Italian beauty, sparking criticism and cries to close the borders to further immigration. Another such dispute around racialized identity surrounds the soccer player, Mario Balotelli who was born to Ghanaian parents but raised by an Italian family in Brescia. When he played for Milan's Internazionale club, Balotelli was verbally attacked with racial slurs, especially when playing against Turin's Juventus team where spectators held banners reading "A negro cannot be Italian!" Balotelli has since defected to a team in England partly to avoid the chants and cries against him as a black player although he's also a member of the Italian National Team. He has said that he was proud to be black and Italian (e.g. Taylor, 2010).

African identity that she was expected to sublimate, and when a growing number of people of African descent began appearing in Turin, she was able to marshal collective support for recognition of her complex African-Italo experience. She and other people of African descent from diverse areas in Eritrea and Ethiopia, Somalia, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Morocco, Senegal, Nigeria, Kenya and other parts areas of the African Diaspora strove to influence practices in Turin, to rework it into a place where they could participate equally as respected members of local society and also express cultural ideas and practices different from those Italians believed worth acknowledging. Their efforts led to the production of multicultural and religious spaces for the expression of African and other cultural practices. Until the economic crisis and the growing political traction of the Lega, considerable social and cultural exchange was initiated by migrants in collaboration with a variety of Italians active in Catholic and non-governmental associations affiliated with the political left (Merrill 2006; Merrill and Carter, 2002). In certain neighborhoods such as San Salvario and Porta Palazzo, there was also in the late 1990s a surge in the presence of Africans buying and selling in the daily markets and opening African shops, including hair styling salons, restaurants, video stores, and phone/computer/Western Union transfer centers. In the 1990s the city, often in collaboration with the European Union, began to initiate a series of redevelopment efforts of the historic quarters such as San Salvario, Porto Palazzo, Borgo Dora, and Barriera di Milano. The redevelopment initiatives followed intense debates about the growing presence of foreigners in ‘quarters at risk’ that were popularly characterized as growing ‘ghettos’ and criminal zones (see Merrill, 2006; Barthel, 2007; Bocco, 2005)¹². While an African presence remains in San Salvario today for the past decade the number of non-Italian managed shops has dwindled, and the African presence there has diminished as people have left Turin. There is however a concentration of people of African descent, especially the Maghreb, and other parts of the world in the quarters of Porto Palazzo and Barriera di Milano.

Some of what differentiates the way place is experienced among descendants of Africa from such experiences among other immigrant groups is the legacy of European imperialism and Africa’s integral role in European modernity (Said, 1979, 1994; Goldberg, 1993; Miles, 1993; Guillamin, 1995). Informants from former Italian colonies or trusteeships in Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia report that in spite of their historical presence in Italy, Italians tend not to distinguish between them and recent immigrants and they are classified according to dominant tropes generated in the media. As one of Jacqueline Andall’s Eritrean interviewees remarked, “If you’re dark (Italians think) you’re Senegalese, if you’re fair you’re Moroccan” (Andall, 200-1). Many people from Italy’s former colonies dispute this

¹² In San Salvario, the “Piano Integrato ‘leggero’” of the Agenzia di San Salvario was born, directed by Andrea Bocca. It was an initiative meant to represent the diverse Muslim and Christian, immigrant and native residents of the quarter by raising the level of civic participation and improving the declining social and economic quality of life. A comparable project, the Gate, was launched in the Porto Palazzo and Borgo Dora neighborhoods, a more recent project in Barriera di Milano.

