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# “ARMATO DI CARNAGIONE”: CHROMATIC REGIMES OF RACIAL PROFILING IN THE ITALIAN PRESS

Marcello Messina  
Stefania Capogreco

## INTRODUCTION

*Napoli, uomo armato in metropolitana: momenti di panico e feriti lievi [...] Momenti di panico e feriti sulla metro linea 1 di Napoli per la ressa che si è scatenata per la presenza di un uomo, di carnagione mulatta, armato di carnagione di coltello. (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017).<sup>1</sup>*

[Naples, armed man on the metro: moments of panic and several mildly injured [...] Moments of panic and several injured on line 1 of the Naples Metro as a result of the crowd that gathered due to the presence of a man, of mulatto complexion, armed with [his own] complexion with a knife.]

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, the online newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano.it* published the above incipit to a press story about a man who had caused fear and panic on the Naples Metro when he showed a 20 centimetre-long knife to the other passengers. After unnecessarily drawing attention to the colour of his skin by using such a racially charged word as “mulatto,” the press story proceeded to shockingly declare that the man was “*armato di carnagione*,” that is, “armed with [his own] complexion” (Fig. 1).

Obviously, this last expression was a “typo,” and after a few hours the wording on the webpage was updated to read as “*armato di coltello*” [“armed with a knife”]. What immediately came to our minds, however, was that such a misprint functioned as a “momentary slip” revealing the widespread, habitually ingrained racial profiling of specific skin tones as “dangerous.” This racial profiling has broader implications in the Italian press, Italian society, and is one which, as we will show, is disseminated globally throughout Italian diasporas (WELCH, 2007; MOODY, 2008; SIMMONS & LECOUEUR, 2008).

In this chapter, we take this typo as an entry point through which we proceed to develop our argumentation over three different levels of analysis. At the first level, we focus on different elements of the quoted press story in order to identify the racial imagery that it sapiently triggers in the readers, both with and without the typo. At the second level, we set the press story into dialogue with other Italian news pieces, editorials and opinion columns, in order to situate its charged language within the shared practices of the national press. Finally, at the third level, we make reference to the general Italian debate in both national

<sup>1</sup> Article appeared on the online newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano.it* (online branch of the newspaper *Il Fatto Quotidiano*) on 8 June 2017 <<https://bit.ly/2ZI9R3O>>. Accessed on 8 June 2017. The quoted passage was later modified and the typo was eliminated, but the original version is still available at the Internet Archive Wayback Machine <<https://bit.ly/2BgU3eS>>. Accessed on 19 July 2020.

and diasporic settings, in order to shed some light on the crystallised assumptions that permit — among many other things — the publication of racially charged material disguised as journalistic coverage.



Fig. 1: A screenshot of the news story on the Naples Metro, as it was originally published on *Il Fatto Quotidiano.it* on 8 June 2017.

### “NAPOLI, UOMO ARMATO IN METROPOLITANA”: EVOKING THE “ABERRANT CITY”

Stereotypes of Naples as a dangerous city, allegedly controlled by criminal organisations and inhabited by people inclined to illegal behaviours, are diffused and constantly reproduced both in Italian (GRIBAUDI, 2008) and foreign media (DINES, 2013). In particular, Nick Dines talks about the reproduction of “pre-existing ideas about Naples as an aberrant city on the margins of a ‘normal’ Europe” (DINES, 2013, p. 1-2):

Naples has long been regarded as a pathological exception: a city of chronic problems, marked by peculiar cultural practices, ingenious survival strategies and a dearth of law and order. On the one hand it is a city that lacks – a modern class structure, public space, civic traditions and so on – while, on the other, it possesses the residues of an incomplete or anomalous development, such as widespread poverty, organized crime and the lumpenproletariat (DINES, 2012, p. 15).

The *Fatto Quotidiano* news item’s association between Naples and the frightening imagery of an “armed man” is thus part of a recurring cliché, a narrative strategy that serves to encourage the reader to activate a series of pre-formulated, entrenched stereotypes.

In his essay *Whiteness and the Blackening of Italy*, Joseph Pugliese examines the graffiti on the statue of Dante Alighieri in Piazza Dante, Naples, in order to highlight the city’s conflictual relationship with such a monument, which represents the North’s imposition of whiteness on the Southern city (PUGLIESE, 2008)<sup>2</sup>. Pugliese identifies race and racism as

2. Despite being politically exiled from Florence during his time, and banished from the canon for centuries (COULMAS, 2016), Florentine Poet and Nobleman Dante Alighieri has been vigorously inserted into the Italian literary canon, and in fact rehabilitated as the monumental figure of this canon, since the 19th century (PICH, 2010, p. 21): the political icon of the Tuscan author Dante was a key figure through which Risorgimento patriots generated a sense of Tuscan cultural unification predicated on the myth by which Dante represented a collective past (O’CONNOR, 2012, p. 314). Importantly, these “collective myths and memories [were] mapped onto [the] landscape” through the erection of monuments to Dante throughout the Peninsula (O’CONNOR, 2012, p. 321).

the discursive framework that governs the narrated distinction between the North and the South, at least since the age of the Italian Unification (1860-61)<sup>3</sup>:

From the beginning, then, the so-called *questione meridionale* (Southern question) encoded a set of racialised presuppositions in which the whiteness of the North operated as an a priori, in contradistinction to the problematic racialised status of the South, with its dubious African and Oriental histories and cultures (PUGLIESE, 2008, p. 3).

