L'Italiano Negro

Gaia Giuliani

a University of Bologna, Italy

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L’ITALIANO NEGRO
The Politics of Colour in Early Twentieth-Century Italy

Gaia Giuliani
University of Bologna, Italy

I discuss the complicated process of the early twentieth-century construction of the multifaceted, certainly controversial and mostly unspoken, Italian idea of whiteness. In order to capture the wide range of representations and self-representations that converged in unified Italy’s racialized identity politics, I analyse the intertwined and continuous rearticulation of the processes of altero- and auto-referential racialization (as articulated by Colette Guillaumin in 1972), that occurred in a span of time that covers Liberal Italy and early Fascism (1870s–1936). In particular, I pay attention to continuities and discontinuities between the two historical phases in order to grasp the very peculiarities of a long-term construction of Italianness in terms of ‘unspoken whiteness’. The ‘unspoken’ character of this major version of ‘Italianità’ derives from the altero-referential nature of both Liberal and Fascist Italy’s racialization. With altero-referential racism I refer to a system of racialization that is centred on the Other. In both Liberal Italy and Fascism, the assignment of a precise colour (from a darker nuance than white, to black) to the internal/colonial Other implicitly produces the racial identity of the Self. This ‘continuity’ between Liberal and Fascist racializations highlights the existing discontinuity between that period and late Fascism (1936–45). In line with scholars like Barbara Sorgoni, Giulia Barrera, Roberto Maiocchi, Aaron Gillette and Olindo de Napoli, I consider the first period as sharply distinguished from the one following, which was interventional, 2013
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characterized by that claim of Aryanness (1936–45) that would be at the core of Fascist discourse on race from 1936 to 1937. This second phase would be characterized by a decidedly auto-referential racialization that claimed racial purity and self-consistency as the mark of the incommensurability between Italian racial identity and inferior racialized groups.

In this essay I discuss the complicated process of the early twentieth-century construction of the multifaceted, certainly controversial and mostly unspoken, Italian idea of whiteness. In order to capture the wide range of representations and self-representations that converged in unified Italy’s racialized identity politics, I analyse the intertwined and continuous rear ticulation of the processes of altero- and auto-referential racialization (Guillaumin 1995: 29–60), that occurred in an arch of time that covers Liberal Italy and early Fascism (1870s–1936). In particular, I will pay attention to continuities and discontinuities between the two historical phases in order to grasp the very peculiarities of a long-term construction of Italianness in terms of ‘unspoken whiteness’, where the ‘unspoken nature’ of Italian whiteness refers to the Italians’ peripheral racial self-assignment in terms of a whiteness that is mostly unmarked and/or associated to the term ‘Mediterraneanness’. The ‘unspoken’ character of this major version of Italianità derives from the altero-referential nature of both Liberal and Fascist Italy’s racialization. With altero-referential racism I will refer to a system of racialization that is centred on the Other. ‘A fundamental trait of such a system is the occultation of the Self, of which people have no spontaneous awareness’ (Guillaumin 1995: 50–1). In both Liberal Italy and Fascism, the assignment of a precise colour (from a darker nuance than white, to black) to the internal/colonial Other implicitly produces the racial identity of the Self. Here Colette Guillaumin’s categories will help to understand the intrinsic peculiarity of a construction of the Self ‘by contrast’, as argued by Michele Nani (2006), that continued from Liberal Italy to Fascism, and that operated in racially unifying a nation that, differently from other western and European national contexts, was conceived as ‘impossible to internally homogenize’. ¹

This ‘continuity’ between Liberal and Fascist racializations highlights the existing discontinuity between that period and late Fascism (1936–1945). In line with scholars like Barbara Sòrgoni (2002: 41), Aaron Gillette (2002: 35–153), Giulia Barrera (2003: 81–3), Roberto Maiocchi (2004: 140) and Olindo de Napoli (2009: 86), I consider that earlier historical time as sharply distinguished from the one following, characterized by that claim of Aryanness (1936–1945) that would be at the core of Fascist discourse on race from 1936 to 1937. This second phase would be characterized by a decided auto-referential racialization that claimed racial purity and

¹ I refer here to that scientific literature which, from inside Italy to northern Europe, the United States and Australia, saw Italy as irremediably divided into radically separated races: some examples are Alfredo Niceforo, Scipio Sighele and

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self-consistency as the mark of the incommensurability between Italian racial identity and inferior racialized groups.

