

Transnational perspectives: Pedagogical practices

Annika Dahlman, Derek Duncan ,
Lauren Elliot, Mathilde Lyons,
and Cara O'Dwyer
University of St Andrews, UK

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Introduction

What follows is a collective reflection by a tutor and students on the most recent version of a pedagogical project which has morphed and developed according to the rapid development of the disciplinary fields in which it is situated and the increasing availability and diversity of relevant primary texts and critical resources.¹ ‘Black Italians’ is a one-semester long module offered to advanced students as an optional element in degree programmes in Italian at the University of St Andrews. It is one element of a four-year programme covering aspects of Italian culture from the Middle Ages to the present day, and its particular methodology and thematic focus builds on the mandatory study of authors such as Igiaba Scego and Primo Levi in the first two years of the programme. Devised and taught by Derek Duncan, the module is delivered in English in a series of seminars that investigate how ever malleable definitions of ‘Blackness’ have operated as powerful and flexible strategies of often violent erasure and exclusion at three defining historical moments for Italy from the late-19th century to the present day. Other modules at this level focus on cultures of diaspora, migration, and colonialism and interrogate similar, but not identical, histories and expressions of diversity. ‘Black Italians’ foregrounds race – its defining parameters and contested lived experience. The co-presence of these other modules explains some choices of emphasis and partial omission in the content of ‘Black Italians’ itself. For instance, detailed discussion of the Black Mediterranean, covered extensively in a parallel course, is less prominent than might be anticipated. The module has existed in different iterations for almost ten years. Earlier versions, for example, have included texts and films such as Wu Ming’s *Timira*, Kym Ragusa’s *The Skin between Us*, Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*, and Andrea Segre’s *Sangue verde*. The presence of Ragusa and Lee in the module points to the transnational optic of its methodological foundations and its many possible linkages and intersections. It purposefully resists the methodological nationalism in which study and research in Modern

Corresponding author:

Derek Duncan, School of Modern Languages, University of St Andrews, KY16 9PH, UK.

Email: ded3@st-andrews.ac.uk

Languages has conventionally been framed. Moreover, it offers an axis of critical thinking that connects rather than compares the non-identical and sometimes distant.

'Black Italians' has always begun with a brief discussion of the presence of Sub-Saharan Africans in Renaissance Italy to give historical depth and range to a topic that is on occasion presented as only of contemporary relevance (Earle and Lowe, 2005). This discussion has been enormously enhanced by the Uffizi Gallery's two online exhibitions *On Being Present* curated by Thompson (2020, 2021). The text accompanying the exhibition both contextualises the individual works of art in which Black people appear in Renaissance art and foregrounds the intellectual and political challenges of 'seeing' this work from a temporally and culturally distant critical vantage point. The dialogue initiated here across time and geo-political space effectively frames the purpose and work of the module (Greene: 2018).

'On Being Present'

During week two of the module, we looked at both editions of the Gallerie degli Uffizi's (IperVisioni) online exhibition 'On Being Present'. This exhibition examines and interrogates the presence of Blackness in Renaissance artworks by identifying and challenging how Black figures are represented. This was one of the first things we did for the class because it grounds our discussion of Black Italians in history, bringing our attention to the fact that Black Italians are part of Italy's history as well as its present. In one of the classes towards the end of the module, we watched *MAKA* (2023), a documentary biopic of Italian-Cameroonian writer and anthropologist Geneviève Makaping directed by Elia Moutamid and written by Simone Brioni, which featured Makaping at the end of the film looking up at Black figures in the artwork in Palazzo Ducale in Mantua and asking them what their stories are. The way in which Makaping interrogates art in *MAKA* echoes the aims of the Uffizi's exhibition. Thompson writes that 'We have a consciousness of the past that the past could not have of itself, and with this consciousness comes a great responsibility of attending not only to its pastness but to its contemporary values and meanings and continuities' (Thompson, 2021: n.p.). As curator, he brings our attention to the question of the gaze, and to the fact that a conscious effort made by this Uffizi exhibition to establish a Black gaze and bring the previously overlooked Black figures in Renaissance artwork into the focus of our vision. Furthermore, the exhibition works to construct a 'Black Archive', as these previously 'unseen' figures are elements in a long history of Black Italians. The exhibition tries, as much as possible, to give the names and histories of the Black figures that are represented, restoring their human dignity, as historically they were often just referred to as 'il Moro' or defined only in terms of their Blackness. Throughout the exhibition, we encounter Black, often enslaved, figures, exploited and painted because of their perceived 'Otherness'. In particular, Anton Domenico Gabbiani's 'Portrait of Four Servants of the Medici Court' (1684) highlights how:

It was common practice in the 16th and 17th Centuries for European courts to collect bizarre or unusual human beings [...] including dwarves and foreign slaves. These individuals served a primarily decorative purpose, embodying (quite literally) the geospatial

purchasing power of the sovereign and entertaining the denizens of the court (Wilbourne, 2020: n.p.).

Black figures were often painted in order to bolster the status and power of the family. They do not have much agency in any of the portrayals in the exhibition, with Justus Suttermans's 'Madonna "Domenica delle Cascine", la Cecca di Pratolino e Pietro moro' (1634) perhaps being an exception, whereby the Black Medici slave gains some agency over the (poor and elderly white) women, as they seem to become the butt of his innuendo (Edelstein, 2020). Another interesting hierarchy is highlighted here involving race, wealth, and gender that points to the necessary intersectionality of all three. Indeed, looking at the exhibition as a whole, we see that no Black female figures are examined in Volume 1 of the exhibition (there are two Volumes – 1 and 2, which correspond to the 2020 and 2021 Black History Months) a limitation that Volume 2 seems to have tried to address with its majority representation of Black female figures. The presentation of Blackness in Renaissance art involves a version of what Toni Morrison calls 'playing in the dark', a symbolic process by which white artists imagine relations between white and Black subjects (Erickson, 1993: 522). What is problematic and what the exhibition tries, as much as possible, to rectify, is the lack of Black authority and agency. The narrative of Black and white relations is entirely defined in white terms, as Black European artists had no voice in the Renaissance period. In an instance of what will be discussed in more detail below, there is a 'loss of the Black body' during this time that the exhibition seeks to make partial restitution for. In recovering the names and histories of the Black people in these artworks, the exhibition affords agency to these figures and dignifies their presence, while trying to interpret what their voices might have said, imagining that they had their own narrative power.²

Thompson's reflections on what the past could not know reverberate throughout Scego's *La linea del colore* (2020a) whose narrative shuttles between historical periods and across territories. Set partly in 19th-century Rome, Scego's text is read in tandem with Cesare Lombroso's *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore. Letture sull'origine e la varietà delle razze umane* (1871), unflinching in its articulation of a white supremacist vision of cultural and physiological achievement. Lombroso's theories of atavistic regression and degeneration imbue Gabriele D'Annunzio's novella 'La vergine Anna' (1902). D'Annunzio who appears as a minor figure in *La linea del colore* racialises the Italian South and in particular the Southern female body in this dystopian narrative set very specifically in the years of Italian Unification.³

Racialised exclusion from national belonging

Following our study of Blackness in Renaissance Italy, we moved on to a discussion of Lombrosian scientific racism and the racialisation of the Italian South. The 19th and 20th centuries saw a new focus on concepts of evolution and race, and the development of the new field of scientific racism: the pseudoscientific study of different racial groups, using supposed empirical evidence to justify hierarchies of racial domination. To explore this in an Italian context, we read Cesare Lombroso's *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore* (1871) in which the author provides an exhaustive categorisation of the 'coloured' races and their

various physiological differences and ‘defects’ with respect to the ‘white’ race. In such discourses, non-white people were cast as fundamentally Other, primitive, and atavistic, in contrast to supposed white perfection and civilisation (Lombroso, 1871: 220–221). The work reveals Lombroso’s preoccupation with bodies and embodied racial difference, and particularly his belief in the body as an external signifier of internal difference.