In this context, the racial anomaly materialised in the *Fatto Quotidiano* article as the “*carnagione mulatta*” (“mulatto complexion”) of the armed man is somewhat already suggested by the title: the mention of “Napoli” already sets the expectations for the readers, who are likely to already imagine a specific type of subject and a specific type of event.

However, two different types of subjects are evoked here: the *terrone* vs. the *extracomunitario*.

In the wake of the waves of migrants from Africa and the Middle East who have come to Italy over the last three decades searching for a livelihood, northerners have coined the neologism *sottoterrone* (‘sub-dirt beneath one’s feet’) to label this new non-white population. At work here is a recalibration of racial hierarchies that effectively functions to reposition targeted racialised subjects on the vertical scale governed by whiteness as the normative standard. In tandem with the entry into the Italian nation of people of colour from Africa, the Middle East and Asia, the racialised extraneity of Southerners has also been somewhat recalibrated. They no longer constitute northern Italy’s absolute other; rather, this position has been assigned to those non-European subjects geopolitically extraneous to the body of the nation. I say ‘extraneous’ as they have been designated by Italians as *extracomunitari*, that is, as people from outside the racially circumscribed national ‘community.’ (PUGLIESE, 2008, p. 20)

The mention of Naples in the title builds expectations towards the “racialised extraneity of Southerners”, whilst the mention of the “*carnagione mulatta*” has precisely the function of recalibrating this extraneity and shifting the attention towards this apparently non-European subject, literally, a “*sottoterrone*”, a new instance of “Italy’s absolute other”.

Even as this recalibration is operative and Southerners are no longer seen as totally extraneous to the body of the nation, instances of violent and gratuitous racism against them remain extremely common. On 21 April 2020, Vittorio Feltri, currently editor-in-chief of the national newspaper *Libero*, declared: “io non credo ai complessi di inferiorità: credo che i meridionali, in molti casi, siano inferiori” [“I do not believe in inferiority complexes: I believe that Southerners, in many cases, are inferior”] (FELTRI, 2020).

What emerges from Feltri’s declaration is that, while Southerners’ role as racial Others within the Italian nation may have been eventually recalibrated, still they must be constantly reminded that entrenched anti-Southern discourses of the inferiority and criminality of Southerners still form the fabric of Italian patriotism, and that such discourses can be drawn on to return Southerners to the status of absolute racial Other with impunity and abandon. Pugliese refers to this implicit but omnipresent possibility in terms of “prosthetic white citizenship”, that is, “what is conferred upon non-white subjects of the white nation”,

<sup>3</sup> As part of the Lombrosian School of Criminal Anthropology, anthropologists, criminologists and phrenologists laboured to inscribe the “congenital inferiority” of Southern Italians. For instance, in Cesare Lombroso’s *In Calabria* the trappings of temperament and inheritable aptitude towards violence and criminality were seen as readable in terms of an esoteric model of Southern physiognomy (PUGLIESE, 2008, p. 2; also see SCHNEIDER, 1998; DICKIE, 1999; PUGLIESE, 2002; PUGLIESE, 2007; MOE, 2002; MESSINA, 2019).

as a kind of provisional and conditional integration to the body of the nation, a form of citizenship that “can, precisely because it is viewed in terms of an artificial adjunct to the non-white subject, be withheld or taken away” (PUGLIESE, 2009, p. 16).

Thus, “prosthetic white citizenship” is constantly applicable to Southerners, labelled as *terroni* (meaning, quite literally, “the dirt beneath one’s feet,” inferring the dirt of the boot-shaped nation PUGLIESE, 2008). However, this “integration to the body of the nation” (PUGLIESE, 2009) is all the more provisional and conditional for the armed subject that is visualised in the *Fatto Quotidiano* news story.

### **“DI CARNAGIONE MULATTA”: VISUAL REGIMES OF RACIAL PROFILING**

In his important essay on the murder of Brazilian electrician Charles de Menezes, committed supposedly by mistake by the London Police precisely on a metro train, namely, the Tube, Joseph Pugliese explores the “visual regimes of racial profiling” (PUGLIESE, 2006) that made such an incident possible:

Let me replay the scene of Jean Charles de Menezes’ flight and shooting in order to flesh out the complex discursive relations that were instrumental in the killing of de Menezes. As de Menezes steps outside his flat and proceeds to walk down the street, a regime of visibility activates the stereotypical iconography of racial profiling as it resignifies his ethnic identity from Brazilian to (South) Asian: in advance of any offence he is *racially* suspect. I draw attention to the regime of visibility that is set in train in the course of his walk to the station in order to interrogate the idea that his death was just an “unlucky accident.” The concept of his death as an “unlucky accident” founders on the invisibilised systematicity that constitutes the modes of operation that underpin racial profiling. The term *visibility* materialises the discursive relations of power that effectively constitute, regulate and determine what it is we see (PUGLIESE, 2006, online).