In terms of discontinuities, I point out the shift from a representation of Italian whiteness in Liberal Italy as the result of the symbolic elision of (non-white) southerners from the racialized representation of the national society to the Fascist concept of *stirpe italica* (in the formulation provided by Nicola Pende). In my opinion, the concept of locating blackness outside the national borders, fixing Italian Mediterraneanness as different from that of the colonized African Mediterraneans, and appealing to Romanness, helped reinclude all the supposed Italian racial differences in a single and national racial identity. In so doing, it allowed southerners to become not just a constitutive part of the Italian people, but the very cradle of the ‘new Italian’, as the quintessence of its Mediterraneanness. At that time, southern Italians’ ‘whitened’ Mediterraneanness, which was celebrated as the highest achievement of Fascism, was claimed to be the cipher of Italy’s historical and cultural superiority over the colonized Other and its consequent equality with the other European nations.

The displacement of blackness operated by Fascism is engaged here through an investigation of both the resignification of Italian femininity as repository of the purity and soundness of the *stirpe italica* and its distinction from that of the colonized woman. A study of the ‘nationalization of Italian women’ as the outcome of their opposition to the colonized results is crucial in the comprehension of the balance between auto-referential and altero-referential racialization operating in the Fascist definition of Italians as Roman Mediterraneans. This balance will reveal the long-term construction of Italianness as grounded in the tension between proximity and distinction between becoming-white Italians and the black or browner Other (whether southerner or colonized) that is pivotal in that claim of Mediterraneanness that is the distinctive feature of Italian whiteness (for an extended discussion of these themes, see Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop 2013: 21–66).

### From Political Unification to the *stirpe italica*

At the beginning of twentieth century the project of a unified Italy was far from being accomplished. This was not only because Italy still needed to establish its boundaries and organize its power over the peninsula’s internal territories and populations (Banti 2000: 23–6). It is also because Italy lacked a strong and universally embodied national identity. In fact, it lacked both a commonly accepted and legally sanctioned idea of national belonging and, most importantly in the age of the triumph of nations, a cultural and, very often formalized, racial identity.
Discursively, the failure in unifying the country was primarily attributed to the widespread idea that rural areas needed a cultural, social and technological revolution in terms of capitalist organization and production, the Meridione being difficult or impossible to absorb (on the complicated dualism between ‘North’ and ‘South’, see Dickie 1999: 1–23). In the case of the Meridione, this idea was based on the assumption, corroborated by politicians, intellectuals and scientists like Giuseppe Sergi, Pasquale Rossi, Cesare Lombroso and Alfredo Niceforo, that the South’s social organization, habits and forms of production were the result of a different civilization (still attached to the former, allegedly premodern, Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies [Wong 2006: 11–15]) and/or of a different temper. Its ‘temper’ was defined by transnational raciolologies as deterministically attached to the influence of those Arabic (Semitic) or ‘African’ (Hamitic) races that were also composing the racial background of the newly colonized populations (1870s–1890s) (Lombroso 2006; Niceforo 1898; Sergi 1898, 1908; Rossi 1898; for critical accounts, see Teti 1993; Wong 2006: 47–70; Pugliese 2008; Sörgoni 2003a).

The implicit or explicit reference to southerners as belonging to a different racial stock was operated by social Darwinism-based anti-Meridionalist theories and was globally confirmed by the classifications of immigration officials. As in a tautological circle, from the southerners’ racial inferiority/social dangerousness derived their irreducibility to the Italian laws. In turn, this irreducibility produced the emigration of subjects who were considered by receiving states as dangerous to their own social system and inadaptable to their way of life (Wong 2006: 121–4; Giuliani 2010: 130–3). Both at home and abroad, the forms of discrimination and segregation that Italian ‘black’ southerners experienced induced an obstruction of southerners’ representation and self-representation as ‘Italian’ and ‘white’ (for an extensive bibliography, see Giuliani 2010). This obstruction came to be further reinforced after the Italian colonial endeavour took place: the description of the irreducible southerner, unable to bend himself to the Liberal idea of Italianness and join the larger racial identity constructed through the imperial endeavour, was maligned in Italian and international social Darwinist literature (1880s) with the same stereotypes used to describe the African colonized (Wong 2006: 94–6; Nani 2006: 97–115; Schneider 1998: 8).

