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► **To cite this version:**

Maica Gugolati, Cecile Vermot. Parody, satire and the rise of populism under postcolonial criticism. Populism and Postcolonialism, Routledge, 2019. hal-03903399

HAL Id: hal-03903399

<https://hal.science/hal-03903399v1>

Submitted on 16 Dec 2022

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Populism and Postcolonialism

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Chapter 2

17 Pages

Parody, satire and the rise of populism under postcolonial criticism

A French and an Italian case

With Cécile Vermot, Maica Gugolati

This essay aims to analyse the tensions in the rise of populist rhetoric through satires and parodies performed by the two migrant artists in France and Italy. More specifically, it analyses to what extent racist and sexist stereotypes are performed through ethnic humour. The comparison of postcolonial performativities of these artists allows us to deconstruct and show similarities and differences in right-wing populist rhetoric. In Italy and France the right-wing populist parties share a rhetoric that instrumentalises the issue of extra-European migration as “the problem” of the generalised condition for the European “crisis”.

“I no pay rent.

[...] We no pay rent.

Come on! We are niggers”

Bello Figo feat The GynoZz, *Non Pago Affito*¹, 2016.

“Integration is something that is important.

My uncle, my father, twenty years in France and they never got integrated.

Never.

¹ Translation by the author. Title translated literally into English: “No pay rent”.

My father especially. Always dressed the same. Boubou², jacket, sandals”

Patson, *Mon père et l'intégration en France*³, 2012.

Introduction

The two statements above come from a song by the Italo-Ghanaian rapper Bello Figo and a French comedian from the Ivory Coast, Patson. Within their performances, these two artists present a voluntary re-enactment of racist and/or sexist stereotypes under the guise of satires and parodies of different types that troll contemporary European societies specifically on the issues of immigration and refugees. Stereotypes are recognizable characteristics that reduce a person or a category of population to those generalized traits, exaggerating and simplifying them (Hall, 1997). The mimicry performed by Bello Figo and Patson, as an adaptive behaviour (Taussig, 1993), is based on the enactment of generalized racist and colonial orientalist patterns (Bhabha, 1983; Said, 1979; Gugolati, 2018; Radio24, 02-01-2012), frequently addressed to immigrants by a section of the hosting countries where they live, Italy and France. More specifically, through their postcolonial performativity, they enact different stereotypes supported by the right-wing populist political⁴, social and media discourse present in these two countries.

Despite the differences in political, social and economic context between Italy and France, there are similarities in the rise of right-wing populist parties and their rhetoric. In 2018, the coalition between the anti-establishment *Five Star Movement* and right-wing *League party*

² Boubou or bubu is West African dress worn by men and women.

³ Translation by the author. Title translated into English: “My father and integration in France”.

⁴ Populist ideology can be embraced by the right or left wing of any political party or ideology (Taguieff, 2002; Wieworka, 2018). The performances of these two artists are mostly related to right populism.

(BBC, 10-05-2018) brought them to power⁵. In France, the election of Emanuel Macron in 2017 took place after a confrontation in the second round between his party and the populist right-wing *Rassemblement National*⁶. In terms of the rhetoric, in both countries there has emerged a political lexical field based on “security”, “nation” or “people”. Studies have also shown that populist rhetoric uses emotional appeals⁷ (Mazzoleni, 2003, 2014; Demetriz, 2006; Bos, Van der Brug and Vreese, 2011; Hameleers et al., 2016; Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza, 2017; Wike et al., 2018). The rhetoric is commonly based on anger against an “elite” and the establishment, or a fear of “others”, personified mainly by the figures of migrants⁸.

This article aims to analyse the tensions in the rise of populist rhetoric through satire and parodies performed by two migrant artists living in Italy and France. More specifically, it is going to analyse to what extent racist and/or sexist stereotypes performed through ethnic humour⁹. The comparison of postcolonial performativities of these artists allows us to deconstruct and show similarities and differences in right-wing populist rhetoric. In the two countries here treated, the right-wing populist parties share a rhetoric that instrumentalizes the issue of extra-European migration, mainly from the African continent and the Middle

⁵ Italy has only become a country of immigration in the past 40 past years, whether for permanent settlement or as a way station. On the contrary, France has been a destination for migrants since colonization.

⁶ The rise of the *Rassemblement National*, previously called *Front National*, is not a new phenomenon in France. Created in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen and now directed by his daughter Marine Le Pen, the RN has seen its percentage of votes in presidential elections increase since the 1980s, going from 14.38% in 1988 to 21.7% in 2017. Despite these low scores, the RN made it into the second round of presidential elections twice (in 2002 and 2017).