Now, the same “invisibilised systemacity” operates, in the Naples Metro episode, to automatically associate the “mulatto complexion” of the protagonist of the incident to a dangerousness that is “*racially*” imaginable “in advance of any offence” In the *Fatto Quotidiano* article, the underlying idea that the man’s complexion could predict his dangerousness abruptly materialises in the typographic lapsus “*armato di carnagione*” / “armed with [his own] complexion”: literally, the racialised skin becomes an undesired, minacious attribute to the man’s persona, an attribute that not only does emerge as a “metonym[...] of an incipient criminality” (PUGLIESE, 2009, p. 15), but is in fact perceived as the main weapon with which the man is equipped.

Here we must pause and focus again on the expectations built by the title, where the association between “*Napoli*” and “*uomo armato*” [“armed man”] is perhaps likely to evoke images of Neapolitans as recalcitrant *terroni*, connivent with any robbery or murder, perpetuating Southerners’ alleged predisposition to crime and confirming their intermediate racial status. These expectations are both powerfully evoked in the title and immediately retracted in the body of the article, where a whole world of Southern criminality and inferiority based on entrenched stereotypes foregrounds the article’s shift of attention to the man with his “*carnagione mulatta*”.

Crucially, the same Neapolitan *terroni* who seem to be the criminalised violent subject/s of the article from a first reading of its title, emerge now as victims of the man and

his complexion. In other words, the “*carnagione mulatta*,” so highlighted as a threatening attribute which the man wields, serves to immediately reposition these Neapolitans as white, as “unarmed Italians” left at the mercy of this “foreign-looking” individual. Here we actively assume that the insistence on the complexion of the individual is meant precisely to cast him as “foreign” in the imagination of the readers: taking another cue from Pugliese, we refer to the fact that “a regime of racialised visibility inscribes its transient subjects as either obviously ‘foreign’ or self-evidently ‘native’” (PUGLIESE, 2006, online).

The perception of the man’s foreignness, which is never explicitly evoked in the news story, is reinforced by the testimony of a witness who remembered that “*L’uomo ha gridato qualcosa di incomprensibile, poi il treno è giunto alla stazione di Colli Aminei, e la gente è corsa via urlando*” [“the man shouted something unintelligible, then the train arrives at the stop Colli Aminei, and people ran away screaming”] (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017). In other words, after the chromatic identification of the man as a racial anomaly, a declaration of linguistic Otherness is used in order to confirm and reinforce the subject’s extraneity to the Italian nation space. There is more, as in the syntactic and semantic context of the sentence uttered by the witness and transcribed in the news story, people run away screaming, not only from the armed man, but also from his unintelligible yells. John Baugh introduced the notion of “‘linguistic profiling’ [...] as the auditory equivalent of visual ‘racial profiling’” (BAUGH, 2003, p. 155): horrified by the man who is armed with a knife, *but who was prior to any knife, first and foremost* armed by his criminalising<sup>4</sup> complexion and incomprehensible accent, people ran away — this is the racial-discursive schema that seems to emerge from the news story.

### **THE COLONIAL GENEALOGY OF RACIST “MULATTO” NARRATIVES IN ITALY**

Furthermore, the term “mulatto”, used abundantly and uncritically in the news story, belongs to a racist vocabulary reminiscent of the colonial past and present of former Portuguese and Spanish colonies in South America, but also — and not negligibly — of the Italian colonies in Africa (CAPONETTO, 2015). “Mulatto” is a term that evokes a sort of racial anomaly, an “abject” (Cf. PERILLI, 2016; GIULIANI, 2016; CAPOGRECO, 2017; CAPOGRECO; MESSINA, 2020) that carries the stigma of mixed-race relationships historically perceived as taboo (CAPONETTO, 2015). In fact, the figure of the “mulatto” evoked the unthinkable and unspeakable desire and pleasure of the interracial sex act in Fascist and post WWII Italy, and their existence was often attributed to being the product of a Black man raping an Italian woman (GREENE, 2012). Furthermore, the term “mulatto”, strongly interconnected with the term “meticcio” [“half-breed”, “mestizo”] (CAPONETTO, 2015; BARRERA, 2002, p. 22), must necessarily remind us about the fact that, from 1940 to 1955, Italian legislation prohibited the recognition of children born between Italian citizens and African partners, denying them Italian citizenship while, at the same time, imposing on them the status of *sudditi*, that is, subjects of the Crown (PETROVICH NJEGOSH, 2015, p. 14). The insistent use of the term “mulatto” in the *Fatto Quotidiano* news story, in this context, cannot be separated from this historical denial of Italian citizenship to people referred to as “*mulatti*” or “*meticcici*” and in fact, the use of this term functions exactly to withhold his very conditional and