As Nani (2006: 17) has argued, southerners’ obstruction was not accidental: it was, at the very core of the post-unification nation’s identity, grounded on a ‘very restrictive’ idea of national belonging that was primarily obtained ‘by contrast’. The sovereign subject was ‘deduced’ as superior (whiter) through its opposition to the internal (Meridione; Jewish) and the external Other (the colonized). In reference to the external Other, Sörgoni, Ponzanesi and Barrera have highlighted that since the very beginning of Italian
colonization (1870s), racialized self-representation operated in terms of a sharp distinction between the colonizer and its colonized, the latter signified as coloured—backward. This distinction was articulated through the crucial scientific purport of Italian positivist anthropological, ethnological and literary studies, which also played a significant role in defining the internal Other (il Meridione). In the case of the internal colour line, the whitening process ‘by contrast’ corresponded mostly to the line dividing urbanized petite bourgeoisie and rural pre- or non-capitalist peasantry. Consequently, it entailed an effort to include—moralizing and civilizing (Wong 2006: 17–22)—rural and southern populations and their territories into a capitalist way of production and the State’s Law, conceived as unique conditions of their future emancipation from backwardness/brownness. Those doomed to backwardness/brownness were those who were considered as non-absorbable (the Lombrosian natural born criminals) into the social order: they needed thus to be excluded/expelled or contained as (potentially) dangerous subjects. In this picture, the unabsorbable southerner—the stereotypical southerner—functioned precisely as the necessary term that defined the superiority of the North: ‘the racial superiority of the North depended on the inferiority of the South. The self was defined in relation to the other’ (Wong 2006: 71). They functioned as the term that contrastively pictures the ‘imagined’ nation—depicted ‘by the exclusion of the alien or unpatriotic, by the projection of Others’ (Dickie 1999: 18) who embodied the ‘degeneration’ and ‘indolence’ of Italy (Patriarca 2010: 7, 14).

This construction ‘by contrast’ was needed for the rehabilitation of a ‘healthy part of Italian society’ in terms of the northern construction of European identity that relegated the entirety of Italy as the ‘exotic and even alien South’ of Europe. As the pro-Aryan thesis scientists attested (see the controversy between ‘Mediterraneans’ and ‘Aryanists’ in Mantovani 2004), this view was strongly based on positivist and racialist arguments, and as Nelson Moe (2002) reminds us, on a larger cultural production and on imaginaries grounded, since the eighteenth century, on the idea of an irremediable cultural and historical divide between ‘Europe’ and the Mediterranean, where Italy embodied ‘the South’. By separating ‘good’ from ‘bad seeds’, dividing the growing Italian urban bourgeoisie from the ‘decadent’ Meridione and attaching it to the bourgeois culture of central and northern Europe, anti-southernism could move the ‘colour line’ drawn by this discourse and include Italians in Europe.

An inclusive project of unifying the country in cultural, political and even racial terms came to be strongly (at least discursively) enhanced under the Fascist regime. If the military colonial enterprise (1880s–1920s) had first spread an idea of homeland among southerners who were employed as colonial soldiers (Wong 2006: 83–92), it was Fascism that shaped an all-inclusive idea of national belonging. Until the end of the
First World War, this idea was still timidly articulated and was only shared and supported in a few areas of the peninsula. Fascism reinforced, among common people as well as intellectuals and politicians, an idea of nationhood that included the South as an inherent part of the national and imperial project.

The peculiar contribution to the cultural unification that early Fascism provided consisted of constructing and forcibly spreading a strong nationalist ideology focused on anti-urbanism, pro-natalism and virility, patriarchy, obedience and faithfulness to the regime (together with family and nation). This ideology proved able to reconcile (more symbolically than materially) the many ‘Italies’ existing within the national boundaries. This ideological operation fully included the Meridione by virtue of the notion that it would serve as the cradle of the ‘New Italian’ within the frame of what can be considered as the Fascist conservative way of progress. In symbolically including the South and silencing, more than solving, the Questione Meridionale, Fascism thought itself able to accomplish the Italian national project.

Fascism rearticulated the former disappointment with southerners’ supposed inability to progress into a well-balanced ideological paradigm where warfare, industrial production and urban and infrastructural development went together with rural family life and agricultural production. The first was described as necessary to the national struggle for world power, while the second was depicted as the ‘Italian model’, the antidote to urban corruption. This idea of urban corruption was pretty common in the (Italian as well as European) conservative argument: it connected (immoral) urbanism to the loss of traditional bias, decay of virility and a confusion of gender roles caused by unnatural, immoral and asocial behaviours. Urbanism embodied, indeed, ‘the emasculating elements of modernity… that corresponded to an actual regression of the human being on the evolutionary scale’ (Bellassai 2005: 315; see also Giuliani 2007: 286–7). The time of bourgeois (anti-family, anti-traditional and intellectualist) and pro-urban claims was over: the Fascist ‘revolution’ needed to be translated to the countryside, and to take the rural model of morality and virility as its own (Duncan 2005: 99).