These discourses would soon come to be applied within Italy itself, as post-Unification concern with the ‘backwardness’ of the South in relation to the industrialised North led to Southerners being cast as uncivilised, barbaric, and fundamentally less evolved: characteristics which were seen as racially inherited and innate (Schneider, 1998: 11–12). The perceived primitivism of the South and its geographical proximity to Africa led Southern Italians to be viewed as racial ‘Others’, an impurity in the national body of the new Italian state and a racial contamination of the Italian nation from within (Duncan and Webb, 2020: 188; Pick, 1989: 113–114). Such discursive constructions underline the fact that that ‘white’ as a racial classification is not determined by skin colour, and national belonging is not determined by birthplace or citizenship. Though we had studied the so-called ‘Southern Question’ at length within other modules on the degree programme, this was the first time we had examined the topic through a specifically racial lens.

We examined this Lombrosian conception of racialised Southern primitivism and degeneration in Gabriele D’Annunzio’s ‘La vergine Anna’ in which the author provides a depiction of racialised Southern atavism through his narration of the life of an individual Southern peasant woman. In his novella, the characters serve as the embodiment of the South’s racialised backwardness. The author shares the Lombrosian fixation on Southern bodies, with every character described in terms of physiological abnormality as D’Annunzio places emphasis on the racial infirmity of the Southern population he depicts: that Southern bodies are less evolved is signified through bodily deformities – ‘il labbro leporino’ of the cattle herder, Zacchiele’s ‘gran testa dalla fronte sporgente’, the ‘lieve balbuzie’ of Anna’s father’s mistress – and through their predisposition to sickness, with numerous characters struck down by disease (D’Annunzio, 1902: 97–98; 112, 91). The racial degeneration of the Southern Italian characters is further signified through their continual reduction to animality, both on a physical and psychological level. The Southern bodies of the novella are constantly likened to animals, be it Zacchiele’s ‘occhi di coniglio’ or Fra Mansueto’s ‘testa caprina’ (1902: 112; 140), while Anna feels a deep connection with animals, which for Lombroso was itself a trait of less evolved races. The primitivism of Southern characters is shown moreover by their ignorance and feeble-mindedness, which appears to be racially inherited. Their lack of intelligence and their illiteracy relegates them to a lower position on the Lombrosian evolutionary scale, where ‘la scrittura alfabetica’ serves as evidence of racial superiority (Lombroso, 1871: 222). A final proof of Southern atavism is given by their primitive religiosity, marked by superstitious religious practices and a belief in the supernatural.

Not only Southern bodies are racially degenerate in ‘La vergine Anna’, but also the South itself. D’Annunzio’s novella presents *il Mezzogiorno* as a space plagued by sickness, in which the people and even the animals are dying and decaying: a diseased land

that brings forth diseased bodies. The South is beset by disaster and calamity, with quasi-biblical earthquakes and floods that call to mind those described in Genesis and imply that the South too is an archaic, corrupted land in need of cleansing. The South figures in D'Annunzio's text as a land 'outside of history', untouched by progress and modernity, fundamentally ancient and primitive in contrast to Northern civilisation (Spackman, 1989: 105–151). This 'immobilità fuori del tempo' is furthermore 'fiss[a] ed etern[a]' (Sabbadini, 1974: 21): the backwardness of the South is innate, unchanging and for all time.

Such discourses of Southern backwardness and primitivism would ultimately be used to justify the imposition of Northern rule on an 'uncivilised' and 'undisciplined' South, just as similar ideas would be used to justify Italian imperialism and its 'civilising mission' in East Africa. Racialised stereotypes about Southern Italians continue to have a lingering influence in Italian politics to the present day. Moreover, the same racial discourses employed to exclude Southerners from *Italianità* would also be used to exclude people of colour. Just as Southern Italians were excluded from national belonging despite being politically, geographically and culturally Italian, people of colour, though often born in Italy and holding Italian citizenship, are still frequently considered as not fully 'Italian' – as we would explore throughout the module in our reading of Igiaba Scego, Espérance Hakuzwimana Ripanti and Geneviève Makaping. Our study of Lombroso and D'Annunzio foregrounded our discussion of these later works and opened up reflection on the ways in which fluid and ever-shifting categories of race are employed as tools of exclusion and marginalisation.

Racial hierarchies disturb linear histories and narratives of predictable narratives of subject formation. Bassani's novel *Dietro la porta* (1964) investigates the retrospective acquisition of a self-conscious Jewish identity in the immediate wake of the signing of the Lateran Accords in the years before the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and the publication of *Il manifesto della razza* in 1938.

