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## **Teaching “Race” with a Gendered Edge**

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## CHAPTER 8:

### **“Not a Country for Women, nor for Blacks”: Teaching Race and Gender in Italy between Colonial Heritages and New Perspectives**

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It is only in recent times that Italy has started confronting its colonial past and the consequences of mass migration, thus realising how this history still shapes the present perception of racialised and gendered differences. Scholars from different disciplines have triggered a lively and fertile debate on Italian colonialism, stating in particular the impact of the colonial heritage on the contemporary experience of migration in terms of representation. The interconnections of colonial legacy and contemporary migration flows have long been on the agenda in many European countries—especially in England and France, often contributing to the negotiation and redefinition of national identities. However, due to the lack of a postcolonial critique and in view of a long history of invasions, internal migration and emigration, Italy has always perceived itself more as a colonised country than as a coloniser. As a matter of fact, Italian society has been characterised until recently by the absence of a critical debate on issues of race and gender.

In our chapter we would like to suggest how the complicity with a repressed or unquestioned colonial heritage has heavily shaped the present social and political situation, generating particular and worrying weaknesses in the Italian school system. In this light, we seek to explore the existing gap between an emerging corpus of critical work on the persisting impact of colonialism on present-day racism and sexism, and the everyday practice of teaching to the new generations. However, the chapter also attempts to offer new perspectives on school curricula, mapping some “virtuous” examples of critical reflection and outlining possible future directions for a redefinition of Italian identities in terms of race and gender.

In the last two decades, several scholars from different disciplines have started to reassess the crucial role of the legacy of Italian colonialism in the contemporary experience of migration, thus identifying a specific “strategic amnesia” as regards Italian colonial history.<sup>1</sup> In what Sandra Ponzanesi has defined as “post-

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Angelo Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani* (Roma–Bari: Laterza, 1992) and *Italiani, brava gente?* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005); Sandra Ponzanesi, “Il postcolonialismo italiano.

colonial unconscious”,<sup>2</sup> colonial history has been conveniently erased from Italian collective consciousness. Confining their colonial past to the vague memory of the Libyan “box of sand”—as the African country was called to emphasise the futility of the colonial achievement—many Italians still oscillate between repressed memory and nostalgia. Moreover, the revival of colonial clichés to deal with African alterity testifies to the persistence of biased representations which, as Alessandro Triulzi has suggested, “while including sanitized narratives of the country’s colonial past, exclude African migrants from full participation in cultural, social or political life”.<sup>3</sup>

Italian colonialism started in Northern Africa in the late 1870s—that is just after the birth of the nation, since Italy as a modern unified state has only existed since 1861. Although the colonised territories in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Libya were lost after the Second World War, Somalia remained under an Italian administration until 1960. The construction of Italian identity during the colonial period has often relied on race as a marker of irredeemable alterity and threat (see Figure 8.1), as much as today Italianness and blackness are still mutually exclusive attributes.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, if the intersection of race with gender has deeply affected the power relations between the coloniser and the colonised, nowadays gendered and racialised stereotypes informed by a colonial mentality are still active in the western multicultural metropolis, marking the differences between immigrants and citizens.<sup>5</sup>

Some recent studies have started to connect post-unification mass migration out of Italy to contemporary migration into Italy, stating that racism in Italy was not confined to the colonial period. Following the insights of Critical Whiteness Studies in a book significantly entitled *Are Italians White?*, Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno demonstrate that, during the experience of mass emigration in the last century, Italian Americans were not always perceived as quite white

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Figlie dell’Impero e letteratura meticcica,” *Quaderni del ’900* 4 (2004): 25–34; and Alessandro Triulzi, “Displacing the Colonial Event. Hybrid Memories of Postcolonial Italy,” *Interventions* 8, 3 (2006): 430–43.

<sup>2</sup> Ponzanesi, “Il postcolonialismo italiano,” 26.

<sup>3</sup> Triulzi, “Displacing the Colonial Event,” 433.

<sup>4</sup> See Alberto Burgio, ed., *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d’Italia 1870–1945* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1995); Sonia Sabelli, “Quando la subalterna parla. Le *Traiettorie di sguardi* di Geneviève Makaping,” in *Fuori centro. Percorsi postcoloniali nella letteratura italiana*, ed. Roberto Deroberis (Roma: Aracne, 2010), 132.