⁷ Emotions and representations constitute a dipstick that influences human actions (Elster, 1989; Hochschild, 1983; Vermot, 2015, 2017). Understanding which emotions are linked with which representations within the right's populist rhetoric may help to explain the vote.

⁸ A semantic shift occurred when Marine Le Pen took the presidency of the party created by her father. For the purpose of legitimization, the term "immigrants" is much less used and is replaced by more abstract designations such as "immigration" or "migration policy". The key words most commonly used in association with "immigration" are "salary", "reduction", "protection" and "cost" for the former, while the latter is more anxious: "danger", "threat", "loss" and "difficulty" (Alduy and Wannich, 2015).

⁹ Ethnic humor is related to racial competition and conflict and deals with the social and cultural patterns, which have arisen from them (Burma, 1946).

East, as “the problem” of the generalized condition for the European “crisis” (Inglehart and Norris, 2016).

To understand how racist and/or sexist stereotypes are transformed into satire and parody in order to denounce and question them, this article will first highlight the link between right-wing populism and emotions. After explaining the methodology, it will define parody and satire through the cases of the artists Bello Figo and Patson. Thirdly, it will highlight three main axes that carry and explain the entanglement between populist rhetoric and the postcolonial register, developing them in different terms.

1) The rhetoric and emotions of right-wing populism

The notion of populism is defined as an ideology that pushes a homogenous social group against a set of elites who become dangerous “others”, who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice (Albertazzi and McDonnel, 2008, p. 3). To function as a political movement, populist ideology is accompanied by a rhetoric¹⁰ that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized and excluded social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action, while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorises the construction and the imagination of “ordinary people” (Jansen, 2011). The notion of “the people”¹¹ reflects an

¹⁰ The term "rhetoric" is used here in its broadest sense, which implies collections of symbolic actions, styles of expression, public statements (spoken or written), definitions of a situation, and ways of elaborating ideas that invoke or reinforce a populist principle which legitimates political action.

¹¹ In 19th century Europe, what was assumed to be “the people” was a social category identified as "the lower class", those who belonged to the lowest sectors of society, in terms of intellectual and socio-economic inferiority. This modern notion of the underclass has medieval roots that associated it with unpredictable and brutal riots (Guerra, 1992). Under democratic systems, “the people” started to be identified as the holders of sovereignty, becoming citizens. The modern notion of “the people” maintained ambiguously the medieval meaning of dangerous irrational "plebs". “The people” in the populist discourse are those who consider themselves to be disenfranchised and excluded from public life (Panizza, 2005).

anti-status-quo discourse that refers to this category as the underdogs, the powerless, against the others, the powerful. This responds to the notion of the sovereign people as an identified collectivity, in antagonistic relations with an established order (Panizza, 2005).

The emotions of fear, anger and nostalgia are the ones that serve for the construction and affirmation of this specific rhetoric. These emotions are not individual, but are felt and shared by groups in which people tend to self-categorize as members. Those who support right-wing populist movements in Italy and France think their country was better in the past than it is today. Nostalgia comes from the Greek verb *nostos*, which means "to return" and refers to the noun "pain". It is an emotion driven by a physical separation, whether geographical and/or temporal. To develop, it needs the presence of absence and the lack of the past, which is always idealized. This idealization, which can be seen as a defence against loss, means that nostalgia is linked to conditions of both sadness and joy. In social science, it can be defined as a strategy to continue to belong to the community of origin and to continue to participate in social life (Anwar, 1979; Vermot, 2014). The sense of nostalgia may also have been reactivated by the prolonged European economic precariousness of today, which led to a generalized sense of loss of hope for a better future (Salmela and Scheve, 2017, 2018). Right-wing populist rhetoric represents an attempt to forge solidarity among "the people" through a rhetorical invocation that is based on an emotional communication, evoking a sense of nostalgia for a phantomic and idealized past that is always better than the present, as a way of facing the uncertainty of the future (ibid.). Nostalgia is linked with ethnocentrism, which appears as the second most important concern (Stokes, 2018). The emotions of fear and impotence evoked by the political, economic and social system are adopted by populist rhetoric, which finds scapegoat figures, the migrants, in order to exorcise this emotional charge.

This consequently creates a discourse of authenticity of suffering, that consists of a sense of imaginary victimhood (Giglioli, 2014) which wishes to gain authority based on a myth of suffering attached to the past. It functions as a subaltern claim for a dominant position that aims to legitimize its own position. Moreover, in the structure of populist rhetoric, the demagogic values celebrated by “the people” are announced and carried by a single leader figure. For the populist parties, “the people” support their leader who usually does not share their social class but belongs to a wealthier one to which “the people” aspire (Mudde, 2004). By so doing, there is the creation of a homogenous demagogic in- and out-group discourse, where the sense of equality is translated into the notion of sameness (Canovan, 1999), allowing those who feel ignored and dismissed by the elites to gain a political voice and social visibility. These specific emotions shape the populist rhetoric; the chapter will continue by analysing the artistic practices and the way they operate within and about the populist discourse.

