AFTERWORD

BEYOND RHETORICAL BINARIES

The Anthropology of Italy and the Politics of Critique

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DIALECTS AND DIALECTICS

The wide-ranging chapters that precede this one offer a series of innovative, often interlinked perceptions.[1] However idiosyncratic or selective any account of those insights is likely to be, one commonality, I suggest, is particularly important. Collectively and individually, the authors disperse some unfortunate stereotypes that have dogged both Italy and Italian anthropology for far too long. Like many stereotypes, these do have some basis in reality, albeit often a culturally misunderstood reality. That reality appears in these chapters in a new and constructive light. Among the stereotypes, two stand out for their frequency. One is a rhetorical capacity among intellectuals for operating at a stratospheric level of conceptual abstraction, while the second is an everyday way of expressing dissatisfaction with state, church or any other powerful institution that has manifestly failed to serve the people in its care. Taken together, they suggest a tension between philosophical idealism and a pragmatic realism that springs from a complex and difficult past.

The abstraction is the product of a long rhetorical tradition, but it often frames subtle and interesting ideas. It permits a style of theorizing – in life and in anthropology – that enables a philosophically sophisticated view of ethnographic work. Sadly, however, it has sometimes led to misunderstanding and especially to a serious underestimation (especially by non-Italians) of the conceptual riches of Italian anthropological scholarship, which,

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despite its philosophical cast, remains equally rooted in empirical ethnography. There are traces of such abstraction in these chapters, not exclusively in those written by Italian authors, and those traces provide tantalizing hints of how close ethnographic observation infuses philosophical and aesthetic generalities with both immediacy and comparability (to voice abstractions of my own).

The complaints, while often exaggerated in a florid rhetoric that shares common origins with the more extravagant abstractions, are a goldmine for anthropologists hoping to gain admittance to the sites of cultural intimacy. The expressions of complaint (*lamentele*) pinpoint real existential issues and admit the attentive ethnographer, whether foreign or Italian, to aspects of Italian cultural life – notably areas of conflict between institutional norms and ordinary decency – that might otherwise be invisible. The anthropologists' job, performed with insight and empathy in these pages, is not to 'correct' the impressions created by the complaints, but to explain why they are so frequent and to show what larger issues they index.

These two features do not exhaust in even a small degree the rich variety of expressive idioms that pervade a society much given to discussing *cultura*. They do, I suggest, offer insight into some of the distinctive contributions made by anthropologists working on Italian society to a discipline concocted in the heyday of British and French colonialism. This volume is indeed a major step away from viewing Italy through the distorting lens of an essentially colonial epistemology – a lens fashioned under the repressive conditions of the historical emergence of the Italian nation-state itself. From that emergence, Italy has tested the complex relation between state and nation as perhaps no other country has done. It may well be that it is this complexity, for example, that enables Berardino Palumbo to coin the term *hyper-place* as a way of acknowledging (and here identifying) 'multiple discursive regimes and moral economies', which seem especially germane to understanding the management of the past.[2] Like Greece, Italy carries a huge historical burden.

In this regard, Paolo Heywood suggests that 'Italy has long existed – like Greece . . . – as a sort of internal other within Europe' – an internal other, I would nevertheless add, that also provided standards of cultural excellence in the eyes of more powerful European nations: opera, chamber music, gastronomy, painting and sculpture, poetry and prose. There is also another difference that may be diagnostic of the difference in the two countries' respective impact on modern European cultural ideals. Greece, which still struggles for its arts to be more widely appreciated, has always seemed more rural and wilder than Italy, no doubt in large measure thanks to the prejudices of the Grand Tour. Locally, Greek fascination with the idea of the village (see Herzfeld 2020) contrasts with Italian insistence on linking culture

with urbanity (in both senses of that word). Indeed, those ethnographies of Italy that did achieve classic status early on – notably Silverman (1975) and Kertzer (1980) – did so precisely by grasping the urban nettle with both hands. Silverman did so by showing the pervasion of the rural imaginary by *civiltà*, the ideal of urbanity, while Kertzer took us into the urban core of communist politics in Bologna and thereby connected the national to the local in a less culturalist vein. Thus, the Greece–Italy dyad, which old-school scholars regarded as the tawdry remains of ancient glories, offers rich comparative insights into the currency of these contrasted self-stereotypes of rurality and urbanity – an arena quite as relevant to present epistemic concerns as anything developed in the remote colonial possessions that were the discipline's early stamping grounds.