conflation with other Africans, arguing that they ought to be treated as members of an extended Italian community. However, people from areas of Africa colonized for example by the French, English, Portuguese, or Belgians also contest their invisibility and claim belonging in Italy (Carter, 2010). The recent growth in writing in Italian by people like Maria Abbebu Viarengo, Tahar Lamri (Algeria), Gabriella Ghermandi (Ethiopia), Kossi Komla-Ebri (Togo), Igiaba Scego (Somalia) and many others speaks directly to the deepening corridors connecting Italian and African place and identity (Orton and Parati, 2007; Parati, 1999). My informants include people from African countries where French or English are national languages and who thought that Italy would have been a place in Europe more willing to accept Africans in their workplaces, housing complexes, and piazzas than either France or England. From their vantage point, Italy is a location in a social formation that includes other European countries with historical and continuing presences in Africa. From their point of view, this means that they, too, have a shared historical and continuing presence in Italy. Yet, many Italians did not acknowledge this in the early 1990s, and do so even less today in spite of African-Italo participation in many aspects of Turin's identity as a declining city of workers and trade unions and the making of new meanings, forms of sociality, and expanded spaces of activism (Ciafaloni, 2011).

More than ever before, there are many different modes of being "Italian" and "African," and first generation Africans-Italos in Turin experience place and identity in ways that at once relegate them to the obscurity of local Italian life and locate them as crucial participants in the making of a world linking Africa to Italy. Like Maria Abbebu Viarengo, many experience Turin as a place where African cultural identities are frequently recognized as exotic spectacle, for instance in performances of traditional African dance and music. Expressions of African philosophies, religions, or social relations that cannot be reified or commoditized for public consumption tend to be ignored or scorned. In some ways collectively denied the sense of being 'at home' in Turin, first generation Africans nevertheless affirm in their everyday activities and narratives multi-textured subjectivities produced through relational places.

On a Sunday afternoon, a time typically reserved for familial and friendship gatherings in Italy, Ivy, an East African woman, set up a series of tables on a cobble stoned avenue in Turin's *Barriera di Milano* neighborhood. At one end of the space where the avenue ended and met a wider street, a band was preparing to perform Italian music. The group would later sing traditional music in local dialect. Ivy had been working for years to disseminate knowledge of African artistic productions and practices, including sculpture, jewelry, music, and dance. On this bright summer day heavy with breezeless heat, she slowly displayed African musical instruments, sculptures and paintings as well as a series of books about Africa translated into Italian, and some coloring materials and books for children. The guests, each appearing to be from the local neighborhood, consumed appetizers and drinks from the corner bar-restaurant and sat on circular tables while

chatting and enjoying the musical performances. But from time to time they'd turn their gaze toward the African woman wearing a African style dress, bright red scarf and hair covering or saunter over to her displays, mill around, and chat with her for a few minutes. On that afternoon, this little avenue marked off for a deeply local collective Sunday gathering was also an African place, where Ivy and her African objects and materials, were both displayed and offered as interactions for participation and cultural inter-change. Ivy challenges the separation of a Western and African self, engaging in a complex and fluid subjectivity localized in Turin but pointing outward in numerous unmappable directions. She has lived in Turin where for over twenty years, struggling continually for recognition. Her subjectivity is in Turin and also beyond it, pointing outward in the direction of East Africa where she was schooled in English, and more broadly to the African and black diaspora within and beyond Africa. Her subjective experiences encompass, too, Northern Italianness where she has learned to live, to speak Italian, and to be ever more culturally fluent.

There are many other examples that demonstrate the contradictory racialization of African-Italos and their invisibility and the centrality of their participation in quotidian life in Turin. Like other stories, I think the following exhibits the sense of being-in-polymorphic, relational place that they experience.

As I suggested above, "La Movida" or youth soirees have become standard sites for nightly youth gatherings at bar-restaurants whose tables blanket sidewalks and piazzas. Businesses compete for customers with high quality appetizers, service and music, some quite successfully. In a renovated enclave of the Porta Palazzo neighborhood, regarded as a place with a high concentration of North Africans, one restaurant-bar among a string of such sites is particularly well regarded and popular. Until at least 2am each night, customers hang about to nibble, drink, chat, and laugh. The enterprise regularly hires young women from other parts of Europe, but for years the owner has held a man from Dakar, Senegal in his employment. I met Malik in 1990, when he first arrived in Turin. A native Wolof speaker who attended high schools and some university in French, he could not find gainful employment in Senegal to support his wife and children, and moved initially to France where he found himself under so much scrutiny as an 'illegal' without any hope of employment or regularization that he decided to seek a livelihood in Turin. He arrived at a moment of ferment when the first real immigration legislation was established, the political party structure (PCI or Italian Communist Party, the DC or Christian Democrats, and the Socialists), that held power since the war had not yet collapsed, Bossi's Lega Nord and Fini's neo-fascist party (MSI or Italian Social Movement currently called the People of Freedom Party) had very little influence, and the trade unions (still connected with political parties in Turin) held some legitimacy and authority. Early on, Malik contracted limited term work cleaning parts for a local Fiat firm. During off times he worked with some of his compatriots as an itinerant trader for which he traveled throughout the country and sometimes to France or Switzerland. Eventually he was