<sup>5</sup> Sonia Sabelli, “L’eredità del colonialismo nelle rappresentazioni contemporanee del corpo femminile nero,” *Zapruder* 23 (2010): 106.



Figure 8.1: Propaganda poster, Italian Social Republic, 1944

The text says: “Defend her! She could be your mother, your wife, your sister, your daughter.”

(Originally published in Alberto Mario Banti, *Sublime madre nostra. La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo*. Bari: Laterza, 2011, 176.)

in the United States. At the same time, Caterina Romeo states that the notion that Italians are not white still permeates American popular culture today and that “the presumed whiteness of the Italian population is at the core of different kinds of racisms perpetrated by Italians in different historical periods”.<sup>6</sup> In this

<sup>6</sup> Caterina Romeo, “Il colore bianco. La costruzione della razza in Italia e la sua rappresentazione nella letteratura di scrittrici migranti e postmigranti,” in *L'italiano lingua di migrazione. Verso l'affermazione di una cultura transnazionale agli inizi del XXI secolo*, ed. Anna Frabetti and Walter Zidaric (Nantes: CRINI, 2006), 80.

light, she explores the complexity of the discourse on race, racism, and whiteness in Italy, stating that although during the last century Italians were discriminated for their skin colour, nowadays they are the ones who discriminate immigrants coming into Italy. Furthermore, race has also been used to establish the differences between southern and northern Italians in the context of internal migration.<sup>7</sup>

### *Marketing the “other”*

Women’s bodies are a matter of much controversy in Italy and are at the centre of a heated debate on their silencing and exploitation—in the media as well as in politics. The exploitation and vilification of women’s bodies in mainstream media, often combined with a problematic entanglement with politics, has revealed the pervasiveness of a sexist visual imagery which is bound to pass on and “naturalise” misogynistic attitudes. However, the invisibility and/or the misrepresentation of black women’s bodies seems doubly disturbing as it displays the convergence of sexist and racist attitudes. Contemporary representations of “otherness”, in fact, rely on racialised *and* gendered representations of black and migrant women which reveal the persistence of the Italian colonial legacy. Repeating a colonial trope thriving on exoticism and sexual exploitation, black women are largely objectified and commodified: in line with a colonial ideology employing images of black bodies to market exotic products such as coffee or chocolate, advertising still often conveys a controversial representation of black women’s bodies (see Figure 8.2).<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, skin colour is not the only marker of racism and discrimination in Italy, since ethnic, religious and cultural differences are significant components of processes of othering and exclusion, too.<sup>9</sup> Migrant women are in fact often trapped in stereotypes which are mainly informed by the spatial relations of their bodies with men and children or the elderly: while the collective image of Eastern European women is constructed either as the mature strong domestic worker

<sup>7</sup> See for instance Vito Teti, *La razza maledetta. Origini del pregiudizio antimeridionale in Italia* (Roma: Manifestolibri 1993), and Enrica Capussotti, “Nordisti contro Sudisti: Internal Migration and Racism in Turin, Italy: 1950s and 1960s,” *Italian Culture* 28, 2 (2010): 121–38.

<sup>8</sup> Sandra Ponzanesi, “Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices,” in *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), and Sabelli, “L’eredità del colonialismo nelle rappresentazioni contemporanee del corpo femminile nero.”

<sup>9</sup> See Luisa Passerini et al., eds., *Women Migrants From East To West: Gender, Mobility and Belonging in Contemporary Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).