Re-centring Black voices in the wake of the Italo-Ethiopian War

While there has been an increase in scholarly attention paid towards research on Italian colonialism in recent years, an important part of the 'Black Italians' module has been its centring of a Black cultural history approach. The Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 marked an important moment in the history of the Italian fascist regime and Italian colonialism. It represents, as argued by the historian Alexander De Grand (2004), the moment when the regime became racist and imperialist.

For the module, set reading on the invasion included an article by Clarence Muse, an African-American actor addressing a Jewish Business Men's club in Los Angeles, published in the *Chicago Defender* in January 1936. Muse's article offers an original entry point for understanding the global ramifications of the invasion of Ethiopia as well as the framing of this Italo-Ethiopian struggle for Black people worldwide. While I have studied the invasion of Ethiopia before, the focus of those modules was primarily the geopolitical implications of the invasion for Italy. This approach usually centres the League of Nations' sanctions incurred as a result of the invasion and its place as a forerunner to

the catastrophe of the Second World War, but does not attempt to demonstrate how the invasion of Ethiopia has transnational significance for Black people in East Africa, as well as for wider African and Black diasporic communities. Muse's article situates the invasion of Ethiopia within a transnational context and as a concern for Black Americans. He presents the war as a unifying moment for Black people globally, echoing early forms of pan-Africanism: 'there is a better racial cohesion since the Ethiopian situation. All Negroes, blacks, mulattoes, sepia browns and even "marrinies" are claiming their African heritage and tying themselves together' (Muse, 1936: 11).

In a compelling appeal for Black and Jewish solidarity, Muse links the Jewish and Black struggles of racism in the US by invoking an ancient fellowship between both groups when he addresses the Business Men's club as 'one Hamitic might speak to his Semitic brethren'. He advocates for greater Jewish and Black solidarity, arguing that when Jewish and Black people realise what they have in common, it will be mutually beneficial for both groups and that the world would come to respect them 'if they cast their lots together'. I felt this linking of Black and Jewish experiences of racism by Muse was helpful for discussions during the module of how race was projected onto racialised subjects by Italian racial scientists and physiognomists like Cesare Lombroso. For me, this is the outcome of the 'Black Italians' module as it highlights different examples of microlevel and macrolevel experiences of racism, tying together a large-scale event, like the invasion of Ethiopia, with the everyday racist comments of other individuals. For example, the corporeal racial experience is ably captured in Bassani's *Dietro la porta* which illustrates how physical characteristics can be imbued with moral and racial meanings as well as the ways in which racism can function via microlevel interactions. Muse's acknowledgement of the interrelatedness of Black and Jewish experiences of Italian fascist racism is important in the context of 1930s racial propaganda, where magazines like *La difesa della razza* conflated and amplified the imagined threats presented by both Africans and Jews to the Italian national body. The class helped accentuate the way in which racism targeting a specific group works in tandem with other forms of structural and state racism.

Another common point of discussion throughout 'Black Italians' was the question of visibility and invisibility of Black people within Italian society and the module uses different contexts and examples to convey this point. In the context of the invasion of Ethiopia, Muse's article provides an important anecdote for this exploration of Black (in)visibility as it speaks to the need for the inclusion of Black cultural history in the classroom. Acknowledging the erasure of Black heroes from the historical record, Muse describes the disappointment of a young Black boy who is asked by a white schoolmate why there are 'no great men in [his] race like George Washington or Napoleon?' Answering that his mother had told him about many Black heroes such as Toussaint L'Ouverture and King Menelik, the White boy responded 'It ain't in the history, so I guess your mother made a mistake' (Muse, 1936: 11). In terms of visibility as discussed during the module, this story's conclusion that the 'colored boy grew up hurt because his pal did not believe there were any great black men' is linked to the work of contemporary scholars and authors studied. Muse's anecdote was particularly on my mind when reading Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019). The sentiment that historians of 'the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern' must acknowledge and

overcome the ‘power and the authority of the archive’ creates connections between Muse’s words and the current trends in work on the Black archive and Black history (Hartman, 2019: xiii). Rubin (2008) characterised cultural history as being the history of the struggle for meaning and the domain of representation. As a cultural history module, ‘Black Italians’ has the capacity to explore representations of Black people in an Italian context that I have not experienced in other history classes. The module’s temporal scope creates a sense of continuity between historic constructions of race in Italy and the modern-day manifestations of these historic constructions.