<sup>4</sup> Because disclosing his status as racial “Other”.

provisional “prosthetic white citizenship” (PUGLIESE, 2009). Describing the suspect as a person of “*carnagione mulatta*”, the newspaper necessarily draws on this racist history of the term, which performs the crucial function of arresting his “prosthetic white citizenship”, thus enabling this man to be inscribed, in the present, as extraneous to the nation space, but as also, at once, a *suddito* (that is, someone whose difference must be policed within the nation space).

Finally, the term “mulatto” evokes a whole set of racio-gendered violences and desires connected to the sexual and reproductive deployment of the wombs of Black women by slave owners. Considering the specificities of racialised subjects in Brazilian society, Denise Ferreira da Silva explores the colonial/erotic economy of lust oriented towards the “*mulata*”, and unearths the concurrence of concupiscence and desire of annihilation in the task of neutralising racialised Afro-Indigenous subjects in favour of Eurodescendants (SILVA, 2006).

Transposing this web of desires to Italy, it is important to mention a well-known episode in the public life of journalist Indro Montanelli in which he participated in the TV programme *L'ora della verità* in 1972. On that occasion, Montanelli recalled his marriage with a 12 year old girl in Ethiopia. To the indignant questions of feminist activist Elvira Banotti, who correctly argued that he had entrapped and raped a child, Montanelli clumsily responded that it was common practice over there (TEGGI, 2018). Elsewhere, Montanelli refers to his same Ethiopian wife as a then 14 year old girl, and offers more details about his relationship with her:

*La ragazza si chiamava Destà e aveva 14 anni: particolare che in tempi recenti mi tirò addosso i furori di alcuni imbecilli ignari che nei Paesi tropicali a quattordici anni una donna è già donna, e passati i venti è una vecchia. Faticai molto a superare il suo odore, dovuto al sego di capra di cui erano intrisi i suoi capelli, e ancor di più a stabilire con lei un rapporto sessuale perché era fin dalla nascita infibulata.*

[The girl's name was Destà and she was 14 years old: in recent times, this detail got me the rage of some imbeciles, unaware that in tropical countries at fourteen years of age a woman is already a woman, and after twenty she is an old woman. I struggled a lot to overcome her smell, due to the goat tallow with which her hair was soaked; and I struggled even more to establish a sexual relationship with her because she was infibulated since her birth]. (MONTANELLI, 2000, *apud* DURACCIO, 2019, p. 65).

We agree with Caterina Duraccio that Montanelli's declaration “da un lato, mostra la naturalizzazione e la totale accettazione di determinate pratiche coloniali, e dall'altro sottolinea il sentimento di superiorità occidentale che accompagnava quegli anni” (DURACCIO, 2019, p. 65) [“on the one hand, shows the naturalization and the total acceptance of certain colonial practices, on the other hand, highlights the sentiment of Western superiority that accompanied those years”]. What is striking about Montanelli's feeling of white omnipotence is the perceived right to dispose of Destà's body as he prefers, with the added benefit of publicly shaming her body by ridiculing her smell. Montanelli seems to linger on infibulation in order to declare his phallic white superiority against Destà's racialised and diminished sexuality, thus inscribing the progressiveness of his Western “civilised” sexuality and the sexual pathology and backwardness of the non-West (PUAR, 2007). Needless to say, the fact that he calls Elvira Banotti an “imbecile” and argues that she was unaware of the customs and traditions of “tropical countries” serves precisely to obliterate the fact that Banotti

was born and raised in Eritrea, and had also lived and worked in Ethiopia — in an entirely colonial move, Montanelli effaced and debased Banotti's personal and collective history in order to insult her and situate his own knowledge as possessing more “authentic” and superior knowledge, thus attempting to invalidate her incisive objections. The above-mentioned events from Montanelli's personal life represent an eloquent metonym of the entrenched racio-gendered mentality that inscribes nostalgic and adulcorated tropes of the *Africa Orientale Italiana* [“Italian East Africa”, abbreviated as AOI].<sup>5</sup> In this context, as claimed by Igiaba Scego (2015), the sexual possession of female native bodies is interlaced with the military conquest of the land and with the physical extermination of the population. Addressing an imaginary Ethiopian woman, the Fascist era song “Faccetta Nera” [“Little Black Face”], often sung nostalgically in present days as “la quintessenza più pura del fascismo” [“The purest quintessence of Fascism”] (SCEGO, 2015), alludes precisely to a promised liberation from supposed slavery, which must necessarily go through territorial and sexual subjection to the Italian ruler: “La legge nostra è schiavitù d'amore / Ma è libertà de vita e de penziere” [“Our law is slavery of love / but it is freedom of life and thought”] (MICHELI; RUCCIONE, 1935):

