

Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory? Intersections in Italian Postcolonial Studies

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Abstract This article addresses the issue of Italian postcolonialism and its belated flourishing in comparison to other European countries. In particular, it focuses on the different genesis that this paradigm has undergone in terms of intellectual traditions and cultural output. Different cartographies have led to a specific brand of Italian postcolonialism that has emerged as a useful umbrella term to critically address questions of immigration, multiculturalism and citizenship within the Italian context. The term has now gained momentum bringing Italy into a transnational dialogue that questions the flows and nodes of Italian history, culture and politics creating new archives and cosmopolitan futures.

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Keywords Italy. Postcolonialism. Europe. Race. Migration.

1 Introduction

Italy seems to have finally entered its postcolonial phase, to the relief and excitement of many scholars, writers and activists who have, for years, been promoting the need to revisit Italian history from new perspectives and subject positions. But if postcolonial theory has finally landed in Italy, is that a reason just for celebration or also for scepticism? Does Italy need postcolonial theory?

Some years back, the French African specialist Jean-François Bayart (director of research at CNRS) wrote a virulent article on postcolonial studies, summing up the field as a carnival and as a fashion that arrives far too late to make a difference. The article, which was originally written in French, has been translated by Andrew Brown and republished in *Public Culture* (Bayart 2011, 23) with the title "Postcolonial Studies. A Political Invention of Tradition?", stirring up fierce controversy among postcolonial theorists and French studies specialists.

Jean-Francois Bayart gives a searing critique of the field of postcolonial studies, pointing out what he calls methodological errors in postcolonial studies (namely a certain 'reification' of what it is to be defined as a proper 'colonial situation') and calls for greater contextualisation and historicisation in order to avoid some of the possible shortcomings. Although Bayart does not dismiss postcolonial studies entirely, he goes as far as affirming that

for all its usefulness, postcolonial studies is largely unnecessary. Most of the issues it has explored had been explored previously or were simultaneously being investigated by other theories, which often managed to avoid the pitfalls into which postcolonial studies fell.

[...]

Postcolonial studies is questionable; it leads the study of colonial or postcolonial situations to a dead end, with the risk of a real scholarly regression in relation to the achievements of the past thirty years. (Bayart 2011, 65)

Somewhat provocatively, Bayart raises an important question, one that we should ponder: if it is to avoid becoming a new normative and exclusive label that falls into the trap it wants to criticise, postcolonial studies needs to be made more 'local' and parochial. Postcolonial studies should also be able to account for the diversity of the contexts in which it is applied, while at the same time avoiding fostering somehow essentialist (or, in the worst-case scenario, even nationalist) ideas about coherent and self-sufficient identities. A certain productive tension between universality and particularity needs to be left unresolved.

The university prisons will soon be full, as postcolonial studies have now taken all situations of dominance through the ages as its province, without fear of anachronism or absurdity. (58)

Though invectives, denigrations and accusations of postcolonial studies is an intrinsic part of the field itself and a feature of its vitality and mutability, the specific *j'accuse* by Bayart needs further scrutiny – not to glorify his ideas and positions, but to articulate and analyse how such a view could, to a certain extent, also be applied to Italy and be reconfirmed or confuted. His anti-postcolonial manifesto was dutifully accompanied in the *Public Culture* special issue by equally powerful responses by critics of the calibre of Robert Young, Ranjana Khanna and Ann Laura Stoler, and including pro-postcolonialists (if we start thinking in compartments) such as Achille Mbembe and Marnia Lazreg. But let me first examine Bayart's most salient points.

Jean-François Bayart accuses the field of explaining current social divides (such as the 2005 banlieue riots in France) as the protracted effect of the past 'colonial divide', by postulating a continuity that underlies modes of representation and behaviour from the colonial era to the contemporary period (56). He complains, therefore, that the field is simply a catch-all term that is not only ambiguous and ambivalent but also fragmented. This is because postcolonial studies is a "river with many tributaries" (58), as there are many sources, and it is attached to different groups, categories and claims.