At the end of the 1920s, emigration valorization (valorizzazione dell’emigrazione [Tosi 2002: 445], internal migration for the (proclaimed but never realized) ruralization of Italy, and Mussolini’s internal solution for the demographic problem (movement and employment of population, pro-natalist measures) progressively replaced a free emigration approach. The ‘demographic battle’ began (1927–43): la forza sta nel numero. The rural world – not just in the South – was given the strategic role of producing hands needed to make the nation wealthy and powerful both in times of peace and war and to reproduce the Fascist Revolution thus far.
According to conservative Catholicism, whose influence on the Fascist regime was significant, especially with reference to matters of sexuality and race, it would inspire fair sexual, familial and social behaviour in the whole population. In racial terms, the movement of populations and Italy’s ruralization were meant to build up internal colonies that would function as true human nurseries from which would spring ‘a race of Italians selected and tested for productivity and fertility’ (Pende 1933: 241).

‘Italians were to be converted into a race of warriors and conquerors’ (Gillette 2002: 53). The new (male) citizen had to be of *stirpe proletaria, maschia, rivoluzionaria e patriotica* (proletarian, virile, revolutionary and patriotic kinship), where his colour was never explicitly mentioned, and the reference to *stirpe* (kinship), *ceppo razziale* (racial stock) and *razza* (race) was fuzzy and confused. It drew from the Italian nationalists’ claim of a nation as a living organism, where nation, race and *stirpe* were alternately used to define ‘the infinite series of generations of which the individuals are only transient elements’, to quote from Mussolini himself and the preamble of the 1921 Fascist programme (quoted in Gillette 2002: 38–9).

This was effectively in line with the ‘nationalization by contrast’ operated by the Liberal period, where a racialized self-representation was made through its difference from the colonial Other. But the shift operated by Fascism clearly refused its whitening strategies. Fascism operated instead a black–white oppositional strategy that rehabilitated less white Southerners, making them white. The opposition between black and white, where black is located totally outside the national boundaries, allowed Fascism eventually to whiten the internal black. To consolidate this view, Fascism needed to wipe out the evidence of southerners’ alleged brownness, from both a symbolic (as heirs of ancient Romans; Pende 1933: 218–26) and a political point of view (stopping mass emigration and investing in infrastructure, anti-poverty reforms and mass sanitization).

**The Long Way from Brown to White**

To legitimize discursively the whitening project, the regime needed to build up a strong, double-featured, racialized identity that described Italians as white and Mediterranean. They needed to reverse the negative meaning attached to Mediterraneanness and present it as a positive feature. Against all globally diffused assumptions on the physical or genetic distance between North and South, this Fascist whitening strategy needed to reappraise the existing transnational racialized ideoscapes – or ‘raciologies’ – and forge a completely new one. This new raciology had to be palatable for Italians; that is, it needed to conform to Italian cultural and religious traditions, and it

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4 On this and the position of the Church on ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenics, see Padre Gemelli (one of the most important theorists) and Corrado Gini and Serafino Patellani (‘nativist’ eugenics). See especially his writings published on ‘religion and eugenics’ in the conference proceedings of the *Primo congresso di eugenetica sociale. Milano 20–23 settembre 1924*, Milano Reale società d’igiene, 1924. In general on Gemelli, see Sticco (1974). On the expectations of the Catholic Church for the Fascist regime and against the modernist tendencies of Liberal Italy, see Miccoli (1985: 86–9, 112–30).

5 On the accordance between pro-natalist and positive eugenics between the Church and some important Fascist theorists, see Ipsen (1996: 75–8), but also Lombardi-Diop (2005) and Maiocchi (1999: 26–40). See
needed to be internationally acceptable; that is, consistent with internationally spread racioligies.