Inevitably, an anthropological approach to a single country runs a double risk. On the one hand, it can easily become trapped in 'methodological nationalism' (see Glick Schiller and Wimmer 2002). On the other, and concomitantly, it may end up reproducing stereotypes. The only antidote to both conditions is a resolutely open-ended comparativism – an epistemological commitment that, implicitly or explicitly, suffuses every one of these chapters. Comparison, to be sure, can all too easily end up as a bureaucratic exercise in the listing of national cultures, or indeed as a classification of countries by stereotype. A reflexive approach to comparison, however, as here, instead examines *why* a particular set of traits seems so prominent within national borders. Of those traits adumbrated in the present collection, even a preliminary accounting reveals both foreign and internal perspectives that shape the way a country looks from the outside and that prompt visitors to nod sagely and reaffirm their preconceived notions of what is, in this case, 'typically Italian'.

That is emphatically *not* the point of this book. One way of avoiding the allure of the stereotypes is to place the anthropology of Italy in the context of anthropology conducted in other countries by Italians, as exemplified by most of the contributions to the provocatively titled – provocatively, because in the English language it challenges the Anglophone hegemony over serious anthropological research – *Histories of Anthropology* (D'Agostino and Matera 2023). The vast majority of that research was conducted outside Italy and avoids the mistake of reaching for yet another 'national anthropology' (see also the sage reflections of Palumbo 2018: 191 et passim). Younger Italian anthropologists are pushing back at local stereotypes surrounding one of their own current foci of intellectual interest, the process of *patrimonializzazione* ('heritagization'), in other parts of the world.[3] It is indeed time to get away from the false assumption that Italian anthropology has nothing to offer global theory and method – an impression that, as I shall briefly suggest again below, is partly the product of an unwillingness to read Italian

anthropological writings with an open mind towards distinctive local styles of expression.

Italian anthropologists have also employed theoretical models distinct from those most favoured in the Anglophone and Francophone intellectual communities. George Saunders (1984) was an early proponent of taking these efforts seriously, but his advice lay largely unheeded for too long. By neither privileging nor slighting its Italian contributors, the present volume begins at last to reciprocate the generosity of Italian scholars such as Francesco Faeta, who has offered a comprehensive account of the important visual record that Frank Cancian – perhaps better known for his Latin American work – created for the Italian South (Faeta 2022; see also Solvetti 2022).

The best evidence for the ongoing and expanding universe of Italian anthropology is precisely the gradual disappearance of arguments for a distinctive 'Italian school', an epistemological version of methodological nationalism. This is all the more remarkable in that officialdom has sought to commodify 'culture' as a peculiarly Italian possession – but then opposition between anthropology and official world views is itself a long and global story.

An early target of the critique of methodological nationalism was the idea of 'national cultures' and the reduction of culture in general to a set of discrete, bounded entities that simply reproduced the logical form of nation-states. In Italy, the 'culture' concept has a peculiarly consumerist resonance despite the concomitant realization that the country is a prime candidate among nation-states, especially within Europe, for the recognition of multiplex cultural and linguistic plurality. Gastronomic *terroirs* match an equally heady variety of local dialects. Official Italy, from the gastronomic promotion of 'Eataly' to the claim that Italy contains 70 per cent of the world's great works of art, lays monopolistic claim to 'culture' in the elite sense of a higher human condition.[4]