And yet neither postcolonial studies itself, not postcolonial critique of it have managed to erase an initial ambiguity. In the work of its theorists, the desire for universalism often turns into a discourse of identity, and the status (philosophical or scholarly) of its texts frequently remains uncertain, which makes them difficult to comment or to use. (58)

Bayart acknowledges, however, that postcolonial studies is now also flourishing in France. However, he rejects the virulent claim that the country has resisted or is resisting this paradigm out of provincialism, conservatism and, above all, the desire not to face its own colonial past.

The originality of postcolonial studies lies in the way the connection was made between the critique of colonialism and the critique of other forms of domination, especially with respect to the question of gender - borrowing heavily, yet again, from French writers such as Pierre Bourdieu, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault, who nevertheless had not really integrated the parameter of empire into their thinking, as Ann Laura Stoler has pointed out, and whose conception of the subject and of representation, allegedly disembodied and Western-centered, has not found favour with Spivak.¹ The link was not completely absent in the works of Fanon and Octave Mannoni, or even Sartre. Nonetheless, postcolonial studies benefited from the tremendous theoretical germination that took place in France in the 1960s and the way its seeds were then sown in America. Duly noted. (60-1)

Through a long argument in defence of France and against the postcolonial essentialisation of France, Bayart points out that postcolonial studies owes

¹ See Stoler 1995; Spivak 1988, 271-313. As Bayart continues on Spivak: "Spivak having rightfully cautioned against the limitation of the culturalist problematics of fight against social exclusion and inequality and advocated for deconstruction of Western conceptualisation of 'representation'. But paradoxically this author has contributed a fair bit to that very same culturalist slide!" (65). This section and other parts of this article are based on the MA thesis by Goffredo Polizzi, *Postcoloniality and the Italian South. Race, Gender, Sexuality, Literature*. Erasmus Mundus Master Degree in Women's and Gender Studies. Utrecht University, Faculty of Humanities, 2013.

much not only to French theory but also, and above all, to the intellectual, literary, artistic and political trends that focused on the colonial question in France during the 1950s. Therefore, in defence of France, Bayart concludes that “we’ve done our bit!” (59) with writers such as Aimée Césaire, Léopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Octave Mannoni, who are seminal to the development of the field, and other French philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, who have inspired the critique of other forms of domination such as gender, sexuality and class, even though they do not directly address issues of empire. More recently, Édouard Glissant (1997) and Étienne Balibar (2003) have kept the critique of colonial formations in sharp focus.

To summarise: he accuses postcolonialism of operating in a homogenising fashion, of being promiscuous in its lack of disciplinary specificity and of being invested in an identitarian politics. For Bayart there are two main fallacies, or what he calls two methodological errors in postcolonial thinking:

1. Dehistoricising the colonial.
2. Concatenation between the colonial moment and the postcolonial moment.

Now, we could say that, if we formulate this differently, by saying for example that operations of oppression and resistance operate with similar patterns across time and that the legacies of the colonial schemata are still lingering in the present constitution of nation states, construction of identity and migration patterns, then yes, Bayart is right, yet with the opposite effect.

Bayart’s tirade against the accusation of French anti-postcolonialism is well taken, as it persuasively argues in considerable detail the way in which French culture has been inspirational, and even foundational, for postcolonial studies. However, it also reconfirms the blindness, or intellectual resistance, towards the transformation that these notions or this inspiration drawn from French theorists and intellectuals underwent when travelling elsewhere and returning in the form of postcolonial theory. The latter is rejected as imported and colonising, reaffirming a natural resistance towards theories travelling back to France from other contexts.

2 Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory?

There is general agreement that the field of Italian studies has been behind the times, that there is a kind of amnesia or removal of the memory, effects and legacies of the Italian colonial past, but that contemporary patterns of immigration have suddenly prompted a new awakening and the elaboration of a new ‘postcolonial consciousness’ vis-à-vis new political, social,

cultural and humanitarian emergencies, as brought to light by the many recent Lampedusa disasters.