Se sei donna e nera in Italia un riferimento, anche casuale, a Faccetta nera ci scappa sempre. Da piccola me la cantavano spesso all'uscita di scuola per umiliarmi, e in generale la canzoncina aleggia nell'aria come quei microbi da cui non ci si salva. Sono in tanti ad averla come suoneria del cellulare [...]. Ma anche chi non si professa apertamente fascista è sedotto da questa marcetta. Basta canticchiarla un po' per vedere le braccia agitarsi a ritmo battente. [...] *Faccetta nera* [...] è una canzone sessista, oltre che razzista. Una canzonetta che nasconde dietro la finzione della liberazione una violenza sessuale. Non a caso il suo testo a un certo punto dice: “La legge nostra è schiavitù d'amore”.

[If you are a Black woman in Italy, you can always expect people to refer, even randomly, to *Faccetta nera*. When I was a child, they often sang it after school to humiliate me, and in general the song floats in the air like those microbes from which you cannot save yourself. Many people have it as a ringtone in their mobiles [...]. But even those who are not openly fascist are seduced by this little march. Just hum it a bit to see people's arms shake in time [...] *Faccetta nera* [...] is a sexist song, as much as a racist one: it is a song that hides sexual violence behind the false promise of liberation. It is no coincidence that at some point the lyrics say: “Our law is slavery of love”.] (SCEGO, 2015).

A series of humoristic postcards from the same era by Enrico de Seta (1935-36), encapsulate precisely this interconnection between the articulation of a desire for military victory over East Africans, and the sexual possession of the local women (Fig. 2).

<sup>5</sup> In line with what we have argued above about the racialisation of Southerners and how it is always connected to the racialisation of *extracomunitari*, we need to mention that Montanelli made several controversial (and openly racist) remarks about Sicily and Sicilians during his career (COTUGNO, 2011, p. 82; MASTRODONATO, 2020).



Fig. 2: Humorous postcards by Enrico De Seta for the Italian troops in East Africa (DE SETA, 1935-36).

In the bottom left illustration of Figure 2, a Black woman shows her companion a white newborn baby, who wears a soldier/explorer helmet (the same helmet as an Italian soldier who watches the scene from afar). The African couple appears obviously enchanted by their newborn baby. Under the title of “Civilizzazione” [“Civilisation”], a caption below the vignette reads: “Forza, Taitù, che cominciamo a civilizzarci: questo è venuto bianco!” [“Keep it up, Taitù, for we are starting to civilise ourselves: this one came out white!”] (DE SETA, 1935-36). Here the military campaign, disguised as liberation, explicitly identifies female wombs as a territory to be occupied and utterly cleansed from their own derogatorily racialised African status.

In this context, the ridiculous idea which holds that the white baby should be heralded as the emergence of “civilisation” by his Black putative father, effaces the historical reality that such a child would be born into: cast as abject on the grounds of their “mulatto” status. Such a child, not heralded as civilised at all, and who in fact would have no “prosthetic white citizenship,” provisional or otherwise, because of their status as abject “mulatto,” would not have been welcomed as an Italian citizen between 1940 and 1955.

Another important element in the four postcards shown in Figure 2 is the corresponding representations of the disposability of Ethiopian women (reduced to the sexual lust of the coloniser, or else the womb), and Ethiopian men (cast as exterminable enemies). The Ethiopian women are represented as disposable bodies — packages even — at the mercy of the sexual lust of the Italian soldiers: “*schiave a prezzi da convenirsi*” [“slaves for sale at prices to be negotiated”] (DE SETA, 1935-36), as it reads on the bottom right illustration (Fig. 2), or else human parcels, packages to be sent to one’s friend as a “*ricordo dell’Africa Orientale*” [“souvenir from East Africa”] (DE SETA, 1935-36) as shown on the top right illustration (Fig.2).

This operates in tandem with the graphic depiction of male Ethiopians as armed enemies to be exterminated not just with impunity, but turned into “trophy bodies” (cf. PERERA, 2014; MESSINA; DI SOMMA, 2017) with which the Italian soldiers can pose for a photograph, as shown on the top left illustration (Fig.2). It is important to note that even the putative father in the bottom right illustration with the white child (Fig. 2) is depicted as an enemy wielding a spear and a shield: in this case the military threat is neutralised by the sexual possession of the woman and the colonisation of her womb, as it were.

Retracing back to the *Fatto Quotidiano* news story, in being identified with his “carnagione mulatta” [“of mulatto complexion”] (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017), the man from the Naples Metro embodies precisely an intermediate space, suspended between the “abjection” (PERILLI, 2016) of the mixed-race offspring<sup>6</sup> and the perception that such an individual nevertheless represents an intermediate step between Blackness and “civilisation”. Furthermore, this man — in a similar logic to the Ethiopian men in the Fascist postcards — is still depicted as a dangerous Black man, professedly “armato di carnagione” [“armed with [his own] complexion”] (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017).