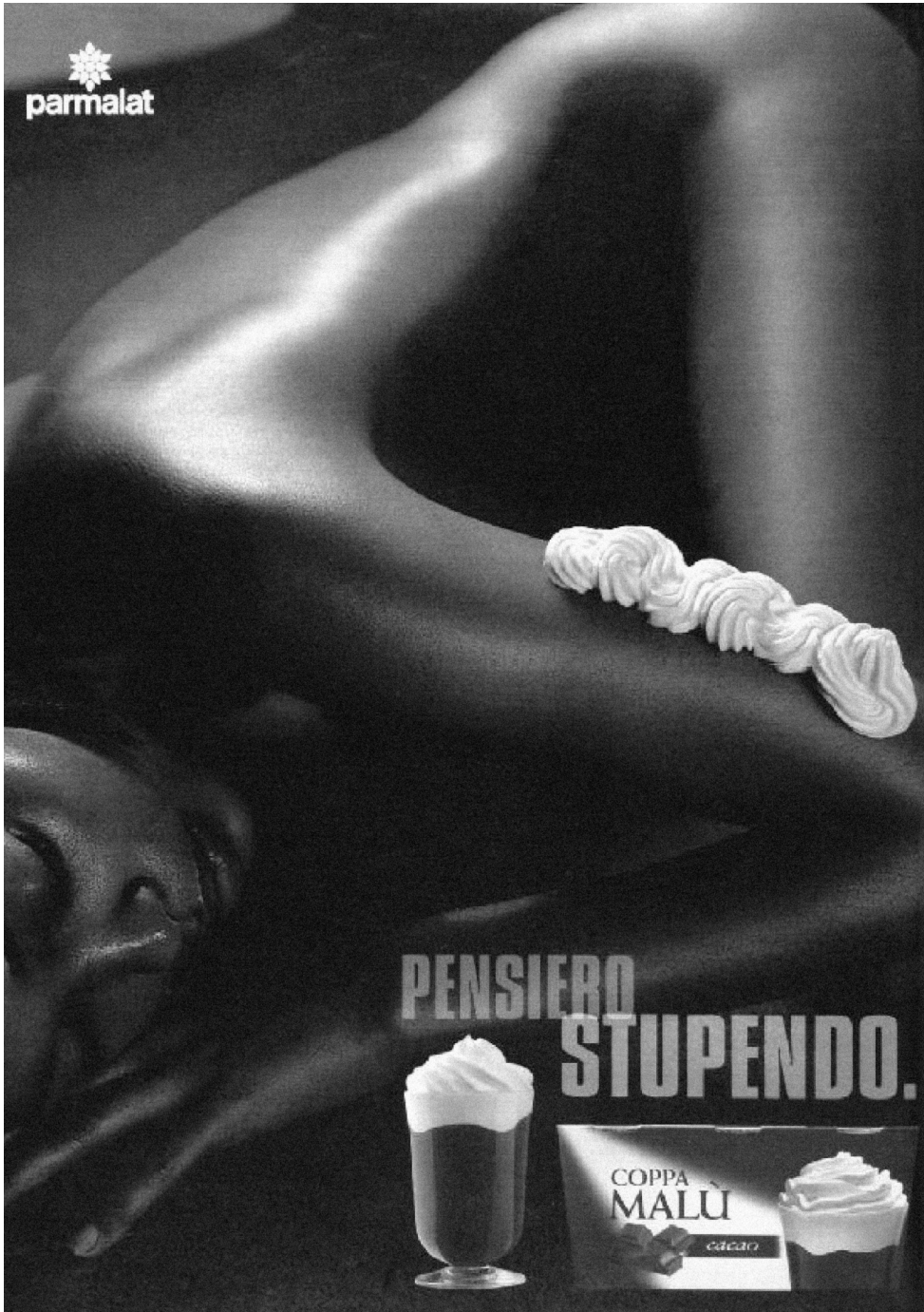


Figure 8.2: Advertising photo for the chocolate dessert Coppia Malù  
The text says: "Beautiful thought."  
(Originally published in Sandra Ponzanesi, "Beyond the Black Venus," 182.)

taking care of the elders, or as the young woman “stealing” someone else’s husband, the identity of African women often collides with the image of prostitutes.

On the other hand, women are still the ground on which national identity is negotiated, since they mark the border of the nation and are in charge of the preservation of ethnic identity, whiteness and Italianness, thus re-producing forms of inclusion and exclusion. It is also interesting to note that the organisers of the recent national women’s demonstration which took place on 13 February 2011 as a reaction to the sexual scandals that involved the former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, claiming that Italy is “not a country for women”, overtly referred to women’s role in the building of the nation. The chosen slogan was: “Let’s give birth to Italy again”—which completely overlooked any critical reference to the power relations inherent in this possibility to literally or metaphorically “reproduce” the nation.