given a longer-term contract with the Fiat company where he worked extremely long hours including Sundays, but joined a trade union and was paid according to standard union rates for the job he performed. When viewed from the vantage point of his lived experiences the paths of Malik's daily work activities are relational and porous. In perhaps unthinkable ways, through his work relationships with Italians, his knowledge and cultural fluency in European and local, Wolof and Senegalese cultures he experiences interconnection and relationality across imagined and material borderscapes. He also partakes in an Italian socialscape of porous relational place making, albeit concealed by the ideas and policies of fixed racialized place.

Malik is a legal resident of Italy with working papers. He speaks Italian fluently, moving easily between the language and his native Wolof. He has at least one Italian friend with whom he worked at the Fiat firm. As the restructuring of Fiat and its subsidiaries and contractors in Turin has held pace with the rest of the industrial world and moved many of its manufacturing firms to rural and parts of the less economically developed world including Eastern Europe, Malik worked less regularly and took a second job at the popular bar-restaurant. Eventually Fiat closed its local shop entirely, and he lost his job. As industrial jobs have increasingly vanished or become unstable in the Turin area, consumer and professional service jobs have expanded and Malik was fortunate to have been working for a bar-restaurant that was thriving during the economic downturn. Malik was hired as a full-time 'bus-boy' and all around handyman. He works in the kitchen, where customers don't see him and yet he seems to be crucial to the success of the business, heavily depended on by the owner who phones him at all hours of the night if needed. Malik was also fortunate to have been able to acquire subsidized housing via the municipal government. He lives in a tiny one bedroom flat on the top floor of a building that he has at various times shared with two to five compatriots, sisters and their spouses. His apartment is located off a cobblestoned street and above several upscale bar-restaurants. His wife and children have remained in Senegal for these twenty plus years and he has sent most of his earnings to support them and more recently his mother. His father passed away several years after he moved to Italy, and he has since held primary responsibility for the family as the eldest surviving son. His wife and mother have also earned income through trade, but have increasingly depended on Malik to cover rising costs.

Malik's friendship and familial networks in Italy are extensive. His two younger sisters and his aunt all live in Turin. His aunt arrived with him around 1989 and lived with him initially in a flat packed with Senegalese men for whom she did the majority of the cooking. Currently she lives alone in a tiny flat paid for by her husband who visits but spends most of his time traveling for work or in Senegal. One of Malik's sisters who arrived in 1991 is now married to a Senegalese man whom she met in Turin, and the other in the late 1990s and also married to a Senegalese man whom she met in Turin. In addition, Malik has a brother in

Southern Italy married to an Italian woman and the couple recently had a child. Malik's sisters speak Italian fluently. Both sisters have moved in and out apartments, some subsidized and some not. One sister lost her home because it was designated as a space for a family with children and try as she has for many years with her face scarred from fertility medications, she has never been able to conceive. After having lived in Italy for over twenty years, the municipal government took their one bedroom flat and sent them packing because she failed to give birth to a child. She and her husband have moved in and out of stable employment for over twenty years. The other sister in Turin who has a university degree in information technology in the early 2000s held a stable job working for a firm on the outskirts of Turin that made resin for yachts but soon after the trade unions organized the almost exclusively female and immigrant employees to strike against toxic working conditions, the company moved out of the country. She told me that her advanced degree meant nothing in Italy because she was "solo una colonizzata" (only a colonized). The other sister, Awa, once opened a phone calling/Western Union site where she feared for her safety in a neighborhood with growing crime rates, and she struggled to keep it afloat during the economic downturn but was unable to keep up with the rent payments. While in operation, the site represented a crossroads where newcomers to Italy from all over Africa and other parts of the world would spend parts of their week and sometimes days connecting with their families via the phone or internet and where they would sit together and chat about their lives and the lives of their children (see Carter 2013). Awa has since traveled to trade in African clothing, handbags and other items while working in short term contract jobs and searching for regular employment.