#### **“UN UOMO ALTO DI PELLE SCURA”: THE SEXUALISED MASCULINISATION OF RACIAL FEAR**

*Era un uomo alto di pelle scura, forse un mulatto – racconta una testimone oculare all'Ansa – aveva una bandana sulla testa e portava dei pantaloni aderenti. L'ho notato già alla Stazione Università, dove sono salita. Una volta sul treno, affollato, è passato accanto a me e ad altri passeggeri e ha sollevato la maglietta, lasciando vedere un coltello lungo e affilato.*

[He was a tall, dark-skinned man, perhaps a mulatto - an eyewitness told Ansa - he wore a bandana on his head and tight trousers. I noticed him already at the Station Università, where I got on the train. Once I was on the crowded train, he passed by me and other passengers and lifted his shirt, showing a long and sharp knife] (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017).

Seemingly still terrorised by the encounter with the “mulatto,” a woman who was on the train with him gave this testimony to the Italian news agency Ansa. The statement was then published in the *Fatto Quotidiano* news story.

Considering the above-mentioned imagery on Ethiopian women as sexual slaves to be purchased, impregnated, and even packed up and dispatched by the Italian “liberation” troops, what emerges from this statement is a reverse representation of the “tall, dark-skinned man” as a sexual menace. As soon as the eyewitness hops on the train, she notices him immediately, together with his tall stature, his bandana and his “tight trousers” (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017). It goes without saying that “when men wear tight trousers” what becomes evident is “the silhouette of the genitalia” (YOO, 2010): in her study of denim preference in Milanese youth, Roberta Sassatelli notes that “the striking majority of the participants in the study to consider jeans as a ‘second skin’, whose attributes are characteriza-

6 In order to get a better sense of the weight of being cast as abject, it is useful to turn to the work of Julia Kristeva who defines abjection in terms of that which disturbs the very boundaries of the “clean and proper body” (le corps propre) required by the dominant order, that is, in this context, the clean and proper body of the Italian nation-state: “Contrary to what enters the mouth and nourishes, what goes out of the body, out of its pores and openings, points to the infinitude of the body proper and gives rise to abjection. Fecal matter signifies, as it were, what never ceases to separate from a body in a state of permanent loss in order to become autonomous, distinct from the mixtures, alterations, and decay that run through it. That is the price the body must pay if it is to become clean and proper” (1982, p. 108).

tions of an explicit sexual nature,” and argues that tight jeans “appear as heavily sexualized items, especially among youth” (SASSATELLI, 2011, p. 138).

As Frantz Fanon would put it, here the unnecessary detail of the tight trousers seems to be intended to cast the Black man as “the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions” (FANON, 2008, p. 136), a genital potency that populates the fears of the train passengers, who, as described in the testimony, anxiously bear witness to him lifting up his shirt, as if he was about to show some intimate portion of his body.

As if flashing his “terrifying penis” (FANON, 2008, p. 136) to the passengers, the man, portrayed as lifting up his shirt, reveals a hidden object that turns out to be extremely phallic indeed: “a long and sharp knife,” that later in the news story is described as measuring “20 centimetri di lunghezza” [“20 centimetres in length”] (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017). The obsessive fixation with the measuring of the knife in the news story reproduces the stereotype of penis measurement as a practice intended to assess masculinity, and this is all inscribed in the gendered depiction of the racial Other in terms of monstrously excessive, and therefore threatening, masculinity (GIULIANI, 2016). Therefore, the man armed with not only his complexion, but with the phallic threat of his complexion, then brandishes a knife thus confirming the “invisibilised systematicity” (PUGLIESE, 2006) which automatically equates his “Mulatto complexion” with the trope of the threatening, excessive masculinity of the racial Other (FANON, 2008; GIULIANI, 2016). Additionally, this phallic symbolism might suggest a reading of the knife that transcends its function as a mere accessory, tucked into the man’s jeans but separate from his body: on the contrary, the knife seems to be construed as a natural part of the man’s body, suggesting stereotypes on violence as innate and embodied.<sup>7</sup>

It is no surprise nor coincidence that a few months after the publication of the *Fatto Quotidiano* news story, on 29 August 2017, far right party Forza Nuova published a racist illustration on its social media pages, depicting a Black man about to commit sexual violence against a white woman, with a caption that read “*Difendila dai nuovi invasori. She could be your mother, your wife, your sister, your daughter*”](Fig. 3).