2) Methodology

For this research, the analysis of a musical production by Bello Figo and a humorous sketch by Patson have been carried out by viewing their productions on the *YouTube* platform. These two works were selected for their antithetical discourses facing the right-wing populist rhetoric that is present nowadays. The interest of these two case studies is not simply the act of inversion of racist commentaries by showing a positive image of their own communities (Muñoz, 1999) or the communities that they feel empathetic with (such as African refugees and immigrants from the African continent); rather it is the act of embodying and representing those stereotypes while claiming them, through satire for Bello Figo and parody

for Patson. The social media platforms are in these cases used to narrate stories of minority subjects, highlighting the fictionality of the constructions of the colonial/racist stereotypical categories themselves. However, it does not just reproduce frameworks of understanding, memories, narratives, ideas, stereotypes and symbols on a national level; it brings a wider global perspective to it (Orgad, 2012).

3) Postcolonial performativities in Italy and France: the case of Bello Figo and Patson.

a) Ethnic humour as satire and parody

There is no single definition of humour. Nonetheless, humour can be delimited through four facets. First, it has a link with transgression against the social order about what is taboo. Secondly, it can be dissociated from laughter and smiling. Third, it differs according to culture, historical periods, generations, social groups and gender. Fourth, sharing humour can create in-group solidarity and therefore a separation from the out-group. Regarding the themes, humour considers social issues like social resistance, political conflicts and ethnic/racial issues reflecting the social hierarchy. It can both maintain social order and negotiate social boundaries (Billig, 2005; Kuipers, 2008; Le Breton, 2018).

Bello Figo and Patson take over racist and/or sexist stereotypes through satire in the case of the former and parody for the latter. Satire exposes a subject to ridicule, often through exaggeration; it is not necessarily designed to make people laugh (Low and Smith, 2007). It relies on a rhetorical strategy of persuasion (Duval and Martinez, 2000), distorting the target's representation through absurdity. Unlike satire, parody, which has ancient roots; it is usually

comic, it amuses, it ridicules and mocks (Low and Smith, 2007). It leads the audience to be aware of the artificiality of the issue debated through mimicry (Kiremidjan, 1969).

Both artists are connected with a policy that concerns emotions, that regulates social sensibilities (Scribano, De Sena, and B. Sena, 2015).

Bello Figo and Patson are immigrants and live in two countries which lack postcolonial debates. They both use grotesque excess (Mbembe, 1992), the practice of laughter and the performance of re-enactment as particular tools in order to invert and subvert social power relations (Bakhtin, 1968; Stam, 1989)³. They embody, display and re-enact, in their different artistic practices, some traits of the imperial imagination (Smith, 2012) as a form of self-determination that is founded in the performative act itself. Moreover, they “re-write”, in a media and scenic sense, their personal stories blended with the generalized and fixed stereotypes (Bhabha, 1983) assigned by the receiving European societies. Through satire and parody that use humour, they unmask the absurd and irrational side of populist discourse. Nonetheless, the audience should be familiar with the ethnic humour practices used by the artists; if not, for an audience that is unaware of them, they might be interpreted as an offensive act or as a literal confirmation of the statements themselves. Those who do not get the joke become part of the problem, which the satire and parody address, becoming also a source of amusement for those who do (Low and Smith, 2007).

b) The musical case of Bello Figo¹⁴

"I no pay rent.
[...] We no pay rent.
Come on! We are niggers.
All my friends came by boat.

¹⁴ Translation from the Italian by the author M. Gugolati.

Swag boat, as soon as we arrived in Italy we got:
house, cars, hotties.
[...] I no make laborer¹⁵.
[...] I do not get my hands dirty because I am already black: I am a refugee.
[...] We want WIFI, WIFI, WIFI!
[...] I sleep in 4 stars hotel because I am beautiful, rich, famous and black”

This is part of “Non pago affitto”, a lyric by Bello Figo, a stage name that literally means “handsome cool or hot guy”. Born in Ghana, Bello Figo came to Italy in 2004 at the age of 12 with the status of refugee. He started to compose and sing songs on the media platform YouTube, reaching (in 2018) more than 23 million views. In order to retain his freedom of speech, he refuses to sign up to any record label. In this song, by reproducing and embodying racial, social and sexual xenophobic stereotypes Bello Figo reveals and declares some of the prejudices of Italian society by mirroring them. He reflects and declares the prejudices and media commentaries on the subjects of immigration and refugees, which are daily debated in national politics and by the media. Instead of using a carnivalesque inversion (Bakhtin, 1970), in his song Bello Figo creates a mirroring reflection of the same stereotypes that objectify him, by declaring them. Just as Foucault (1966 [1970]) showed that the viewer of an artistic work becomes part of the subject shown in the painting while looking at it, in Bello Figo’s song there is no separation between the xenophobic stereotypes stated by the artist and those declared by populist discourse and by many media commentaries on social media platforms. There is an interplay between those who receive and show the stereotypes, and therefore between the performer and the viewers. There is a blurring of boundaries between the figure who is subjugated by xenophobic stereotypes and the one who voluntarily enacts them; between the one who declares them and the one who listens to them.