The final section of the module explores contemporary expressions of race through the work of two contemporary Black Italian writers who explicitly indict the often-unexamined expression of white racism and assert the potency of Black critical writing and thought. Geneviève Makaping’s *Traiettorie di sguardi: e se gli altri foste voi?* (2022) has been part of the module since its inception. Her genre-crossing investigation into Italian whiteness through the lens of her experience as an academically trained anthropologist re-defines practices of looking as well as writing. Espérance Hakuzwimana Ripanti’s *E poi basta: manifesto di una donna nera italiana* is another genre-resisting text creatively combining fragments of remembered experience, theoretical reflection, and political indictment. Her refusal to offer sociological information in response to tired racially inflected inquiry about origin and belonging is a powerful political and aesthetic retort to ingrained practices of racial definition. She effectively reiterates the question posed by Tavia Nyong’o: ‘How might we begin to make sense of the paradoxical vibrance of a form of life endangered, or even erased, by efforts at documentation and representation?’ (Nyong’o, 2018: 3). The urgent need to recover and preserve Black life and culture merges with hopes for different futures, a priority also pursued by Shelleen Greene and Simone Brioni, the two guest speakers on this semester’s programme. Greene’s essay, ‘Italy and Archives of Black Futurity’ generously shared with the group in advance, was the basis for a discussion of transnational Black creativity as a tool for the exploration and redefinition of an historically recalcitrant archive. Engaging attentively with non-Italian artists whose transnational interventions redefine white Italian spaces and cultural legacies, Greene concludes her reflections on the revisionary photographic work of Carrie Mae Weems and Lyle Ashton Harris with the proposition that they ‘ask *us* how we constitute the African diaspora in Italy through interlocking experiences of colonialism, slavery, anti-black racism and migration’ (Greene, 2021: 37, emphasis added). The multiplicity of perspectives required for *us* to apprehend in their complexity accounts of Blackness in Italy subtends Elia Moutamid’s multilingual film *Maka* (2023). Simone Brioni joined the class online to discuss his role in the recent revised edition of Makaping’s text, its English translation, and writing the script for Moutamid’s film (Brioni, 2022; Johnson, 2022).

Camilla Hawthorne has questioned how people who identify as Black Italian now situate themselves in terms of transnational histories, identities, and cultural practices. She picks out ‘modalities of descent, rhizomes, and entangled space-times’ to convey a sense of the intersecting and diverging complexities of Italian ‘Blacknesses’ and indeed cites Scego’s *La linea del colore* as almost exemplary in this regard ‘weaving together stories of trans-Atlantic and trans-Mediterranean voyages, histories and legacies

of colonialism, and Black resistance without flattening or collapsing one into the other' (Hawthorne, 2022: 9).

Incroci

In Scego's *La linea del colore*, the narrator, Leila, finds herself face to face with a disconcerting architectural feature: 'la fontana dei Quattro Mori'. The piece depicts four unnamed, dark-skinned prisoners kneeling and in chains, forever fixed in their state of enslavement. As she stands before the perpetual prisoners, Leila, making a reference to Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* (2015), observes that to be Black is to 'vivere nella costante paura di perdere il corpo'. This remark prompted my essay on the constant threat of the violent dispossession of the Black body.

It absolutely begs mentioning that 'la fontana dei Quattro Mori' is, in fact, not merely a figment of Scego's writer's imagination, but a very real architectural piece that has been standing in Marino, a town in the province of Rome, since 1632. As a matter of fact, Leila's encounter with the fountain is far from the only thing in the text which is rooted in reality. Just as 'On Being Present' adds to the construction of a Black Archive that will accommodate not only Black history, but Black futurity, so, with Scego we get a taste of what this futurity may look like in literature. She employs the creative medium of the novel to weave together a story out of truths and could-have-been-truths and thus create a story about Blackness that belongs, only in one sense, to the realm of fiction. And because of the creative nature of the medium, what she does is not solely a filling in of the gaps in history, but a creating of new gaps that will afford articulations of Black histories and experiences to come.