The illustration basically reproduced a Fascist placard that circulated during the years of the Republic of Salò,<sup>8</sup> only slightly updating the caption with the mention of the “*nuovi invasori*” [“new invaders”]. What is evident here is the continuity that links the Fascist era with present-day debates in Italy, in that the graphic depiction of Black men in the Fascist era as a disposable and monstrous threat continues to shape the ways in which “prosthetic white citizenship” is withheld. Here the double standard of new and old Fascist logics is evident: Italian soldiers have the full right to exploit and abuse East African women, while Black subjects in Italy are “invaders” and must be fought in order to protect Italian women. Importantly, this Fascist narrative by which the black or “mulatto” man threatens to monstrously rape white women (MESSINA; DI SOMMA, 2017; CAPOGRECO, 2017) is steeped in broader racist stereotypes of the “Black Peril” and the “Black Brute” (OWENS PATTON &

<sup>7</sup> We endlessly thank Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli for suggesting this last idea to us, and also for her precious advice on this essay in general.

<sup>8</sup> The *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* [“Italian Social Republic”], better known as *Repubblica di Salò* [“Republic of Salò”] was a puppet state of Nazi Germany based in Salò, a small town on the Lake Garda, and with Benito Mussolini as head of state. It lasted from late 1943 till mid-1945 (BURGWYN, 2018).

SNYDER-YULY, 2007; WRIGGINS, 1983) which, as in other colonial contexts, throws a cloak over the common, systematised and normalised practices by which white men, such as the “respectable journalist” Indro Montanelli, rape black women (FEINSTEIN, 2019).

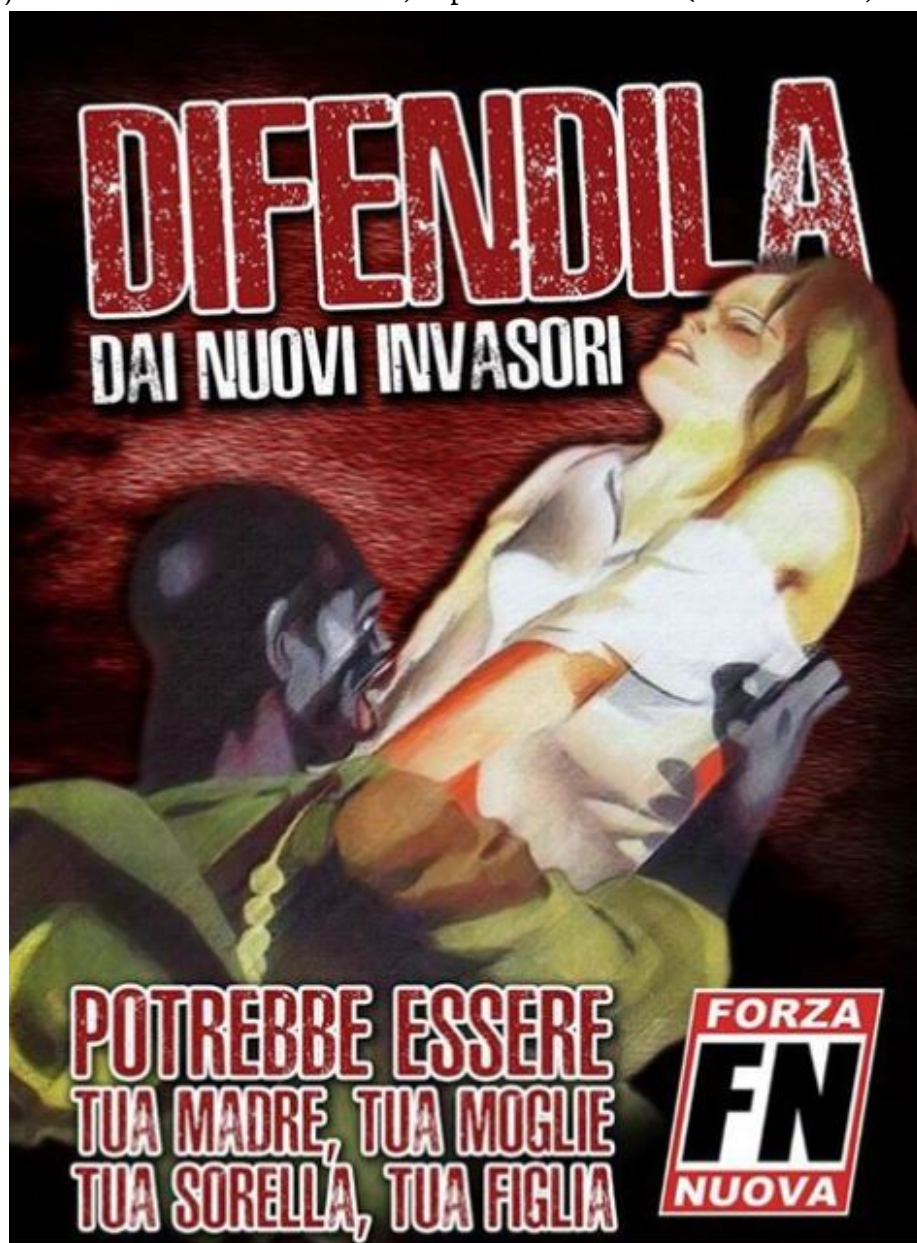


Fig. 3: A placard released by far right Italian party Forza Nuova in August, 2017.