As mentioned above, we could read the genealogy of postcolonial studies (following Bayart's model, but not in a negative sense) within Italy itself, in an attempt to figure out whether Italy has been completely immune, resistant or antagonistic to the postcolonial development. Or perhaps a different genealogy needs to be traced, where terminology might be different but concerns similar, yet linked to the specific geopolitical situation of Italy in its transition between the colonial past and multicultural present. This should take into account Italy's strategic position or – to phrase it better – influential and influenced/contaminated position in the Mediterranean with a different connection/relation (both territorial and metaphorical) to Europe and the other Souths, i.e. around the Mediterranean basin.

There are several intersections that should be mentioned when the development, the flourishing or what is more often called 'the arrival' of postcolonial studies is celebrated:

1. The precedent in supposedly 'postcolonial thinkers' or those who have instigated and influenced the development of postcolonial theorising (Vico, Gramsci, Levi).
2. The internal subaltern question in Italy, namely the Southern Question and its relation to *Pensiero Meridiano*/Mediterranean studies.
3. Italy's history of double colonisation (paradigms of emigration as immigration or what is usually referred to as external and internal colonialism) with very specific consequences for the Italian notion of national identity but also geographical reach and scope.
4. Race theories and eugenics. How the discourse on race has followed a specific track in Italian studies and merges and diverges with studies on colonialism and postcolonialism (from Lombroso to Sergi to Burgio, Sorgoni, Barrera, Poidimani, Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop).
5. Contemporary thinkers are readdressing the operation of nation state, empire and globalisation vis-à-vis patterns of migration, capitalism and sovereignty (Negri, Agamben, Dainotto, Passerini, Verdicchio, Mezzadra, Mellino, Passerini and so forth).

2.1 The Italian Intellectual Legacy

Let me start with Italian thinkers who have undisputedly contributed to the genesis if not to the development of postcolonial studies. Starting with Said, widely acknowledged as the founding father of the field, we

can easily confirm that his thinking was inspired by Vico for his notion of humanism, and by Gramsci for his notion of hegemony and the subaltern, along with Foucault and his notion of knowledge as power and of how discursive constructions of domination and resistance are articulated. It is universally acknowledged that Gramsci has been a key thinker for the development of postcolonial studies, though he himself did not devote much attention to the Italian colonial question in his *Prison Notebooks*. Hailed by cultural theorists as a wide-ranging thinker, going beyond the mere question of class and Marxism, as this has often been continued to be studied in the Italian context, Gramsci has become a bit of a cult figure thanks to his insights (that were far ahead of his time) concerning the notions of hegemony and consent, the subaltern, the role of the intellectual, the function of minority languages and the role of accents. Neelam Srivastava and Baidik Bhattacharya have devoted a very useful volume to the study of Gramsci as a postcolonial thinker, trying to connect his legacy to a much wider transnational scenario in which the appropriation, abrogation and derogation of this thinking has led to fruitful intersections and insights.

As Robert Young writes in the volume edited by Srivastava and Bhattacharya, it was actually Spivak who invented the subaltern and not Gramsci. The latter's definitions shifted and referred to the term in different ways, as the lower classes, classes struggling against the state, marginal classes and peripheral classes, though the most viable definition is the reference to the proletariat as a class without political consciousness: "groups who have not yet come to class consciousness (Quaderni 328-32/ *Prison Notebooks*, 2, 48-52)" (Srivastava, Bhattacharya 2012, 30). Obviously, Levi has also been very influential in postcolonial thinking and his name is closely linked to the work of Agamben and his definitions of camp, bio-life and the state of exception, which have been widely used and appropriated to analyse postcolonial conditions of abjection, as in the case of migration, refugees and asylum.

2.2 The Southern Question in Italy

As Bayart points out, postcolonial studies should seriously consider the fields of thought that have revolved around concerns and issues similar to its own, in the various contexts in which it tries to adapt itself. In the Italian and southern Italian context, this would certainly mean addressing the now centuries-old tradition of *Pensiero Meridiano* (Cassano 2007) and Mediterranean studies (Chambers 2008).