In the summer of 2010 Awa was deeply despairing about the conditions in Turin and the virtual impossibility of an African over 35 finding work, particularly when up against competition from Romanians, Poles, Yugoslavians and other Eastern Europeans who for a number of reasons were preferred. She had finally been offered a job for a few weeks that paid well under the union standards watching an 82-year-old woman who was the mother-in-law of a Senegalese acquaintance and spouse of a wealthy Italian. The family was going away on vacation and the grandmother didn't want to remain alone. Awa's husband had been out of work for a very long time but had just secured temporary and part time low wage employment as a security guard for a Chinese operated gambling casino in Turin. Awa worried about his safety walking back from work late at night as public transportation was unavailable.

When we first began talking with this Senegalese family over twenty years ago we communicated in French and they were struggling to navigate the local social and political landscape with the help of mediators with knowledge and connections with representative organizations in the local government, church, and trade unions. After an initial period of uncertainty when they struggled for basic housing, residence documents, and health care, they became more settled in Turin, making connections with supportive Italians as well as Senegalese in leadership

positions with the trade unions or associations. They learned to follow national and local political developments in Italy and in Senegal, and could identify local political leaders whom they passed on the street. Their cooking combined elements of Senegalese and Italian ingredients, although they may procure many of the same ingredients used in Senegal from one of the local Chinese owned groceries! They followed Italian soap operas, American television shows dubbed in either French or Italian, and Senegalese sports competitions and music videos in French or Wolof.

The “*Présence Africaine*” is of course very strong for these members of the new African Diaspora who lived in Senegal for some twenty years and can maintain ongoing exchanges with their countries of origin via television, telephone, networks with other Senegalese in Europe, and deliveries via family and compatriots. Yet during the past several years coolness and even hostility toward the visibly non-Italian and non-European sanctioned by the nativist rhetoric of the Lega has become acceptable practice and they report experiencing increasing microaggressions. However, they don’t really choose to wall themselves off from Italian society. When asked about their national identities, they have for some time readily defined themselves both as “Italian” and “Senegalese.” And in fact Malik had already defined himself in part as European even before he arrived in Italy, having been educated in French language, history, and culture and from a country where the French presence was felt in many domains of everyday life. Yet today, when they walk out the door of their apartment and through Italian consumption sites they are often received with hostility, especially when wearing African attire. In these racialized, Italianized spaces where there is anxiety about loss of a distinctive cultural identity, differences are not licensed. Sadly, these African-Italos whose subjectivities are produced through their engagement in diverse relational places in Turin and Senegal seem increasingly to be turning inward or traveling outward toward Mecca and focusing on their Muslim religious rituals. They speak regularly of wishing to return to Senegal where life is so “much better” than in Italy where they are treated with respect and hospitality. They focus more today than in the past on gaining status through Senegalese networks. In part because their complex and multi-textured experiences are devalued and made invisible by race, they are compelled to identify outward. Yet they continue to live as African-Italos, in profoundly relational places where here is there and there is here.