¹⁵ Literal translation from the broken Italian used in order to dramatize the Italian language as stereotypically spoken by immigrants. It has been used by comedians and actors who usually mimic African foreigners talking Italian: usually the double consonants are not used i.e. “affito” instead of “affitto”, and the use of pronouns is incorrect.

Butler states (1999, 2005) that the drag performer's imitation of gender reveals the fictitious categorization of gender itself and deconstructs it, demonstrating its own fictionality. Similarly, Bello Figo's satirical act of excessive embodiment and enactment of xenophobic debates, rubs the populist audience's noses in the fictionality of their own judgements.

By using a media platform, he trolls the listeners and viewers in order to provoke a strong reaction from the audience while simultaneously reflecting their own prejudices. There is a lack of moralism in his performance of his music. As he declares in his interviews (*Vice* 2018), he mixes his own biographical story with those of people he feels empathy with, such as the minority African migrants living on Italian soil, while at the same time developing the prejudices on immigration discussed by Italian media. In the act of embodying them, he becomes simultaneously the subject and the object of those stereotypes, dismantling them in a nonsensical logic. As he does so, the audience is faced with a staged absurdity that reflects the fictionality of the racial prejudices themselves. Bello Figo, when stating: "I am beautiful, rich, famous and black", integrates the notion of blackness and foreignness into the celebrity paradigm (Gabler, 1998) and into consumerism, opening up the nationalist sense of economic and social protectionism to a wider intercultural issue. He adds to it a globalized paradigm of the red-carpet phenomenon, which shows the Italian audience that the contemporary aspiration to fame (Danto, 2009) embraces a whole supranational pop culture. Declaring that migrants desire and participate in the process of upward mobility simply by the fact of holding refugee status works to outrage what the populist discourse claims should be reserved primarily for Italian citizens¹⁶. He aroused anger in some of his listeners who felt offended.

¹⁶ We refer here indirectly to the American political slogan used by Donald Trump in his 2016 election campaign "America first" which refers to a foreign policy that emphasizes nationalism and protectionism. In Italy, a similar neo-patriotic statement is made by the Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini "Prima gli italiani" (Italians first).

c) The comedy theatrical case of Patson¹⁷

“My ungrateful son, you don’t like the police. You are not grateful. Huh, you're not grateful! Your first bracelet? You were 12 years old. Who offered it to you? The police! Your first digital photo, it wasn't even fashionable. Who offered it to you? The police! [Patson’s father's voice repeating his son’s statement] ‘I don't like the police’ [Patson’s father again] You're not grateful!”

Patson (Kouassi Patrice Mian) was born in 1974 in Ivory Coast. He started his career as a comedian in 2006 within the *Jamel Comedy Club*¹⁸. This last one, promotes humourists from French ethno-racial minorities, who perform in “cafe-theâtres”¹⁹, questioning the French/Republican assimilation model. These artists, Patson included, are revisiting the stereotypical figures of migrants or the children of migrants. Within his performance, Patson seeks to question the issue of social diversity, complexifying the social image of "minorities" through the "story of self" of a character in a "subordinate" position. He uses jokes to counter the permanence of imagery inherited from the colonial era and to fight against stereotypes and their mechanisms of exclusion that imply a certain model of "Frenchness"²¹ (Quemener, 2014, p. 86). Here, Patson takes up the image of the African migrant by describing directly his father and indirectly himself to a public, which is implicitly understood as being representative of Frenchness. Within this configuration, the public is laughing at stereotyped migrants but also at themselves. In other words, Patson used a representational practice of

¹⁷ Translation from French made by the author C. Vermot.

¹⁸ This institution was created by Jamel Debbouze, one of the most successful comedians in France, who is a child of migrants living in a suburb of Paris.

¹⁹ Cafe-theâtres (coffee-theaters) are little theaters where shows last between 50 and 60 minutes, making it possible to do several shows a night. The space is usually small, allowing a small audience of between 20 and 40. This allows close proximity between the artists and the public.