Such official models exploit Italian cultural heritage, ignoring the ways in which it also fuels critiques of the country as an unworthy heir to ancient and Renaissance glories, much as Greece, too, was placed on a pedestal that effectively served to deny it access to modernity.[5] One consequence of these negative images is a defensive display of cultural virtuosity, sometimes allied to muscular assertions of national rights and recognition (Greenland 2021; Hom 2015). Beyond opera, gesticulation, romantic or predatory sexuality (depending on one's positionality), pasta and *gelato* and strange rules about when to drink milky coffee, however, culture comprises traits that are also invisible to the casual tourist or foreign consumer but – sometimes painfully – apparent to those who live in the country.[6]

Thus, the abstract noun *progettualità* (see Herzfeld 2009: 121) resonates in Italy precisely because 'projects' often get stuck at the planning stage. The

planner Paolo Berdini (2000; see also Negri 1999) has castigated the endless production for the Roman municipal government of master plans (*piani regolatori*) that never seem to materialize on the ground. When projects are realized, moreover, their long-term maintenance is by no means guaranteed; the imperative of *far bella figura* (looking good) – as with the San Giorgio bridge discussed by Emanuela Guano – does not anticipate endless unspectacular years of fixing the pipes and wires.[7]

The creation of municipality-directed murals in Genoa mayor Bucci's misguided attempt to create consensus through aesthetics shows that rhetoric does not always achieve its goal. When the rhetoric is more obviously material than the verbal kind, as with the murals, it is also more accessible to critique. In such cases, social experience exposes the message as an attempt to distract attention from continuing failure to maintain, let alone improve, local conditions. The murals, as Guano shows, represented a top-down aesthetic; claims that the initiative was truly participatory merely served to highlight the fact that it was nothing of the sort – as is more generally true, Pizza warns us, of any attempt to expropriate cultural heritage in the name of democratic participation.[8]

In a country that suffers from the unequal wealth distribution discussed by Michael Blim, moreover, maintenance is a particularly elusive benefit; all too often, funds are lacking for the maintenance even of expensive projects designed to impress. Roads and extensive plots of land remain as *cantieri* (construction sites) for years, either because they are underfunded, or because they have been taken over by mafiosi who ensure that the work is repeatedly undone and redone so that public monies may flow directly into mafia pockets. Neglect can lead to disaster, as happened with the Morandi bridge, or it can be deliberately orchestrated by proprietors keen to expel poor tenants in favour of more profitable ones (Herzfeld 2009: 23, 262). When glitzy projects displace the maintenance of old stock, as Guano illustrates with bleak precision, the drawbacks of such initiatives – new sources of pollution and an almost total lack of relevance to local taste and need – are evident before questions of maintenance even arise. Such failures are by no means uniquely Italian, but they have become part of the negative stereotype – and real-life experience – against which Italians often rail.

Anthropology has its own peculiar embarrassments, and these, too, have helped to create an unjust impression of what Italian anthropology is all about. Much as British and French anthropologists participated in colonial projects, Italian anthropologists laid the grounds for some of the internal discrimination that is addressed in these pages. Prominent among early Italian anthropologists who represent that embarrassing past is Cesare Lombroso, inventor of the infamous 'criminal anthropology'. This was a racist research programme that sought to identify physiognomic features

shared by non-Europeans and alleged European criminals alike. One of the ugliest chapters in Lombroso's career was, as Sorge (2015: 38) has lucidly demonstrated, his claim to have documented such marks of Cain on the swashbuckling pastoralists of Orgosolo in Sardinia. The Italian state identified Orgosolo men as 'bandits' and assumed, on the basis of Lombroso's 'findings', that they were irremediably criminal by nature. This portrayal, as Sorge shows, had a terrible impact on the community and more generally on Sardinia – an impact that reverberates to this day.