By reclaiming their contribution to the process of nation-building, these women have ended up forgetting that Italian national identity has often coincided with a rigid colour-line that separated white Italians from the black “others”, and it has been characterised by the lack of any critical reflection about whiteness. As a matter of fact, the contemporary debate addressing sexism and the commodification of women’s bodies in Italy—originating from the political scandals that revealed the connection of sex, money and power—was not able to take into account the voices and experiences of black and/or immigrant women in Italy: as Chiara Bonfiglioli has pointed out, even feminist interventions were “mainly voiced from white, middle-class, heterosexual subject positions”, and “have failed to consider how bodies are simultaneously *gendered and racialized*, and how gendered violence exists at the intersections with other naturalized axes of power and privilege”.<sup>10</sup>

Blackness and Italianness have always been mutually exclusive terms, although the ones who are racialised, in postcolonial Italy, are no longer the African colonised, but the immigrants coming from the global South and East, now claiming to be the new Italian citizens, and the Romani people who are still experiencing massive discrimination throughout Europe. Despite the formal recognition of the European Union, Roma and Sinti have been the subject of brutal policies of forced assimilation, segregation, or deportation. Moreover, in recent times their stereotypical image has been manipulated as a source of crim-

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<sup>10</sup> Chiara Bonfiglioli, “Intersections of Racism and Sexism in Contemporary Italy: A Critical Cartography of Recent Feminist Debates,” *darkmatter* 6 (2010).

inality to be repressed by both right wing and centre left parties. The association with criminality, nomadism and, in the case of women, with the myth of the “kidnapping gypsy woman”, has resulted in an escalation of repressive policies and in Italian pressure to modify the EU Directive regulating the movement of European citizens, with the aim of reducing the number of Roma coming from the new member states. In fact, while a little under half of Romani people have Italian citizenship, others, especially those who migrated to Italy in recent decades, are mainly from former Yugoslavia and Romania.<sup>11</sup>

As a consequence of global migration flows, “[f]or the first time in its history ... new fantasies of whiteness are emerging in the Italian public discourse, revolving ... around the issue of Christianity as well as around the issue of Enlightenment”.<sup>12</sup> These “fantasies of whiteness” reinforce a supposedly homogeneous idea of national identity—with no correspondence either in the past or in contemporary reality—and are disturbingly expressed through a revival of colonial stereotypes and Islamophobic comments. Therefore, the recent celebrations of Italian unification, on 17 March 2011, represented a missed opportunity to re-discuss the notions of Italianness. The worrying celebration of Italian nationalism even by the Left, in opposition to the Northern League’s separatism, reveals nonetheless an incapacity to come to terms with the complexity of contemporary Italian identities that are rapidly changing as a result of immigration. However, while the debate on race and gender is still at the margin of the Italian public debate and academic culture, according to Romeo, “migrant and postmigrant writers” nowadays are the ones who are intersecting the discourse on race with such other categories of analysis as gender, religion, class and ethnicity, rewriting “not only literature but Italian national identity itself”.<sup>13</sup>

Instead of seizing the opportunity to reconsider the notion of national identity, accepting the challenge posed by these new Italian citizens, the Italian political debate on race and immigration in the last two decades has been intertwined with religious and gender issues. On the one hand, the presumed recognition of the rights of women, lesbians, gays, and transsexuals has been used as a distinguishing mark of the superiority of Italian democracy, as opposed

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Isabella Clough Marinaro and Nando Sigona, “Introduction, Anti-Gypsyism and the Politics of Exclusion: Roma and Sinti in Contemporary Italy,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 16, 5 (2011): 583–589.

<sup>12</sup> Sandro Mezzadra, “Anti-Racist Research and Practice in Italy,” *darkmatter* 6 (2010).

<sup>13</sup> Romeo, “Il colore bianco,” 88.



to non-Western cultures. On the other hand, right-wing parties have focused on the defence of the “Christian roots” of Europe, in order to justify anti-Islamic propaganda. In both cases, issues of gender and sexuality have been strategically used against immigrants in order to enable a nationalist, racist and identitarian rhetoric.<sup>14</sup> This strategy—that is functional to the definition of thresholds for inclusion and exclusion—does not take into account that Italy still ranks 74 in the global gender gap index,<sup>15</sup> and that the process of recognition of LGBTIQ rights is still on a bumpy road of delays and complicit silences.