In addition to demonstrating the intertwinement of Black history and Black imagination, Scego incorporates multiple spatial as well as temporal levels that emphasise the transnationality and 'transtemporality' of the Black experience with the 'constant fear of losing the body'. She connects North America to Somalia through Italy and through different times. This aspect in particular, this emphasis on the connections that transcend time and space, led me down an interesting, albeit short, path of research into the phenomenon of cultural trauma. Drawing primarily on the book by Ron Eyerman, I discussed *La linea del colore* through the lens of cultural trauma as a collective 'meaning struggle' which makes trauma 'central to [a group's] attempts to forge a collective identity out of its remembrance' (Eyerman, 2001: 1). It shed light on the ongoing presence of fear when one's cultural identity is, at least in part, built on some notion of shared trauma.

'La fontana dei Quattro Mori' acts also as an example of the way in which the constant threat of violent dispossession of the Black body is at times invisible, especially to white people. Naturally, by this I do not mean literally invisible; the fountain stands in Marino clear as day. Instead, I use the word 'invisible' in the sense of 'overlooked' or perhaps 'ignored'. In the novel, Leila as well as her heroine Lafanu, in their respective timelines, must explicitly call attention to the Blackness of the petrified prisoners for it to be at all noticed. This call to attention ties into a subject matter with which Scego has concerned herself on multiple occasions. In an article for *Internazionale* for instance, she argued that the remnants of fascist topography in the urban space of Rome indirectly preserve an

incitement to violence against Black bodies (Scego, 2020b). Indeed, Scego has dedicated an entire book to this idea, *Roma negata: percorsi postcoloniali nella città* (2014), which appears on other modules offered by our Italian department. Back in 2019, I studied *Roma negata* for the module called 'Italian Geographies' with Dr Ramsey McGlazer and Dr Valerie McGuire as tutors.

As a student of Italian, what reading the work of Scego does is open up a new outlook on the subject and on the 'patrimonio italiano'. It urges us as Italianists to challenge our objects of study and, more importantly, how we study them, re-evaluating in this manner our academic practice. That said, what Scego and *La linea del colore* give us is, to be sure, only a glimpse of the complexities of Black presence in Italy that we must learn to recognise and unpack.

Methodologically, 'Black Italians' draws on a wide range of sources in the broad disciplines of Cultural Studies and Black Studies to provide the tools necessary to understand not just how anti-Blackness is expressed but how it is inhabited, endured, resisted, and revised. Socio-historical work referring specifically to Italy is read transnationally in tandem with theoretical analysis emanating from outside the peninsula. Scholars such as Stuart Hall, Saidiya Hartman, and Tavia Nyong'o are indispensable resources for thinking about creativity and the formal properties of the Black Archive as well as about the political imperatives to work on and with race as a category of critical cultural analysis. Engagement with their writing also heightens awareness of the difficulties of using words and concepts that seem familiar but whose meanings never prove singular shifting as discussion moves through time and space and across languages and cultures.⁴ The specificity of these difficulties also localise seminar participants as producers of situated knowledge alert to what Mary Louise Pratt has recently referred to as the 'position of analysis' (Pratt, 2022: 126). It is essential to acknowledge the determining effects of the location from which intellectual inquiry is conducted. In our case, this means recognizing the entanglements of our own subjective and biographical affiliations and the space of their articulation (a largely white, elite Anglophone institution). It also means recognizing and taking cognisance of the particular historical moment at which the seminar took place (Black Lives Matter, COVID, Gender Recognition Reform, the Sheku Bayoh Inquiry) generating modes and priorities of analysis and understanding that could not be replicated in identical form elsewhere.