Lombroso's views are also of broader importance today because, however indirectly, they prefigure much of the 'integralism' of the political right. Heywood briefly traces the impact of Lombroso's thinking on the emergence of the 'Southern Question'. While Heywood rightly reserves his severest criticism for Edward Banfield and Robert Putnam for contributing to a racist social geography that continues to divide Italians, Lombroso remains a brooding presence because of his appeal to far-right politics. The nascent nation-state eagerly embraced his views on human degeneracy because, as in Greece, the conflation of the cultural with the genetic *also* inspired notions of a unified national character and heritage. Such notions have been variously invoked, by left and right alike, to counteract the centrifugal tendencies of Italian regionalism – although, as Jillian Cavanaugh remarks, the chronotopic possibilities afforded by local dialects may confirm as easily as they sometimes undermine the ideal of national unity. Indeed, they may on occasion also feed local nostalgia for a culturally – and thus, by implication, racially – pure past.

Fortunately, Lombroso's historical importance in the forging of Italian racism and nationalism is more than offset by a long intellectual tradition of broadly Marxist origin, with internationally recognized founding figures in Ernesto De Martino and Antonio Gramsci. Modern Italian anthropologists are often energetically anti-racist and often critical of national state institutions, although, like foreign anthropologists working in Italy, they try to explain the failures rather than simply exaggerating or condemning them. The chapters in this book explore themes of complaint that the authors seem to share, at least partially, with their local interlocutors: the inability to complete projects, official disregard for the weak and the marginal, inefficient bureaucracy, racism, political corruption.

These conditions (and the *lamentele* that betray local awareness of them) reflect the endless treatment of Italy as a poor relative of the European powers, and, as Antonio Sorge notes for Sicily in particular, as a place of abandonment and decay. There is an important dialectic that conjoins the optimism of abstract projection and the pessimism that failure brings in its train. Perhaps the clearest articulation of the relationship between success and complaint is Michael Blim's poignant concluding observation: 'For all

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the good that the Third Italy did for many of Italy's citizens, it also encouraged a careless disregard for those who did not reap its benefits, and its celebratory rhetoric became a justification for a rejection of national responsibility for the country's problems, which dwell in the Third Italian regions as well.'

Rhetoric is a powerful tool for the dissemination of discontent. The current, right-wing government, for example, may have triggered a recent increase in racist attacks, both physical and verbal. Maddalena Cammelli here astutely links the tag phrase '*Italiani brava gente*' to a larger pattern of memory politics in which resistance to the acknowledgement of collective responsibility feeds the current fascist resurgence. The phrase, initially associated with attempts to present the Italians as minor players in the Nazi-Fascist persecution of the Jews, resurfaces frequently, although sometimes today, on the left, with irony. For all our concern with the undulating recrudescence of racism in Italy, however, not all forms of forgetting are equally pernicious. Heywood sagely observes that there is a difference between the wilful ignorance of the political right wing on the one hand and the deliberate forgetting by Predappio's residents on the other. That forgetting seems, in fact, to be a form of conscious remembering: remembering to forget, or what Irene Peano felicitously calls 'remembering not to remember'. Predappiesi perform this labour of occlusion continuously. They cannot afford to forget; rather, they dissociate themselves from a lurking past of which many of them thoroughly disapprove.

Their socially performed lack of interest thus differs, not only from fascist denialism, but also from the alleged government indifference either to the burgeoning influx of immigrants or to their deaths at sea. Lilith Mahmud points out that the widely shared view of Italian bureaucracy as 'incompetent', while hardly complimentary, is for that reason a sneaky way of claiming that Italian functionaries are not racist – that they actually *preferred* to act incompetently, to avoid an enforcement that would have resulted in more deaths. Mahmud's contribution, like Michael Blim's commentary on economic regionalism, demonstrates the materiality of rhetoric and its sometimes tragic consequences for those it excludes.