From among a number of theories, the work of Nicola Pende met all the requirements: repudiating Nordicism in line with Giuseppe Sergi, it included and framed all typological differences internal to the so-called razza italica into an internationally acceptable theory of the ‘human biotypology’ and provided a scientific foundation to the government project of racial clearing (bonifica della razza) based on the Fascist principle of the primacy of the national community over individuals. In particular, Pende stayed in line with the Liberal Italian reception of social Darwinism (Spencer and Galton) that, along with the criminal anthropology of Lombroso, had imposed for more than thirty years the theory of the human inheritance of phenotypical traits and social attitudes. This was the Italian model of eugenics theorized by Serafino Patellani, Cesare Artom and, most importantly, Giuseppe Sergi, that refused any eugenicist ‘negative’ approach (à la Mendel) as well as any strictly genetic notion of human behaviour. They privileged the notion of ‘contextual’ influence, positing the possibility of state interventions into conditions and factors of ‘social degeneration’ (Pancaldi 1983: 263–86; Pogliano 2000: 429). Sergi, in particular, whose influence also held great sway under Fascism, systematized a craniometrical, anthropological, archeological, linguistic and philological theory of Italic kinship as an evolved offspring originating from the Mediterranean type. His theory conceived the latter as opposed to the Aryan (Ario) who ‘invaded Northern Europe and part of Northern Italy, Greece and Spain solely’ and who was essentially ‘barbarous’ (Sergi 1908: 551, 553, 571), and thus represented important evidence of the grounding of Fascist racism up to the late 1930s in Liberal racist–positivist articulations. In Pende’s words: the ‘razza italica is and needs to remain Meditarrean; in fact, over thousands of years, despite its vast crossbreeding with a number of other racial kinships [stirpi], it maintains the ancient Mediterranean Italics’ blood, which since prehistoric times constituted the anthropological ground of the Peninsula’ (1933: 212–13). In this conception – at the core of Fascist demographic and racial policies of the 1930s – stirpi referred to a supposed composite group of people who were descendants of the populations subject to the Romans and composed of the local component of their ancient empire. This group was considered racially self-consistent by virtue of its common story. The terms stirpe and stirpi (singular and plural) were deployed in Fascism’s racist discourse as referring to a set of stirpi unified in a sole stirpe, the latter sometimes substituted with the term ‘race’ (see also Maiocchi 2004: 152).
Grounded on the idea of ‘fruitful interbreeds originating a Nation’s force and beauty’, this theory inaugurated the subtle distinction between kinship and race that allowed the latter to be seen as the unifying term that included all differences and neutralized their disaggregating power. The theory of race as a set of kinships would have unified the country biologically by invoking a common great ancestry (Bellassai 2005: 322).

From these very general, commonly and confusedly accepted insights in racial theories and distinctions, theories like Pende’s produced two important theoretical shifts towards a systematization of a scientifically more coherent and politically suitable Italian racial identity. First, the razza Italica came to be the most positive and powerful result of the encroachment between Mediterranean racial influences for two reasons: (1) these influences are located in a Great Past that distinguishes and identifies them as biologically and historically superior to their contemporary heirs (Fuller 2005: 137); (2) the interbreeding between those Mediterraneans and ancient Romans into a new race, whose superiority was an indisputable fact testified by its imperial grandeur, warfare skills, legal system and artistic, literary and scientific achievements, made it superior to each of its single components, whose unfitness consequently could not escape degeneration or stagnation (on the racial degeneration of inferior Mediterraneans, see Sòrgoni 2003a). Second, this superiority, as the result of an ancestral encroachment, needed to be biologically preserved: Pende, like the whole intellectual community and the regime, thought that only an accurate bio-politics could preserve and reinforce this sui generis racial identity (see the fundamental paragraph in Pende 1933: 98, but also and more importantly 256–7; for a critical insight, see Maiocchi 2004: 146–53).

As Pende put it at a conference in Nice on 5 January 1934:

The true destiny of the cirum-Mediterranean peoples is to reconstitute the ‘Latin Mediterranean spiritual unity’, from one side of the Mediterranean to the other, a Mediterranean unity that can cause the renewed brilliance of the first great and multi-sided civilization that from the eastern Mediterranean through Greece and Rome and our Renaissance has paved the way for humanity at all times with its great and truly human, that is ethnic, principles. (quoted in Gillette 2002: 48)

Accordingly, Libyans were considered brothers of a sort, for a number of racial and historical reasons; Ethiopians were the noblest of the Hamitics (Sòrgoni 2002: 43), Somalis were of the Semitic type, and Eritreans were Christians. Nonetheless, they could be colonized because their grandeur is located in the past, which made them backward compared to the more progressed Italians. They were thus suitable for a fraternal guide, such as the Fascist empire, who would help them towards a further stage of racial, political and cultural evolution. This fraternal guide also included a ‘cultural’ enhancement of both

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7 The word purity is thus very rarely mentioned: politicians and scientists refer instead to the integrity and soundness of the razza italica.