This double standard undoubtedly positions the man of the Naples Metro news story in the same imaginary place as the man depicted in the placard on Fig. 3. Horrified by the look of the man’s dark skin, of his tight trousers and of his knife/phallus, the news item positions the eyewitness as the threatened white woman to be protected. As a Neapolitan, perhaps, she could have been represented elsewhere according to the common “racio-gendered vision of southern Italian women as lawless, immoral, vindictive, violent and murderess” (PALOMBO, 2015, p. 194), however, within this national news story, the Neapolitan woman conveniently does not have her “prosthetic white citizenship” withheld, such that the man might be positioned as absolute racial Other.

## FINAL REMARKS: “AMATO DI CARNAGIONE”

The typo “*armato di carnagione*” [“armed with [his own] complexion”] (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017) functions as a momentary lapse in what, citing Pugliese, we described as “the invisibilised systematicity that constitutes the modes of operation that underpin racial profiling” (PUGLIESE, 2006). By virtue of such a momentary lapse, the usually concealed modes of operation by which racial profiling takes place become momentarily visible, thus disclosing that the “mulatto man” is rendered in terms of a racially imaginable dangerousness in advance of any offence.

In fact, this momentary utterance which bespeaks the usually unspoken, and momentarily visibilises the routinely invisibilised systematicity by which the “mulatto man” is racially profiled as dangerous, reveals how a series of colonial and Fascist discourses — as manifested in the placards and postcards we have herein provided — functioned to underpin the narration of this news story.

Furthermore, as we have stated, the news story’s ambiguous title and opening whereby the context of the Naples Metro is first vaguely evoked as a site of shootings and robberies, and subsequently embellished as an innocent white place menaced by a dangerous racial Other — in combination with this slip of the tongue, as it were — reveal that notions of the inherent criminality of Neapolitans, as well as the casting of Naples as a zone of uninhabitable criminality, underpin this article.

While in many ways accruing privilege from the above-mentioned “recalibration of racial hierarchies” (PUGLIESE, 2008, p. 20), the position of Southerners is always one of a precarious “prosthetic white citizenship,” underscored by the fact that such anti-Black racism maps onto the very notions of (in this case) Neapolitan criminality. A double manoeuvre is thus in operation, by which Southerners can both be evoked as the dangerous, absolute racial “Other” at any time, while at the same time they can be positioned as white victims in the context of “Black Brute” narratives like this one. In this context, the “dark-skinned man” is immediately turned into a sexual monster that menaces an horrified female witness who, no longer equated with the vilifying stereotype of the Southern female (PALOMBO, 2015), now stands in as synecdoche for the white Italian nation.

Among other things, this double manoeuvre — like the regimes of visibility inscribed by Fascist propaganda that the trope of the white woman as victim draws on — diverts the attention away from the systematised, normalised, and righteously self-justified (and/or outright denied) violence towards Black women, both in the East African colonies and in present-day Italy.

Finally, we need to reflect again on the “*carnagione mulatta*” [“mulatto complexion”] (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017), that is meant to immediately evoke the “*extracomunitario*” positionality of the man described in the news story, a positionality that, as we have attempted to illustrate, inevitably evokes the Italian colonies in Africa, and in general alludes to racialised geographies that may have to do with notions such as “Africa”, perhaps “Middle East”, or even “Latin America”, “South Asia”, etc.

Now, as if protecting the vague veil of enchantment that permits the charged visualisation of these places as repositories of racial monsters, the *Fatto Quotidiano* article sapiently

omits the very important detail that the “dark skinned-man” professedly “*armato di carnagione*” [“armed with [his own] complexion”] (IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO.IT, 2017) was actually a Swedish national:

*Armato di coltello semina il panico in Metropolitana: ci sono stati feriti nella ressa. L'uomo di nazionalità svedese è stato disarmato dalla polizia. Molti passeggeri sono in stato di shock* (CLEMENTE, 2017)

[Armed with a knife, man causes panic in the Metro: some were injured in the crowd. The Swedish national was disarmed by the police. Many passengers are in shock]

The above quotation is taken from a news item on the same event, which appeared on the online newspaper *NapoliToday*. Quite appropriately, this news story avoids mentioning any detail as to the man’s skin tone, choosing to disclose only his nationality. Obviously, in this case the white imagery normally associated with Sweden and its inhabitants impedes the racio-gendered visualisation of the “mulatto” monster evoked in the *Fatto Quotidiano* news story.

This final piece of information, excluded from the racial-discursive schema of the *Fatto Quotidiano* news story, reveals that what is ultimately in operation therein is a web of multiple “geocorpographical” (cf. PUGLIESE, 2017) dislocations, that makes sapient use of signifiers like “complexion,” “dark-skinned,” “mulatto,” “armed,” through to “Napoli,” in order to evoke a series of specific racist associations that are all too evidently addressed to a society that has never given up its colonial, Fascist and anti-Southern mentality.

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