### ***“Second generations” and the role of education***

In this light, it is easy to imagine that a gap exists in schools as regards issues of race and gender. Although postcolonial critique is slowly gaining ground in Italian academia—in particular in the departments of Anglo-American Studies, Comparative Literature, and History—there is still a consistent delay in addressing the intersections of race and gender in school and university curricula. It is only in the last two decades that publications, conferences, and translations are increasing in Italy, producing a fertile debate on these issues.<sup>16</sup>

In particular, primary and secondary education is still largely unaffected by the debate taking place in academia. The strong presence of immigrant pupils is perceived—mainly at an institutional level and among policy makers—as a generic threat to the school system, as non-Italian children are accused of holding back the other students. However, while it is true that newly-arrived children enrolled in Italian schools have little or no language competence, the political response to bridge this linguistic gap has resulted in a policy of a *de facto* separation between immigrant and non-immigrant students. In fact, as recently as 2008, the Minister of Education introduced a 30 percent cap on the number of non-Italian students per class, stating that the number of foreign students would have to be proportionate to the total number of students.

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<sup>14</sup> These issues have been at the core of the conference *In and Out of Sexual Democracies* held in Rome in 2011 (<http://www.facciamobrescia.org/content/view/516/136>).

<sup>15</sup> World Economic Forum, “The Global Gender Gap Record 2011,” <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-2011>: 130.

<sup>16</sup> See for instance Tiziana Morosetti, ed., “La letteratura postcoloniale italiana: dalla letteratura d’immigrazione all’incontro con l’altro,” *Quaderni del ’900* 4 (2004); Fabrizio De Donno and Neelam Srivastava, eds., “Colonial and Postcolonial Italy,” *Interventions* 8, 3 (2006); Derobertis, *Fuori centro*, and the panel on “Postcolonial Italy” organised at the EACLALS Conference held in Venice in 2008.

Apart from the predictable controversy triggered by such an overtly racist and discriminatory action, this law does not even take into consideration that about a half of the 630,000 “non-Italian” students are in fact children who, although born in Italy, are not eligible for Italian citizenship. While during colonialism “mixed race” children jeopardised the rigid colour hierarchy, today the so-called “second generations” are the ones who are questioning the legislative and institutional racism that founds citizenship on lineage rather than on *ius soli*.<sup>17</sup> As a result, even those Italian citizens who were born to immigrant parents are discriminated against by the ideological state apparatuses (school, police, media, etc.) as if they were strangers themselves.

In this context, as a recent report states, “what is considered a priority is the development of strategies to integrate as quickly as possible non-Italian students into the formal education system”.<sup>18</sup> Quite significantly, this desired “integration” covertly implies an a-problematic assimilation into the school system with no particular concern for the rediscussion of school syllabi, not to mention the recognition and renegotiation of persistent colonial power relations at play in the representation of otherness.

The rhetoric of military expansion and cultural submission which characterised Italian colonialism produced a great number of images for schoolbooks, advertisements and films, which contributed to the creation of a docile and exotic otherness to be conquered and ruled. However, as Ponzanesi has noted, the representation of the “other” has not been critically addressed since the period of the fascist propaganda,<sup>19</sup> thus producing a void in the debate on race and gender. As a matter of fact, school syllabi are still informed by an ethnocentric—or “Italo-centric”—perspective, unable to recognise the racist matrix of the Italian colonial experience and to connect it with the complex history of European imperialism. For example, examining history textbooks adopted by Italian schools since 1946, Giuliano Leoni and Andrea Tappi analyse the way the colonial experience has been revised in order to build Italian national identity and prestige in contrast

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<sup>17</sup> Derobertis, *Fuori centro*, 22–23.

<sup>18</sup> COSPE, “Combating Ethnic and Racial Discrimination and Promoting Equality Trends and Developments 2000–2005,” National Focal Point Italy, <http://www.cirdi.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/IT-special-study-on-trends-on-racism-and-xenophobia-italiano.pdf>: 33.

<sup>19</sup> Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture: Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (New York: SUNY Press 2004), 136.

with the prejudices and stereotypes attributed to the “other”: at least until the end of the 1980s, the representation of Italian colonisers as good-natured people (*italiani brava gente*), tireless workers and civilisers, goes together with silence and omissions about the atrocities they committed.<sup>20</sup>