Both Makaping and Hakuzwimana Ripanti make reference to Black writers such as bell hooks and Toni Morrison in their own attempts to understand and engage with Blackness in Italy both historically and critically. Their acknowledgment of Chicana theorist and poet Gloria Anzaldúa's work on 'border thinking' is another cardinal reference point for transnational theorizations of race. 2022 saw the translation into Italian of seminal work by all three. The title of Scego's novel is taken from American sociologist WEB Du Bois and two of its main characters are fictional re-workings of Sarah Parker Remond, Edmonia Lewis, and Frederick Douglass whom Greene mentions in the introduction to her essay. Remond had met Garibaldi and Mazzini in London supporting the cause of Italian Unification. Douglass was the subject of Isaac Julien's 10-screen film installation *Lessons of the Hour* (2019), shot in part in Edinburgh where Douglass lived for a time, touring and lecturing extensively in Scotland.⁵ Julien's *Western Union: Small Boats* (2008) had explored

Black migration to Italy across the Mediterranean through the prism of Italy's artistic patrimony, a triangulation also picked up by Scego in *La linea del colore*. To side-step the methodological fluidity and rigor of a transnational optic is, among other things, to misrecognise our implication, both personal and institutional, in histories and contemporary practices of anti-Blackness. A transnational optic insists on our proximity and involvement in which we are also both objects and subjects of knowledge.

Towards the end of *E poi basta*, in a chapter titled 'Corpi', Hakuzwimana Ripanti compiles a list of (only a very few) of the acts of racial aggression committed in Italy in 2018. 'Black Italians' is fundamentally grounded in the repeated and ongoing reality that solicits its existence, bracketed by two recent incidents of racially motivated violence in Italy. The module began with a consideration of the murder of Alike Ogochukwu on 29 July 2022 and the range and tonality of responses to it and was later punctuated by the decision of volleyball player Paola Egonu to stand down from the national team tired of the repeated questioning of her status as Italian citizen. 'Male trasparente', the chapter in *E poi basta* immediately following 'Corpi', enumerates a history of experienced verbal micro-aggressions that connects with Egonu:

Ci sono [mali trasparenti] li odio, mi spezzano quando non lo voglio, si rigenerano e non so mai spiegarli.

Li ho messi qua per ricordarmi, per ricordargli che anche se non li so dire posso scrivere. E io, che prima di capire le cose le devo scrivere, forse piano piano, li sto accettando (Hakuzwimana Ripanti, 2019: 215).


The interruption of Egonu's story is a testament to the way in which 'Black Italians' constantly engages with and develops alongside current events; her statement to step down was made halfway through October of 2022, by which time the module was already in its fifth week of teaching. In this way, Egonu's presence on the module reflects the dynamic nature of 'Black Italians'. Perhaps more importantly, however, it is symptomatic of the way in which the module's subject matter in itself is dynamic and in a constant state of change and growth. It is a subject whose folds, fractures, and non-progressive temporalities, as Hakuzwimana Ripanti's testifies in *E poi basta*, cannot be listed exhaustively.

Notes

1. This essay has five authors. Inconsistencies in the use of first person singular and plural pronouns throughout are reminders of the multivocal nature of the conversations and the work that produced it. We recognise and affirm common authorship of the piece in its entirety.
2. Projects of historical recovery and states of presence are obviously not unique to Italy. See for example Hart (2002) and (2022) in relation to Ireland. Sobande and Hill (2022) combine archival retrieval with analysis of Black lives in Scotland now.
3. Lombroso was, of course, only one voice in a wider transnational scientific community in thrall to speculation on race and racial difference. This speculation was both global and inward looking in scope. Anne McClintock coins the term 'domestic degeneracy' in reference to the

- identification of racialised ‘others’ at home. This identification was based on a particular reading of the body and its supposed revelatory deformities (McClintock, 1995: 21–74 – esp. 53).
4. Transnational optics on ‘race’ bring to the fore the term’s non-equivalence across languages. ‘Ras’ in Swedish for example has a history that has much in common with the histories of the word ‘race’ or ‘razza’ but current use does not reflect the terms evolution in English, and nor Italian. In Swedish, the historical connotations of ‘ras’ remain much more intact.
 5. For a survey of Douglass’s activity in Scotland see the interactive website produced by the National Library of Scotland <https://geo.nls.uk/maps/douglass/scotland.html>. See also Pettinger (2018) and Gilroy (2022).

ORCID iD

Derek Duncan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1188-4935>

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