²¹ Frenchness (francité) is a neologism that appeared in 1963, simultaneously in Paris and Montreal. It was used in 1966 by Leopold Léopold Sédar Senghor to describe a communion of French language around the world (Vachon, 1968). It was only in the 80s, in France, that Frenchness started to be used to speak about national identity (Vidal, 2009). Linked with the “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), Frenchness is often linked with the idea of whiteness, and of Gallic and Christian origins.

“self-estrangement”²³, in which representation acts as an invitation to the audience to detach itself from the commonsense conceptions of their lives in the national understanding (Orgad, 2012).

4) Postcolonial performativity and populist rhetoric in Italy and France.

a) “Us” versus “Them”

The populist rhetoric of the right is based on an anti-elite, nationalist register that valorises ordinary people. It privileges a universalistic discourse that goes against the standpoint theories (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2008), which maintain that all knowledge is socially situated within a context. This homogenous universal discourse supported by right-wing populist rhetoric involves a universal analytical framework rather than responding to an *ad hoc*, and therefore diverse and partial, discourse based on geopolitical contexts. The category of “other” is employed in the dialectic structure “self–other” (also “us–them”) where “other is a subject excluded from a dominant in-group which constructs an out-group” (Staszak, 2008, p. 2). There is a distinction between “them”, who belong to an outgroup, and “us”, who belong to an in-group.

In populist rhetoric the figure of out-group is filled by the figure of migrant. Moreover, right-wing populist rhetoric is interrelated with a specific “national narrative” construction. A nation, as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), allows the notion of a group condition to be defined with a subjective identification. Following Anderson’s patterns (1983), this emotional bond, which allows the construction of the imagined group of the nation, includes in part the rejection, through anger, of the figure of an out-group which, in

²³ Estrangement is a symbolic process of distancing the audience from its own already established narratives, culture, politics and history.

populist discourse, refers to migrants, strangers and outsiders. These are often stereotyped, victimized, demonized and invested with negative meanings through discourses and images (Kind and Wood, 2001; Van Dick, 2000, in Orgad, 2012). It is specifically this distinction between “them” and “us” that appears within populist rhetoric in Italy and France, and also within Bello Figo's and Patson's performances.

In January 2016, Bello Figo was invited onto a televised broadcast (*Vice*, 02-12-2016), which also had as guests the Member of the European Parliament and columnist Alessandra Mussolini and the Federal Secretary of the Lega party Matteo Salvini. Their reactions were predictably opposed to Bello Figo's songs. In his songs, Bello Figo uses plural pronouns and plural forms of the verbs in order to highlight his positionality of a specific “us”, identifying himself with the subjects of his song: refugees. The reactions of A. Mussolini, were based on moral disdain; she told him to get “to work”, suggesting that his status as a singer was fake. When she once again interrupted him saying “go back to your country”, attempting to make him feel alienated from the place where he legally lives, Bello Figo answered correctly: “This is my country”, insisting on the acceptance of the presence of migration and of the Italo-migrant generations as Italian citizens. The parliamentarian, in keeping with populist rhetoric, mixed moralistic commentaries with political positionings and frivolous personal opinions on the aesthetic value of his work, all delivered in the same conversation and with the same tone of voice. Following this TV appearance, some of Bello Figo's concerts were cancelled because of neo-fascist threats.

Patson, in his performance, emphasizes a distinction between the pronouns “us”, which refers to migrants, and “you”, which refers to the audience but also to a “them”, a category of people different from him, the “French people”. This is a reference to the position/policy of

assimilationism supported by the French government. In the sketch, Patson points out that his father and his uncle are not assimilated. The theory of assimilation, and its perception within society, is generally based on the idea of a “straight line” assimilation². Assimilation is a process, which can take place through economic (getting a job) or sociocultural steps (such as proficiency in the language). In his performance Patson clearly evokes these different issues. After twenty years in France, his uncle and his father are still not wearing appropriate clothing for the climate and the society they live in, they speak broken French and have strong accents. Patson plays both his father and the son (himself) at the same time by telling the story to the public. He translates the father’s words to the public, to the “French people” who are presumed not to understand the African way of speaking French. By not knowing how to pronounce the host language, his father shows that he will never integrate in the country. Patson, using an ironic caricature of cultural difference, allows himself to evoke the excesses of a perpetually hosting French culture (Quemener, 2014).

The linguistic aspect of the supposed assimilation component has been used voluntarily by both artists, Bello Figo and Patson, in their mimicry of broken Italian and broken French.