Conclusions

Italy is widely represented and understood as the birthplace of Western Civilization, the epicenter from which European intellectual, artistic, political and economic leadership expanded throughout Africa, the Atlantic World, and eventually all over the globe. Every year millions of people visit the country’s great urban centers to discover a little of themselves incarnated in architectural and artistic achievements and to experience a sense of unity with humanity through Italian cooking and the warm people whom they expect will welcome them. These images and expectations were as salient among some first generation postcolonial Africans when they first arrived in Italy as they are to the continuing flow of

visitors who claim diverse European descent. All identify in various degrees with an Italy of creativity, achievement, and generosity of spirit. And arriving on national soil most visitors encounter this Italy, to some extent. Those perceived to be there for more than a short visit and cannot demonstrate hereditary roots are however far less warmly welcomed than those with them.¹³ Regardless of their legal status, people associated with an Africa to the south of Italy's south tend to live lives that straddle several national and ethnic borders in ways that contest and rework Western domination, binarist and fixed identities.

Over a half century has passed since fascist policies and practices that sought to control populations through racial purification were exposed as grossly tragic historical mis-steps. Yet even though the historical distortions of the racially essentializing logics of Western modernity legitimized in anthropological and eugenic sciences have been laid bare, the racialized hierarchies that nourished them have been reinvented in the present. The deafening silences that surround colonial atrocities by Italy and other European countries in Africa, the relations of force, cultural imposition, and racialized exclusion may serve to reproduce taken for granted relations of power and also remove from knowledge the continuing participation of people of African descent in European modernity. In practice, Africa lives in Turin in place-situated, multiply textured ways. Black life worlds are part of the transformation of culture, society, and economy in Turin.

Nevertheless, for over two decades, Africa has come to signify unwanted immigration. Images of African prostitutes and boatloads of nameless people capsizing at sea or landing on Lampedusa, an island off the coast of Sicily have proliferated in the popular media. There has been considerable effort to stem the flow of newcomers through restrictive legislation and by fortifying, militarizing, and expanding Italian maritime borders. Policies and dominant negative tropes make the enforcement of the geographical borders between Italy and Africa painfully real as people are turned back or deported and the racialization of place continues to contribute to nightmarish experience of being "overdetermined from without." These are real experiences, even among people of African descent like the soccer player, Mario Balotelli, who grew up in Brescia with adoptive Italian parents, speaks the local dialect, and knows little to nothing about the world of his Ghanaian birthparents. A climate in which the Italian zeitgeist is to reject anti-racist norms established after fascism doesn't make it easy for Maria, Malik, Amu, Ivy and many others to express openly the multiple dimensions of their identities, their participation in relational place. Yet the binary and hierarchical narratives that divide Italy from Africa don't even begin to describe the complexity of their experiences and self-understandings as postcolonial African-Italos.

¹³ Italian citizenship is awarded to people with a maternal or paternal grandparent who had Italian citizenship. A contested status, it is rarely awarded to foreign residents today and not even considered until one has lived in the country for ten years and has considerable financial resources. Refugees can apply for Italian citizenship after five years, but refugee status is itself seldom granted in Italy.

If there is any lingering doubt that Europe's disputed narrative of itself as a closed cultural space and the invisibility of Africans in Europe is being challenged one must only follow the headline news over the past two decades (see Carter 2011). From far right terrorist attacks against multicultural policies in Norway, to protests demanding the right to live legally in France and Italy, to riots against racial profiling in areas of concentrated cultural diversity in England, a steady and escalating current of discontent has unhinged exclusivist notions of belonging. These eruptions all express differing subjectivities, forms of experience and knowledge about who is or ought to be classified as a legitimate 'insider' with all the attendant rights and privileges, and who by contrast does not belong or is if not in fact then symbolically an outsider belonging on the other side of the European border. In spite of drastic measures that include contracting with the Libyan coast guard to patrol the southern coasts or erecting more detention centers both on and off-shore, Italy has over the past several decades irrevocably become a country of immigration. If one takes demographic trends as any indicator, it's evident that the country is rapidly becoming more ethnically diverse. Birthrates among immigrants are 2-4 times what they are among native Italians, which are among the lowest in the world. This country that until at least the late 1980s identified itself solely as a sender of Italian migrants and not a receiver of foreigners is now increasingly complex, and its future depends also on the children and grandchildren of African and Arab descent. A non-fixed future.

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