Linking to the famous 'Southern Question' initially explored by Gramsci himself, Paolo Verdicchio posited a while back that the condition of colonialism and postcolonialism is not just one of empires and their demise but also of internal colonisation within Italy itself, through the divide between

north and south and the hegemonic construction of authority and inferiority, modernity and backwardness, progress and a-temporality, which follows the classic Orientalist paradigm developed by Said, but which has barely been read and recognised as such for the historical, political and cultural relations between North and South.

The Italian-American scholar Pasquale Verdicchio has written of a “Preclusion of Postcolonial Discourse in Southern Italy”: postcolonial studies challenges historical fictions and yet it sometimes falls short in its representation of postcolonial groups, mostly due to a characterization of postcoloniality almost entirely in terms of problematic designations such as white versus non-white, or First versus Third World. As Verdicchio argues:

[i]f postcolonial discourse is to effectively unmask the workings of imperialism, it must be opened up to study colonial possibilities that exist(ed) in less clear cut situations. First and Third World are not always separable in geographic space and granted racism’s unambiguous influence and effects, race is an ambiguous category. The phenomena of emigration plays a key role in such cases where the historicization of emigration trends can only enlarge the scope of postcolonial studies. (Verdicchio 1997, 191)

Therefore, the category of race, as Verdicchio demonstrates using the case of Italian migrants in the United States, is much more ambiguous and dependent on a variety of contextual elements than the white/non-white binary would account for, and processes of racialisation are not always uniquely dependent on apparently self-evident (but in reality purportedly singled out) physical differences. Verdicchio defines southern Italians as “unrecognized postcolonials” (Verdicchio 1997, 191) and delineates a very useful framework for the consideration of southern Italy through a post-colonial lens.

Making a similar argument, the anthropologist Jane Schneider has considered the north-south dynamics in Italy as an instance of ‘neo-orientalism’. Schneider describes the past twenty years in the life of Italy as a period of rekindled regionalistic conflict fostered by the different and conflicting interests of diverse actors on the national stage (political parties, industrial lobbies and criminal organisations of various kinds) and finds it imperative to rethink the ‘Southern Question’, via Said and his notion of Orientalism, as having a strong but somehow unacknowledged racial element. Commenting on what has become an internalised sense of inferiority on the part of southern Italians, Schneider states that the task of the present is to understand “what alternative formulations might people create and live by if they were able to escape from the control of the ‘Question’ and to imagine the political, economic and cultural differences within Italy in some other way” (Schneider 1998, 16).

One attempt to combine the focus on southern Italy with a postcolonial line of thought has been that associated with the conceptualisation of the Mediterranean as a postcolonial space. According to Iain Chambers, for example, southern Italy should be interpreted and should interpret itself as being part of the larger postcolonial network of the Mediterranean Sea. Southern Italy should be looking south, instead of looking north to Europe, in order to gain a better understanding of its identity and networked relations through alternative geographies and histories. This theoretical move has to be understood against the backdrop of recent discourses on the 'Europeanness' of Italy and of the southern borders of Europe becoming ever more impervious, which has yielded the coining of the phrase 'Fortress Europe'. According to Chambers, the Italian south can be a place from where a critique of Western developmental teleologies can be sustained and from where alternative versions of modernity and global transformations can be envisioned and articulated. The southern point of view offers a critique of Western modernity from within, demonstrating modernity's incompleteness and interruptions. Thus, the discourse of the Mediterranean as a site of open-ended hybridisation exposes "the fundamentalism of Occidental humanism" (Chambers 2008, 31).

Chambers' theories can be seen as part of what Norma Bouchard calls a 'Mediterranean Neo-Humanism' (Bouchard 2008) or *Pensiero Meridiano*, as it is most often referred to in Italy. The sociologist Franco Cassano can be considered one of its major proponents. According to Lollini, Cassano and *Pensiero Meridiano* do not endorse a complete rejection of humanism; rather "[f]rom the framework of the global south(s) of postcolonial and subaltern theory, Cassano questions the universalizing assumptions of Eurocentric Occidentalism, while seeking to recover a subalternized archive of humanistic knowledge" (Lollini 2008, 20).