Politically and historically, Italy and France have treated the racial issue differently. In Italy “racial laws”²⁵ were formally established during World War II and were cancelled by the constitution at the end of that period. Despite this legal change, in the current media discourse some politicians (Panorama, 05-09-2018), when discussing the phenomenon of immigration, have (erroneously and illegally) raised the question of a white race (referring to a generalized notion of Italian citizens). In France, the question of race was historically neglected (D. Fassin and E. Fassin, 2006). The French narrative is built around the myth that French

² It is defined as “the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial²⁴ distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it” through generations (Alba and Nee, 1997, p. 863; Rumbaut, 1997; Zhou, 1997).

²⁵ They were established by the fascist government in 1938, published by the PNF, Partito Nazionale Fascista, October 26th 1938.

citizens live free, equal and in a fraternal country, under the protection of human rights²⁶. Past recurring social tensions have allowed the debate to emerge progressively. The recognition of racial discrimination, “visible minorities”, the issue of institutionalized discriminations have increasingly been faced by contemporary French society. Nonetheless, racist stereotypes continue to exist in the media, in jokes, daily discourse, representations and, obviously, in right-wing populist rhetoric.

Both artists are playing with migrant stereotypes and populist rhetoric within their performances, but in keeping with their national context they treat the issue of blackness in different terms²⁷. In Bello Figo’s satirical song, he embodies and declares a generalized notion of blackness, referring to it mainly through the figure of the (black, male African) refugee who comes across the Mediterranean Sea, exactly as the populist politicians portray them. Patson, on the contrary, parodies the tensions between his father, who comes from an African country, and the host society to which he belongs, maintaining a separation between the subject (himself) and the object that embodies the stereotypes he mimics. For Bello Figo there is a homogeneity between the status of refugees with the etiquette of blackness and for Patson, the African continent, simplified as “Africa”, is spoken of as a homogenous borderless place, and not as a continent that is composed of different countries. It is the colour of the skin of both artists that serves as sufficient for a distinction of “othering” within the Italian and French societies. Bello Figo lists in his rap a series of xenophobic clichés that are spoken and shared on social media where “we” (black people, refugees, including

²⁶ The human rights declaration initially excluded women and individuals from the colonies. Even today, human rights is translated into French as “droits de l’homme”, (man’s rights) expressing a gendered take compared to the more neutral word “human” which is used in English.

²⁷ According to the research “Trajectories and origins” led in France by INED and INSEE, the first ground of discrimination expressed by “visible minorities” in France is related to skin color. (Beauchemin, Hamel, and Simon, 2018). Despite Article 3 of the Italian Constitution and the further law n. 205 passed in 1993, and other more recent conventions, which impose legal sanctions against ethnic, racial discrimination and violence that punish anyone who publicly proclaims fascist principles and methods with antidemocratic aims, there is no explicit reference to discrimination based on language and skin color in the Italian Penal Code (ECRI, 2016).

himself) do not want to work as laborers, because “we” do not want to get dirty, since “we” are already “black”. This part of the lyric, which has been paraphrased, responds to the local general expression, which conflates being black with being dirty inverting and reusing it in his favour. On the contrary, Patson's humour is based on a caricature of the African migrant and himself (the son). Repeating the erroneous representations of a part of French society, he considers the African continent as a homogenous country, since his skin colour serves as a sufficient element of distinctness from France and the French population.

b) Slackness²⁸

Within their performances, both artists evoke slackness in different ways. Slackness can refer at the same time to negligence and can be a postcolonial and decolonial tool (Cooper, 1995, 2004). It transgresses and outrages, through explicit sexuality, the attitudes and statements imposed by Eurocentric values. Within his song, Bello Figo uses slackness verbally and explicitly, which allows him to investigate how the “high/low” culture divides the audience. Women, or literally “vaginas”²⁹, or as he stated afterwards: “white vaginas”, are repeatedly mentioned during the song, in order to emphasize the machismo and antagonism with Italian manhood, or the “white male” as he defines it. Sexual stereotypes embodied by the racist colonial discourse are overstated, emphasizing an over-sexualization of the black male body (Fanon, 1952; Wallace, 1978).

Patson focuses on the issue of abuse of the system by a young unemployed migrant and his slackness as described by his father while observing him:

²⁸ The term “slackness” defines a controversial aspect of West Indian, Jamaican dancehall music that has sexually explicit lyrics, performances, and dance routines that outrage the middle class and the older generation (Mordecai and Mordecai, 2001; Cooper, 2004).

²⁹ In the Italian lyric the word used is “figa”, a slang term that refers both to female genitalia and an attractive woman.

[Patson voice] "My father had heard in the neighborhood, that I did not like the police" [Patson imitates the accent of his father] 'Ehin? you do not like the police?' [Patson voice] "My dad, he loves the police". [Patson's father] "Come here! What's your problem with the police, huh? I registered you at school³⁰. [...] They fired you! I put you to work, they fired you! I put you in the assedic³¹, they fired you! You tell everyone you're doing the three eight³²! You sleep in the morning, noon and night. That's your three eight!"