8 Libya had been considered since 1911 as ‘already part of Italy’ because of the Roman annexation of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica as the imperial province of Libya and the strong cultural and commercial interchange between the two shores of the Mediterranean (see Schiavulli 2009: 19); in addition, as a number of anthropologists had argued, Berbers and Libyans were part of the Caucasian race of the Euro-African species (e.g. Sergi 1895: 43–9; see Wong 2006: 101).
these and more distant races via sexual contact. The intimate relationship between colonizer and colonized was seen as the evident mark of both the effort of a superior nation in enhancing the ‘cultural’ equipment of its inferior relative, and the flourishing sexual activity of virile Italians (Stefani 2008: 40–5). However, while sexual intercourse between the Italic ‘new man’ and colonized women was unofficially tolerated (until 1936–7) – in Libya as well as Eritrea and Somalia – in order to manifest the Italian mission as paternal guide, the original national stock needed to be safeguarded and internally reproduced. The factory for its reproduction had thus to be protected and disciplined in order to reinforce it and make it stronger than that of the inferior races.

Officially, since 1922, Italian women had been assigned the role of repository of the Italian kinship’s ‘integrity and soundness’ (integrità e sanità della stirpe),9 and had become the object of a series of policies and institutions (including the Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia created in 1925) aimed at preserving their health and procreative capacity, thus restricting and severely punishing any misconduct or indecent behaviour. Now, their role and nature also needed to be explicitly articulated as opposed to that of colonized women. As Radhika Mohanram (2007: 26–57) argues for other cases, in Italy, the white female body marked the boundary separating purity and impurity, morality and immorality, nation and race’s regeneration and degeneration. In a way, it was meant to incorporate the distinction between nation and empire, between the Italian people and the colonial subject. This is clearly confirmed by doctors’, biologists’ and demographers’ activity throughout the regime aimed at preserving national women’s ‘blood’ (among them, Giorgio Chiurco, Alessandro Ghigi, Leone Franzoi, Corrado Gini and Domenico Simoncelli; see Sòrgoni 1998: 163). It is also testified by the differences that existed in Fascist policies in matters of female sexuality, marriage and reproduction approved in Italy and its colonies. In fact, while for Italian white women these policies were becoming more and more restrictive in terms of marriage-centred rules of conduct, colonized black women could unofficially be kept as concubines (mostly in Eritrea) and ‘madames’ until 1937 (Gabrielli 1996; Sòrgoni 1998: 58–71; Iyob 2000: 217–38; Barrera 2002: 101). The informal excuse that the regime produced to tolerate this was, once again, the alleged proximity–difference between the colonizer and the colonized, which had been maintained since the Liberal period: ‘they’ were similar but inferior – they thus needed to be (biologically) whitened (‘elevated’ to a higher stage of progress by the older brother simply through intimate contact or companionship with him). The outside-the-marriage contact between them could remind Italians of that indisputable fact.

Italian women’s nature and role for the nation needed to be differentiated from those of black women, and their claimed Mediterraneanness in terms of uncontrolled passions and sexual appetite reappraised as a positive feature of the nation as a whole.10 Mediterraneanness needed to become a solid

9 See the Italian penal code, Title X, articles 545–55, approved in 1930 and abrogated in 1978.

10 For an important graphic expression of this imaginary, see the weekly review La Donna Fascista. Giornale delle organizzazioni femminili del PNF (1935–43), the cover of which displays precisely that mixture of ruralism, familism, morality and submission to patriarchy and Fascism that conveyed the Fascist conception of the Mediterranean–Italic woman, while precise references to how Italian women could preserve racial integrity through proper behaviour served to reinforce a race-based understanding of the Mediterranean-Italic identity.
component of the racial background of the ‘new Italian’, consistent with the needs of the national community and functional to the soundness and integrity of its racial identity.\footnote{11}