Pensiero Meridiano amounts then to a search for a different kind of humanism, one that is not coterminous with a Eurocentric point of view, and whose origins can be traced back to the Mediterranean. *Pensiero Meridiano* reopens the somewhat exhausted tradition of *Meridionalismo* through its engagement with postcolonial studies, opening up new trajectories that connect Italy's subaltern history to wider European comparative contexts.

2.3 Italy's History of Double Colonisation

Italy has been 'postcolonial' all along if we want to account for the massive history of migration that Italy suffered between 1800 and the present - almost 27 million Italians emigrated, often without returning. In the book *Italy's Many Diaspora* (2000), Donna Gabaccia examines the social, cultural and economic integration of Italian migrants. She explores their complex yet distinctive identity and their relationship with their homeland.

The plural in Gabaccia's title refers less to the multiple global destinations of Italians and more to two different considerations: that Italians left their country as Veneti, Siciliani and Neapolitans rather than as 'Italians'; and that a distinct feature was the varied character of their dispersion: trade diaspora, cultural diaspora, nationalist diaspora and mass diaspora. The formation of the modern Italian nation often seemed to take shape more easily outside Italy than within. Gabaccia argues: "For a country with a long history of sending emigrants abroad, Italy experienced considerable distress in welcoming migrants onto its national territory" (Gabaccia 2000, 170), and adds that "a nation accustomed to thinking of its migrants as subject to racist and capitalist oppression abroad suddenly looked into the mirror to see itself as the oppressor" (172). This might have to do with the fact that Italy, unlike the United Kingdom, France or Germany, has not developed a clear understanding of how its history of migration has defined its national identity.

So, Italy is not only engaged with the retrieval of its colonial past but also with coming to terms with its national dispersal, which can also be seen as an expansion, or elongation as Ato Quayson would call it, of the national space and consciousness (2012). Nonetheless, it requires a different paradigm to account for what history is and how 'postmemory', as coined by Marianne Hirsch,² works out, through which second- or third-generation Italian emigrants, despite not having been born in Italy or perhaps even speaking Italian, carry the weight, experience or sense of Italian identity, which also brings with it its many tainted legacies of anti-Semitism, colonialism and racial apartheid. That means a 'postmemory' that is not only about supporting Italy in the World Cup and seeing Balotelli as a possible new national 'postcolonial hero', but also a much more confused and diffused relation of belonging and contention.

This émigré mentality has a link, though it works differently, with the current patterns of immigration, which should remind Italians of their migratory pasts and which instead heightens the lack of memory of this loss, and does not enable to make a connection between national haemorrhage and migrant invasion, the one referring to loss and diaspora and the other to rejection and non-recognition of the other as human, let alone as 'potential co-citizen'. The many Lampedusa disasters are again a bitter reminder of the disconnection between race, identity and soil, all making

2 Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Focusing on the remembrance of the Holocaust, this essay elucidates the generation of postmemory and its reliance on photography as a primary medium of transgenerational transmission of trauma. Identifying tropes that most potently mobilise the work of postmemory, it examines the role of the family as a space of transmission and the function of gender as an idiom of remembrance. Cf. Hirsch 2008, 103-28.

problematic the operation of recognition, hospitality and integration. This rejection has often been analysed in postcolonial terms, as a reminder of the unprocessed, unelaborated Italian colonial past, silenced, suppressed and removed for decades, and now coming to haunt Italy's contemporary politics with a vengeance, literally through the dead bodies of the many immigrants who try to lay claim to Italy in particular and to Europe and the West more generally, on the basis of their links, historical ties and colonial bondage.