Patson, unlike Bello Figo, considers the bionomy between a taken-for-granted sense of gratitude to the host country and the uncomfortable disparity between that and the social reality. He does not treat ironically the issue of inadequacy felt by a migrant in relation to the assimilation system imposed by the society itself; rather, he exposes, through the views of his father, who experienced the colonial relationship between an African country and the "metropole"³³, the moral duty of migrants to be "thankful" and appreciative to French society for having welcomed them, offering them supposedly a better life. His humour extends to the relationship between "thankfulness" and the role of the police, a common discrimination issue for the majority of young citizens of the suburbs who are mostly from migrant backgrounds (Hargreaves and Perotti, 1993, in Orgad 2012). Through the mimicry of his father, he presents the general view of a young person living in the Paris suburbs, who is associated in the social imagination with a "marginal delinquent".

"[...] You listen to weird music: 'Murder the police, murder the police [with body gesture]. Woop woop. Murder the police. Woop woop'. If you continue, it's me that will kill you, even before the police [laughs]."

³⁰ The way he pronounces the term "school" is heard as "alcohol".

³¹ The Assedic, *Association for Employment in Industry and Commerce*, now called *Pôle emploi* (employment pole) is a French office where unemployed people have to register in order to get help to find a job.

³² In France, working on "three eight" is a shift work scheduling system that consists in rotating three shifts of eight consecutive shifts on a single shift to ensure continuous operation 24 hours per day. This system is mainly used in companies in the secondary or transport sector.

³³ "Metropole" refers to the continent as opposed to the overseas territories.

He is also addressing a political discourse specifically regarding slavery, postcolonialism, racism, violence and discriminatory violence from the police. Within this part of the sketch, Patson is referring to a song from Mathieu Kassovitz's iconic French movie *La Haine* (1995), about life in the suburbs. In one scene, DJ Cut Killer remixes the song Sound of da police (1993) by the French rap group NTM³ from KRS One, a North American rapper from Bronx, NY. Both KRS One and NTM are politicized rappers, who speak about slavery, postcolonialism, violence and police beatings and racism. NTM, express their anger against French society through a violent discourse. Within this lyric, the group explicitly expresses the persistence of institutional racism (Béru, 2008). Even though the rap group is no longer active today, the words “woop, woop, assassins de la police”, which were incorrectly translated and wrongly attributed to the French group³⁶, are still used today as a rallying cry during French demonstrations (France Culture, 2018). Through his sketch, Patson ironically denounces two issues at the same time: the violent systemic condition of people of colour in the suburbs, and the colonial hierarchical relations between postcolonized citizens and European countries, as personified by his father.

c) The Fear of Invasion

For the populist parties of the right migrants, as an identified “object” and “subject”, may embody responsibility for the nation-state’s instability. This can explain the fact that what seems to affect contemporary politics the most is the perception of danger based on the issue of immigration, rather than the actual rate of immigration itself (Il Sole 24 Ore, 29/08/2018).

³ This remix was later introduced with the title: ‘Police’, during a concert by an iconic French rap group: Suprême Nique Ta Mère (Suprême Nick - from the verb “niquer”, to screw - your mother), known as NTM.

³⁶ Instead of hearing “woop, woop, that the sound of the police” by KRS One, French listeners changed it to “woop, woop, assassins de la police” - killers of the police, in English.

Europe today is facing political, economic and social uncertainty. In this situation, people feel or perceive a danger without being able to identify it, making them anxious. Uncertainty pushes people within an iterative decision process into a state of permanent alert, which leads to anxiety (Delumeau, 1978; Callon, Lascoumes, and Barthe, 2001; Salazar, 2010). Through the right populist rhetoric, this anxiety is channelled into fear of the figure of the migrant³⁷. The emotion of fear is linked to a situation of risk, where people put themselves on an episodic alert and express fear towards a danger that is likely to occur (Beck, 2001, p. 37). Its instrumentation, its invocation and its political uses are no longer confined to the regimes of terror but are also found within democratic regimes (Crépon, 2008).