To do so, the Italian ‘Black Venus’ needed to become even blacker than she was traditionally conceived,\footnote{12} while the Italian woman, as the repository of the new Italian’s honour and purity, was constrained in a rigidly disciplined patriarchal and matrimonial, reproduction-centred and eugenicist model of life (de Grazia \textit{2002}) that would elevate her to a more civilized – whiter – status. To both intransigent Catholicism and Fascist eugenicists (Pogliano \textit{1984, 2000}; Maiocchi \textit{1999:7–33}), sexual habits in the countryside and the closure typical of rural communities, together with a ‘qualitative and quantitative model of reproduction’ (Maiocchi \textit{2004: 140–5}), made peasant society the perfect model. It (\textit{i camerati rurali}) appeared as opposed to the corrupted (and infertile) metropolitan communities as well as so-called primitive (colonial) societies, where decreasing birth rates, \textit{de facto} marriage, free sexual habits, concubinage and prostitution were prevalent (Loffredo \textit{1938}). This model of woman would have substantiated that ‘youth’s revolution’ (\textit{la rivoluzione dei giovani}) theorized by Corrado Gini (Maiocchi \textit{2004: 154–63}) that transformed Italy into a beautiful, virile, athletic, rural, healthy, strong and dynamic nation, prolific both at home and in the overseas colonies (Ben-Ghiat \textit{2001: 93–122}).\footnote{13}

In this particular articulation of whiteness–Italianness as Mediterraneanness, rural and southern housewives (\textit{le massaie rurali}), the symbol of that sensuality and fecundity that in Liberal Italy were considered symptomatic of backwardness and unmasterability, were both domesticated and celebrated as part of the Italian sexual/racial exception. This is particularly evident in Pende’s \textit{Bonifica} where he dedicates more than a fourth of the book to women’s ideal conduct as Italic kinship’s propagators. The model to follow is once again the nationalized and Fascistized rural \textit{massaia}. Against the feminized bourgeois and emancipated woman of the Liberal Age, who ‘played masculine sports like skiing, bicycling, alpinism, horse-racing’, Fascist women had to think first of all of their ‘hearth and ovaries, kids and husbands’ (Pende \textit{1933: 204}). The \textit{massaie rurali} were the best expression of a particular signification of Mediterraneanness that combined opposite polarities like passion and family, darkness (blackness) and whiteness, immorality and morality, uncontrolled feelings and discipline.

Let’s prepare the future women who are Romanly \textit{romanamente} Italians, who are solid and not infatuated by feminine modernism.

A complete woman is neither just a body, nor a soul, but \textit{instinct}, \textit{sentiment} and \textit{female intellect} together, [she] as a wife and a mother [is] the necessary and indispensable fulfilment of the male body and spirit.
Women who are morally Christian, but, nonetheless, normal in their instinct, without timidity and anti-natural psychological repressions. (Pende 1933: 107, 110, 120; my translation)

The conjunction with the despised rural black of the Liberal period is thus maintained, but a sharp distinction is also made. The difference between white and black females lies in the fact that, in this picture, Italian darkness becomes a sort of archetypical characteristic related to a particular model of beauty and femininity that is traced back to the iconography of Roman gods and goddesses. This direct link to the Roman past, which elevates the Mediterraneanness of Italians to the rationality and force of the archetypical Roman, is also represented as corroborated and reinforced through the disciplining activity of the regime itself.

As Sandro Bellassai (2005) and Ruth Ben-Ghiat have outlined, Fascist masculinity signalled a (oppositional) rupture with the Liberal bourgeois idea of masculinity – sober, contained, refined and sophisticated. The forging of this masculinity was particularly enhanced through the Ethiopian conquest (Ben-Ghiat 2001: 123–30; for the Fascist idea of masculinity and imperialism as opposed to those forged by France and Britain, see Fuller 2007). My point here is that there was a consistent shift from the emancipated, sober in behaviour and (sexually) contained femininity engaged by Liberal Italy’s behavioural code to the proper ‘feminine’ – animal-like, instinctive, maternal yet sexually proactive, in Pende’s words. This shift, constructed in the colonies and the metropole, also played a crucial role in shaping the ‘new Italian’.

The regime’s discipline over bodies and behaviours, their encampment into a national project, together with the imperial expansion and its racial signification of the colonial Other, framed and substantiated the idea of Roman Italian superiority over other Mediterranean and darker populations. Through the appeal to ancient Romanness and the regime’s current discipline, Italian darkness is ‘de-epidermalized’ in a way that allows a distinction between ‘archetypical’ Mediterraneans (Roman Italians) but white, and ‘epidermal’ dark Mediterranean races. This abstracted darkness eventually allows Italian women (or ‘kinship’s mothers’) and the nation as a whole to be represented as definitely white-and-Mediterranean (auto-referential racialization).