This is linked not to simple amnesia, but to what Ann Stoler has called 'aphasia'. The word is used not to appeal to an organic cognitive deficit but:

Rather, it is to emphasise both loss of access and active dissociation. In aphasia, an occlusion of knowledge is the issue. It is not a matter of ignorance or absence. Aphasia is a dismembering, a difficulty speaking, a difficulty generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts with appropriate things. Aphasia in its many forms describes a difficulty retrieving both conceptual and lexical vocabularies and, most important, a difficulty comprehending what is spoken. (Stoler 2011, 125)

To conclude, there are several issues that are specific to the Italian postcolonial predicament and that should be taken into account: the internal Southern Question; internal and external colonialism, including the Jewish question, as the specific race discourses pertaining to the Italian case; and the influence of Italian colonial thinkers, which is also marked by the appropriation and cherishing of the postcolonial field outside Italy. This refers to the phenomenon of scholars who are often not part of the diaspora themselves, or in exile, but un-homely. This makes it possible for the postcolonial studies to be not simply a reflection on the Italian postcolonial condition and its relation to the colonial past, but also to engage with it with a double insight: embracing a discipline from a distance, as a travelling theory that returns strengthened, altered, modified.

2.4 Race Theories and Eugenics

The founder of the Italian school of criminology, Cesare Lombroso, is a highly influential figure in the scientific culture of the late nineteenth century. The history of race is very peculiar in Italy not only because of Lombroso and the Southern Question but also because of colonialism.

Firstly, Italy's colonial enterprise started when most of the other European empires were collapsing. Furthermore, Italian colonialism was the effect of an unplanned solution to internal economic issues (an *imperialismo straccione* [tramp colonialism]). It was mainly southern Italians who

escaped poverty and social unrest by enrolling in the military campaigns in Africa, unaware of what they were signing up for. Lastly, Italian colonialism was perceived as disorganised, given that it lacked a structured ideology of superiority (hence the myth of *Italiani Brava Gente* [the nice Italians]) (Del Boca 1984; Labanca 2002; Ponzanesi 2004). For example, the relative proximity in race and class between the Italians in Africa (originating primarily from Southern Italy)³ and the relatively light-skinned people of Eastern Africa, where a mix of races and religions coexisted, could not sustain a clear dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonised. This situation of proximity was also theorised by anthropologists such as Giuseppe Sergi, who claimed that Italians were part of a Mediterranean race rather than an Aryan race (which he considered to be of Barbarian descent) and, therefore, closer to Africa ([1895] 1901). Sergi controversially placed Ethiopians and Mediterraneans within the same stock (*stirpe*). According to him, the Mediterranean race, the “greatest race in the world”, was responsible for the great civilisations of ancient times, including those of Egypt, Carthage, Greece and Rome. They were quite distinct from the peoples of northern Europe. These theories were developed in opposition to Nordicism, the claim that the Nordic race was of pure Aryan stock and naturally superior to other Europeans. The common origin implied the absence of repulsion between the peoples of the two areas and a desire for union. That view was censored and denied with the rise of Italian fascism. Attempts were made to establish a legal opposition between the colonizer and the colonised through a racial model of superiority that penalised forms of *madamismo* and *meticciato* (interracial relationships).⁴ But as had already happened with anti-homosexuality laws, Dall’Orto explains, very few Italians in the colonies felt threatened by the new legislation and instances of concubinage and interracial relationships continued, or possibly increased given the larger number of Italian soldiers deployed in Africa during the war against Ethiopia (Ponzanesi 2004).

Moving forward to more modern times, some recent interventions have reflected on this issue and have addressed the *foreclusion* of race in the Italian public sphere, trying to understand what kind of power mechanisms it has served and still serves in the present day; these scholars and activists strongly argue for the (re)introduction of the concepts of race, racism and

3 John Dickie analyses the stereotypical representation of the South in the post-Unification period (1999). The Mezzogiorno was widely seen as barbaric, violent and irrational, an ‘Africa’ on the European continent, while paradoxically integrated into the imaginary of the emerging nation.