In the song by Bello Figo, he lists a provocative trilogy that responds to the embodiment of the xenophobic and racist commentaries that are common in the Italian media and in popular discussions. He states that “his friends”, referring to black refugees, when they dock from the illegal boats that cross the Mediterranean Sea, automatically receive a car, a house and women. Here he responds to the simple inversion phenomena of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1970), where the inversion of habits and discussions are fully and literally identified and embodied. By mentioning cars, he responds to the question of social status and to the general sense of social ascending desire of hierarchy. By mentioning houses, he raises an important event that happened during the specific timeline of the song: in 2016 a violent earthquake in the centre of Italy destroyed several small towns and caused more than 3000 forced evacuations (into tented camps and hotels) at the national expense (*La Repubblica*, 28-08-2018). At the same period, the government established a reception system for refugees who are hosted temporarily in unoccupied low-budget hotels. Bello Figo's statement responds directly to the xenophobic comments of feelings of injustice, from those who believed the Italian government should have prioritized Italians over the refugees, offering hotel

³⁷ Within the sociology of emotions, fear, like all emotions, is defined as a social construction (Vermot, 2017) and is a “meaning production” (Jodelet, 2011).

accommodation to them instead. Comments from the populist right assert that the Italian families who were victims of the natural disaster were abandoned, while on the contrary, rooms in luxury hotels (*Liberio Quotidiano*, 26-08-2016) with free Wi-Fi were given to refugees. The singer exclaiming “WIFI” in the song, continues by stating that he wants to call his “friends from the boats” inviting them to come, in order to increase a (false (*Sole 24 Ore*, 28-08-2018) perception of “invasion” by immigrants in Italians (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 27-08-2018). He embodies the xenophobic statements shared by the media by deliberately enacting the fictional xenophobic discourse. In the 2016 TV broadcast (*Dalla Vostra Parte*, 2-12-2016) the current (2018) Italian Minister of the Interior M. Salvini, who belongs to the separatist and xenophobic political party Lega, stated exactly the literal meaning of Bello Figo's parodic lyric. His failure to understand the practice of trolling and the parodying of society in the song led to Salvini's populist discourse being affirmed publicly and in the media. By taking Bello Figo's parody literally, the viewer, and in this case even the politician, sees and hears a confirmation of xenophobic judgements. For the politician, Bello Figo explains literally what the Italian nation really does: it hosts false refugees who are not escaping from war or conflict in their homelands and who are given a comfortable life thanks to the welcoming associations and national policies.

Patson touches on the issue of invasion, but in different terms. He talks about his overcrowded family, the polygamy of his father when he leaves his “four wives and 38 children at the train station so as not to pay for their tickets” (here paraphrased). He continues with the issue of being welcomed in Europe. Within his performance he affirms that new family members are hosted by his father, without mention openly if they have arrived legally or illegally:

“Once, I was in my room. Well my room is also the room of my eight sisters [laughs], my eight brothers [laughs] and my three cousins who came from home³⁸ [laughs]”.

Moreover, he mobilizes the colonial past with the issue of the overcrowded apartments lived by immigrants in France:

“At home we had no bunk beds [laughs]. You're lucky. You have bunk beds. We were piled on top of each other [laughs]. I slept like that and my brother slept on my neck, directly [laughs]”.

Here Patson alludes subtly to the slave trade, superposing it with the overcrowded places where contemporary immigrants tend to live. In this frame of his speech, “you”: from “You’re lucky” is addressed to the “French people” who typically live on a different level of comfort.

Conclusion

This article aimed to deconstruct the entanglement between right-wing populist rhetoric and some practices of ethnic humour from Italy and France, two countries that lack major postcolonial debates. It has been demonstrated how populism is correlated with collective emotions and how they become political tools even when faced with artistic practices that attempt to reveal the fictional construction of social attitudes and political ideologies. Although Bello Figo is not a political singer, he became a political figure because he performed a reality that was taken to be political, as a result of his register and satirical methodology. His songs do not declare openly what he personally wants to say but re-enact the main populist discussion in Italy.

³⁸ In the original French version, Patson uses the term “au pays” which refers specifically to an immigrant expression that refers to the notion of home as the African continent.

In the case of Patson, the use of “self-estrangement” allows him to perform French African migrant stereotypes, which are central to the right-wing populist rhetoric in France. Like Bello Figo, Patson does not openly position himself as an artist with a political discourse. Nonetheless, his performances indirectly question French society about racism and African stereotypes, echoing the populist rhetoric of the right.

These two case studies, enable us to show how contemporary right-wing populist rhetoric does not give space to a partial discourse (Haraway, 1988) that gives a voice to the diverse minorities living in the same country; neither is it open to an act of reflexive deconstruction of the issues, nor to the methodologies through which they are expressed. It seems that these contemporary societies do not follow the rapidity of social change increased by the phenomenon of sudden migration that diversifies, while encoding and decoding (Hall, 1973), the *status quo* of the artistic and entertainment performances of the nations. A study of the reception by different audiences of Bello Figo and Patson's performances should be carried out in order to understand how parody and satire can be used by populism in order to reinforce its own ideology and/or allow the empowerment of these “minorities”. Nonetheless, at this stage this research also describes how the artists use the practices of satire and parody as tools to question racist and sexist stereotypes.

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