**Conclusions: Fascist Whiteness and Its Roman Mediterranean Italian**

The nation’s whiteness thus appears as the result of a double form of racial construction: it is adduced as resulting from a connection to a mythical past of grandeur (auto-referential racialization), and at once deduced by its
(phenotypical) difference to black bodies (altero-referential racialization). In the construction of Italian whiteness, the auto-referential racialization is deployed to eliminate racial discontinuities and differences within the national borders (denying Italy’s internal brown spots) without a direct claim of whiteness; the altero-referential racialization to discipline women’s bodies and behaviours at home (under the threat of a racialized regression to impurity) and, within the colonized space, to remind Italians about their achieved classless, whitened Mediterraneanness.

This very particular claim of superior Mediterraneanness, as Sòrgoni (2002, 2003a, 2003b) has outlined, was the symbolic skeleton of the Fascist idea of both Italian nation and empire. Mediterraneanness, substantiating the discourse on the latter’s inferior brotherhood, was functional to ground both Italian racial specificity, the legitimacy of the colonial occupation, and the construction of Italy as a peer among western nations. In this construction, the Fascist process of auto-referential racialization as ancient Roman legacy is crucial but subordinated to a discourse on difference/proximity: there is no explicit articulation of that legacy as whiteness, nor its encapsulation into an organic racial doctrine. Instead, it is considered a self-evident common ancestry that Fascism codifies as its own matrix (Gentile 1993, 2007). This established an evident dichotomy between the Nazi idea of race – from whose top ranks Italians determined to have been from the mongrelized race were excluded – and the Duce’s, a distance that was strongly defended by Mussolini himself until the late 1930s (Gillette 2002: 45–7).

Unlike in late Fascism, that of the Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti (1938) and its adhesion to an idea of Italians as Aryans, when a self-representation in outspoken racial terms innervated all the regime’s policies, in this phase it is still the (now externalized) Other that gives implicit racial substance to Mussolini’s idea of Italianness. It is the colonizable ‘place in the sun’ for Fascist Italy that draws the line between whiter nations and the rest tainted with a darker colour (Sòrgoni 2009: 303–13). Late Fascism’s racism almost dismissed or transformed Mediterraneanness (through the expulsion of the Hamitic and Semitic components [Sòrgoni 2003b: 421; 2002: 45ff] and through the adhesion to a more physical than spiritual and historical racism [Gillette 2002: 53–7]) into a variant of Aryanness (de Donno 2006; Maiocchi 1999) which – instead of unifying Italians – was in search of the ‘true Italian’ and its ‘internal enemies’; it renounced the accordance between its racial thinking and the Roman Law; and commuted the system of inferiorization in the colonies into a system of segregation (de Napoli 2009: 205–13). However, in the 1920s and 1930s, the Fascist idea of Mediterraneanness, though very distant from Giuseppe Sergi’s (1908) theory of Homo eurafricus (or the Hamitic Hypothesis), was still at the core of the national and imperial self-representation of Italians.

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14 It is worth remembering that the peculiarity of this representation, based on a system of inferiorization and infantilization, in no way produced fewer victims or less violence than other colonial experience (Ipsen 1996: 119–35; Larebo 2005; Del Boca 2005; Ahmida 2006; Ben-Ghiat and Fuller 2005: 27–56).
The construction of this very peculiar idea of Roman Mediterraneanness was supported by a number of theories, among which was Pende’s theory of ‘human bio-typologies’. Within their theoretical frame, and despite the evident, still existing, internally profound cultural, linguistic and phenotypical differences, *la stirpe italica* could be claimed as one and national by virtue of its noble origins and its own magnificence and greatness. Most importantly, *la stirpe italica* could be considered as a fundamental achievement of the regime that had encapsulated its greatness in a proper and consistent body politic and confirmed its grandeur through the renewal of the ancient imperial enterprise. Once emigration was legally stopped and formally reduced (1927), the great infrastructural works in the South and the imperial enterprise undertaken, the regime could state, seventy years after unification, the perfect correspondence between its social, cultural, racial and political projects – to create Italians and consolidate Italy. Italianness as Roman Mediterraneanness – the product of an effective alchemy between altero- and auto-referential racialization – resulted in the highest outcome achieved by the regime itself. Interpreting both the Roman legacy and intrinsic Mediterraneanness of Italians, Fascism claimed to ‘extract Italianness from the unconscious of Italians’, to paraphrase Mussolini’s last interview.

**References**