4 *Madamato* or *madamismo* was the Italian term for the consorting of Italian men with local women whereby Eritrean women effectively considered themselves married while there were no legal implications for their Italian partners. See Ponzanesi (2005, 2012a).

especially *racialisation*⁵ in the public debate in Italy as critical tools that can give us a better understanding of past and contemporary phenomena of exploitation and marginalisation in Italy and in Europe.

In their introduction to the issue of the online journal *Darkmatter* dedicated to racism in Italy, Anna Curcio and Miguel Mellino argue that the problematic disavowal and *foreclusion* of race in Italian public debate (even in the anti-racist movement when it comes to anti-southern racism) goes hand in hand with the increase in racial conflict and racist episodes in the country. Inspired by the field of Critical Race Studies that has its roots in the American civil rights movement, Curcio and Mellino see the introduction of the lexicon of race in the Italian public sphere as a way to challenge contemporary Italian racism, and they give an account of contemporary Italian history that seeks to trace the work of racialisation. They also aim to develop a framework where the imbrication and the complex relation between different forms of racism in Italian history are taken into consideration:

We want to argue that racism has *fractured* the Italian national space right from the birth of the modern nation in 1861 and, consequently, the terrain has been prepared for the contemporary racialization of international migration. In fact, it is not possible to understand the contemporary postcolonial migrant as the key representative of race without taking into account the cultural, political and economic construction – and hence their role within historical Italian capitalism – of its main ancestors: the southerner and the colonial other (during the first liberal and fascist moment), the Jew (in the later fascist period), the southern migrant (second Post-war Republic). (Curcio, Mellino 2010)

Curcio and Mellino do not argue that there is a simplistic linear continuity of racist and racial patterns throughout different historical phases and geographical locations. In fact, they argue quite the opposite, pointing out that racial discrimination in Italy has targeted different groups of people. Therefore, Italian racism should be seen not as fixed and immutable but rather as connected to the relation of its production and transformation.

5 Curcio and Mellino define the term ‘racialisation’ as follows: “by racialization we mean the effect on the social fabric of a multiplicity of institutional and non institutional practices and discourses oriented towards a hierarchically connoted representation of physical and cultural, real and imaginary differences and hence to the disciplining of their material and inter-subjective relationships. Oversimplifying, we think that the concept of racialization, since it is highly saturated with the disturbing colonial and imperial legacy of race, is more suitable than others connoted with more neutral meanings (such as ethnicization or multiculturalism, for instance) to describe in an effective way the economic and cultural processes of essentialization, discrimination, inferiorization and segregation, that is of symbolic and material violence, to which certain groups in the Italian and European social space are nowadays submitted” (Curcio, Mellino 2010).

Their claim is that modern Italian history shows how race and racialisation worked as powerful tools to produce social and cultural hierarchies, and specific forms of discrimination and exploitation anchored to a specific colonial narration of the nation that should be explored and investigated in details with its interconnections:

In the present context, contemporary Italian racialization must be interrogated as a constitutive part of a broader local kind of post-colonial governance aimed at the management of the main political and economic transformations (the so-called transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist society) of the last twenty years, that is at the reorganization of the whole social fabric in the wake of economic globalization processes, the by now irreducible migration and mobility of labor as well as the long run effects of anti-colonial and feminist enunciations that reshaped the labor market and general social relations from the 1970s onwards. (Curcio, Mellino 2010)

2.5 Contemporary Thinkers

The last point is pretty much connected to the first one, referring not only to postcolonialism as a river with many tributaries, but also to Italy as already having done her bit to boost the field. Italy is, therefore, not late but, on the contrary, the initiator and promoter of postcolonial studies. We can think of several contemporary thinkers who re-address issues central to the postcolonial discourse, such as the operation of the nation state, empire and globalisation vis-à-vis patterns of migration, capitalism and sovereignty (Verdicchio 1997; Agamben 1998; Hardt, Negri 2000; Mellino 2005; Mezzadra 2006; Dainotto 2007; Passerini 2011; Lombardi-Diop, Romeo 2012; Ponzanesi 2012b; Giuliani, Lombardi-Diop 2013).