If schoolbooks have only recently started to address issues of race and ethnicity in the construction of Italian national identity, their connection with gender has not still been recognised as a category of analysis and pedagogy by the educational system. Moreover, even if the feminist movement had a strong impact on Italian society during the 1970s, it has always focused on the concept of sexual difference, thus failing to account for the disparity among women in terms of race, ethnicity, class, and other categories of power.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, in terms of theoretical reflections, several public debates and publications have started to address Italian colonial history from a gendered perspective,<sup>22</sup> analysing the construction of race and the sexual policies of Mussolini’s imperial project.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, a new book series, significantly entitled *sessismo e razzismo* (sexism and racism), has just been inaugurated by the publisher Ediesse, in order to focus on the naturalisation of categories such as race and gender which contributes to fixing the boundaries of women’s bodies and national identities. The first book of the series—an introduction to the connections between racism and sexism from an anthropological and feminist perspective—has aptly translated the insights of black and postcolonial feminism into the Italian context.<sup>24</sup>

### ***New perspectives: Teaching race and gender today***

A lot of work remains to be done in order to introduce issues of race and gender into school syllabi and university curricula in Italy. Thus, any critical reflection on the implications of race and racism for the Italian past and present culture—

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<sup>20</sup> Giuliano Leoni and Andrea Tappi, “Pagine perse. Il colonialismo nei manuali di storia dal dopoguerra a oggi,” *Zapruder* 23 (2010): 156.

<sup>21</sup> According to philosopher Olivia Guaraldo, Italian feminism has built an “orientalised” representation of femininity that resists its own transformation. “Libertà e soggettività nel pensiero femminista: un bilancio,” *Dwf—donnawomanfemme* 3–4 (2011): 10.

<sup>22</sup> Giulietta Stefani, *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in Africa orientale: una storia di genere* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Nicoletta Poidimani, *Difendere la “razza”. Identità razziale e politiche sessuali nel progetto imperiale di Mussolini* (Roma: Sensibili alle Foglie, 2009); Chiara Bonfiglioli et al., eds., *La straniera. Informazioni, sito-bibliografie e ragionamenti su razzismo e sessismo* (Roma: Alegre, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Annamaria Rivera, *La Bella, la Bestia e l’Umano. Sessismo e razzismo senza escludere lo specismo* (Roma: Ediesse, 2010).

and their articulations with gender and sexism—is still dependent on the individual initiatives of school teachers and university professors, who face the new reality of intercultural classes. Some schoolteachers, for instance, have started to incorporate into the syllabus such texts as Amara Lakhous's *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio) which question the safe and fixed assumptions of Italianness. In addition, in the last few years there has been a flourishing of readings and meetings with migrant writers in schools.

Moreover, the commitment of some “migrant writers”<sup>25</sup> to children's literature is trying to bridge this institutional gap, embracing the didactic project of teaching their language and culture of origin to the new generations living in Italy and, at the same time, introducing Italian children to different cultures and languages. Educational projects like bilingual short poems and novel—such as those of the series “Mappamondi”, which have been published by Sinnos since 1991,<sup>26</sup> a publishing house specialised in intercultural education—are providing a new space for intercultural dialogue in schools, filling the vacuum between school curricula and the everyday reality of students. The interest of schools and libraries in these publications testifies to the necessity of overcoming the shortcomings of politics through the initiatives of writers, teachers and publishing houses. Furthermore, it is also worth mentioning that in 2006 one of the texts included in the secondary school national final examination was a quotation from an interview with Christiana de Caldas Brito, a Brazilian writer writing in Italian. Quite unexpectedly, interrupting a long tradition of quotations from (mainly) male and unquestionably Italian writers, Italian students were invited to write a short essay commenting on de Caldas Brito's statement on migration as being an ongoing and universal experience. However, although this might be seen as a timid attempt to breach the monolithic curriculum of the Italian school system, much work still needs to be done.

We would like to conclude with an illustration of the “good practices” that we consider to be the first step towards deconstructing the boundaries of cultural

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<sup>25</sup> The definition “migrant writers”, introduced to refer to writers of immigrant background, has produced a fertile debate in Italian literary criticism; some have questioned whether it is worth using a label that categorises writers into “natives” and “migrants”. Nevertheless, we consider it useful in this context to underline these writers' contribution to decolonising and renewing the Italian language and literary canon. See Armando Gnisci, *La letteratura italiana della migrazione* (Roma: Lilith, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> See Francesca Cosenza, “In giro per mappamondi tra scrittori migranti e generazione che sale,” *El Ghibli* 22, 5 (2008).

and national belonging and towards transforming the Italian educational system into an open space for the comparison of race and gender differences. We see these practices as valuable examples that will have to be emulated and multiplied, in order to redefine school curricula and educational methodologies and with the aim of recognising the ongoing transformations that are rapidly modifying the old notion of Italianness as mono-cultural and mono-colour. The contemporary reality of intercultural classes is already challenging the boundaries that divide those who have always been considered “strangers” because of their skin colour from those who can have access to citizenship rights. This is an opportunity that the educational system must not miss.

### *Implications for teaching*

The combination of feminist pedagogy with an anti-racist pedagogy is, in our view, a crucial step in a country that, in the 2011 Amnesty International report, was described as still grappling with intolerance and discrimination on grounds of ethnic and gender identity.<sup>27</sup> In line with the need to bridge the gap between theoretical and critical approaches and educational practices, the text focuses on the importance of understanding the construction of gendered and racialised identities through discursive practices, encouraging a more gender- and race-conscious perspective in the classroom.

The present chapter can be used in secondary schools to encourage a critical reflection on the production of sexist and racist attitudes, thereby dismantling their supposed “naturalness” and harmlessness. By offering an overview of the existing critical debate on the subject, this chapter seeks to intersect historical, social and political perspectives with educational practices aimed at boosting awareness and discussion in the classroom as to the ways in which race and gender are dealt with, both by the school system and by society at large. In particular, the chapter may stimulate and develop discussion in the classroom as to naturalised images and verbal expressions which contribute to generating oppressive discourses, inviting a reconsideration of the socio-historical contexts that created them. The text may thus encourage a reflection on how gendered and racialised stereotypes informed by a colonial mentality outlive colonialism.

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<sup>27</sup> Amnesty International, “Annual Report 2001,” <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/italy/report-2011>.

Investigating the ways in which the legacy of Italian colonialism affects everyday practices of representation, students may focus on the violence of language and representation in order to unearth the interconnected complicity of racism and sexism. For instance, students may find it useful to confront the visual material produced during the colonial period, from postcards to posters and advertisements, in order to distinguish the various biased strategies of representation and trace their persistence in contemporary Italy. Another interesting approach may be to suggest a linguistic exploration of words and expressions marked by racist and sexist overtones which originate in the colonial period, thus deconstructing their apparent “neutrality”.

Generating new knowledge about and producing a critical interrogation of the complex interconnections of race and gender is of crucial importance, especially in a country facing a relatively recent multicultural reality. In this light, literature provides valuable tools to identify new teaching approaches in the Italian school system. In particular, the new perspectives opened up by the use of texts by “migrant and postmigrant writers” in the classroom will undoubtedly contribute to contrast and resist the normalising images as regards sexual and national identities in Italy, offering the new generations a de-centred perspective, which will contribute to the process of undoing the connections between whiteness and Italianness, masculinity and nationalism, blood and citizenship.

This approach certainly represents a challenge for both the students and the teachers, generating a set of interrelated questions. Can they identify with the struggle for recognition and with the search for identity most of these writers and their characters perform? What is their experience of gender and/or racial discrimination? How do they react to everyday practices of oppression, both at a personal and at an institutional level? A further element of analysis may be the impact of contemporary migration on notions of Italian subjectivity. How has migration reshaped national identities? How does multiculturalism produce new stereotypes? And, further, how does it affect and challenge biased practices of representation?

Challenging the politics of domination, students are encouraged to explore and interrogate discursive practices of racial and gender oppression, triggering their awareness of these issues and developing a critical thinking in relation to their own experience.

## **Questions**

1. How does the legacy of Italian colonialism impact on everyday practices of representation?
2. How does the continuing influence of Italy's repressed colonial history contribute to the silencing or misrepresentation of otherness in the school system?
3. What are the new perspectives opened up by the use of texts by "migrant writers" in the classroom in order to contrast and resist the normalising images as regards sexual and national identities in Italy?

## **Assignments**

1. Does your country have an official colonial history authorised by the government? In the light of discussion in teaching race and gender in Italy, ask yourself if there is a critical debate on the subject. Survey the textbooks used in your country and explore the ways in which race and gender are dealt with in the classroom.
2. Analyse Figure 8.1 and compare it with Figure 8.2. Discuss the differences and/or similarities between official and public, past and present, visual representations of race and gender.
3. Can you identify new teaching approaches (i.e. the use of sources from "post-colonial" writers) that are being used for producing new knowledge and a critical interrogation of the interconnections of race and gender in the school system of your country?

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