In his book, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive* (2002), Agamben looks closely at the literature of the survivors of Auschwitz, probing the philosophical and ethical questions raised by their testimony:

In its form, this book is a kind of perpetual commentary on testimony. It did not seem possible to proceed otherwise. At a certain point, it became clear that testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to. (Agamben 1999, 13)

We could go on by saying how influential Roberto Dainotto's work has been to rethink Europe, or the work of Chambers on the Mediterranean as contesting the law of the soil and proposing other forms of cultural connections,

both historical and figurative; and that Negri has contested globalisation as a new form of empire and put forward a proposition for an alternative in the forms of multitudes, which will inspire many alter-globalists.

The list could go on *à la Bayart* about what is intrinsic to Italian thinking and discourse and about what has been imported or even stolen. The bottom line is that, as Edward Said has written, neither countries, nor thinkers, nor disciplines have a monopoly on the politics of epistemology or critique of causation, as Bayart imagines the postcolonial field claims (cf. Stoler 2011, 138). The more interesting question is how theory travels, as Said has pointed out, and what its impact is for the configuration of a particular scientific field and what conventions of knowledge production have made Italy finally embrace the field and claim an entitlement to it.

3 Conclusions

So, do we need postcolonial theory or have we been postcolonial all along? What does postcolonial theory add to the richness of sources, historical legacies and theoretical traditions that Italy already has in its own right? Can we be provincial and jingoistic and say, like Bayart for France, that we have already done our bit? That postcolonial theory has nothing to offer, that for all its usefulness postcolonial studies is largely unnecessary in Italy?

But we must recognize that, for all its usefulness, postcolonial studies is largely unnecessary. Most of the issues it has explored had been explored previously or were simultaneously being investigated by other theories, which often managed to avoid the pitfalls into which postcolonial studies fell. (Bayart 2011, 65)

If there is a question of fashionableness, more than a fad, in the upsurge of postcolonial studies in Italy, then that is not only because at last postcolonial studies (as well as colonialism) has finally landed in Italy, it is also because Italian studies in its many inflections and variations, as mentioned above, has travelled outside Italy and cross-pollinated and intersected with other discourses. One of these discourses is postcolonial theory, re-entering Italy, therefore, not via the back door but through a kind of mirror giving recognition that this is what we have been doing all along, and yet with that slight difference in coordinating the different strands under a new paradigm. This new paradigm, despite being fragmented, full of pitfalls and dead ends, makes it possible to put the many particularities of Italy into a transnational and comparative context, highlighting both dissonances and consonances.

There is, therefore, a special quality in this 'delay'; it is not just second-hand, Anglo-Saxon centric, discursively colonising and theoretically forced

but, as Rada Ivekovic (quoted in Stoler) says, “‘delay’ fashions a history in its own right, inviting the reconfiguration of a field and perhaps even ‘the creation of new disciplines’” (Stoler 2011, 138).

The postcolonial turn in Italian studies is, therefore, not just a novelty or a new academic fashion but the confirmation and consolidation of a genealogy in Italian studies that has a long tradition and roots in different discourses connected to the history of Italian migration, racial formations and intellectual thought based on the specificity of the Italian nation formation. This relates to Italy’s denied but pervasive colonial legacy and the fragmentation of its identitarian politics based on ethnic, racial and religious complexities. These are not imported or emerging concepts because of the increasing success and academic establishment of postcolonial critique but pressing issues that find an articulation and connection thanks to a new language and methodological tools that stem from a new global understanding of patterns of domination and resistance that have historical and geopolitical specificities that need to be accounted for. Yes, this demonstrates that, if Italy has been postcolonial all along, critical awareness and critique of its postcolonial condition have been lacking or scarcely brought to light. We can conclude therefore that Italy not only needs postcolonial theory but that within a wider European and international scholarly landscape its belatedness and specific critical apparatus can yield new, important insights into the origin and future of postcolonial thought.

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