Mahmud's accusation of genocide, moreover, is no exaggeration. Not all would-be immigrants survive the attempt to breach the walls of Fortress Europe. Those who do survive the cruel sea passage, as Grotti and Brightman demonstrate, yearn for a cultural and social rebirth that is itself inextricably ensnared in the reality of a death barely avoided. Yet they are often disappointed. In the second generation, the experience of rejection may be even greater.

Beyond the impossible choice between diabolical incompetence and the deep but polluted sea, Mahmud, Elizabeth Krause, Anna Tuckett, and

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Vanessa Grotti and Marc Brightman all demonstrate that ideas of *italianità* are deeply inflected by racial assumptions about who 'belongs'. Rhetoric materializes unspoken assumptions and lends them political force. Krause, in particular, shows how the rhetorical performance of bureaucratic impartiality and regulatory efficiency works not to protect immigrant rights, but to reinforce discrimination against Chinese workers and to deflect onto them earlier canards about mafiosi from the South. Such devices, which thus betray a long conceptual history at the local level, now pervade the entire European system of migration control (see also Albahari 2015; Feldman 2012).[9] Italian officials thereby implicitly – and perhaps unconsciously – calibrate *civiltà* across time and space with the encompassing 'civilizing mission' through which European colonialism sought justification for its racial hierarchies of slavery, conquest and humiliation. Ancient Roman imperialism, itself an explicit model for (especially) British colonial domination, has returned to haunt those who seek to become the new Italians (and, by extension, the new Europeans), or who simply seek a means of economic survival within that cultural *imperium*.

In Italy, Mussolini's fascists made ancient Rome the model for the new muscular Italian culture they envisaged. Despite current distaste for Mussolini's particular brand of *romanità*, it continues to inflect the teaching of history in ways that partly overlap with its counterpart in other European and, especially, British schools. The appeal to a Roman imperialism sometimes headed and largely populated by people of West Asian and sub-Saharan African origin, a detail totally submerged in most European high-school textbooks, serves as a form of self-justification for the 'civilizing mission' and, in Italy, for claims of cultural excellence.

Italian racism reflects larger European attitudes – a background currently reproduced in the unequal distribution of responsibility for migrant affairs among the member states, with their racist attitudes towards Italy (and Greece). Americans and Europeans are hardly in a position to deny their own implication in the Italian racial and class hierarchy. Indeed, it acquires dramatic reality in Antonio Sorge's politely biting description of how foreigners who buy cheap properties in destitute Sicilian towns immediately acquire the social status of benefactors. His comment on one such expatriate's website displaying 'the cornucopia of delights that make Sicily a beautiful, splendid place full of tradition, good food and picturesque people' echoes the Genoese city administration's promotion of 'joy' through its mural painting campaign in Emanuela Guano's account. In Sicily, as Sorge notes, some foreign residents do bring tangible benefits to local society, but the larger picture, as in Genoa, is one of subordination to neoliberal consumerism, and the socially and economically ruinous shift from *paese* to *borgo* is matched by the relentless gentrification of 'historic' zones of the larger cities.

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The hierarchy thus evidenced, in some of its other manifestations, can literally prove fatal. That the Dublin Conventions entailed European Union bullying of its southern members, for example, does not exculpate those states from the charge of building a similar hierarchy on the bodies, dead and alive, of hapless migrants. It does demonstrate the capillary breadth and depth of a colonial hegemony that has produced multiple, ramified forms of complicity at several levels, from the pan-European to the kind of regional aggregation represented in Italy by the once-separatist Northern League.

Jane and Peter Schneider's analysis points to the same hegemonic structure from another angle. They show how the mafia image of Italy largely originated in southern Italian migration to the US, where Prohibition (and more recently the proscription of the drug trade) sucked admittedly willing and eager Italian entrepreneurs into an economic dynamic and a hegemonic political order that inevitably positioned them as dangerous actors both abroad and at home. That realization does not lessen their criminal responsibility any more than the current European immigration regime justifies the criminal incompetence of national authorities. It does show them operating profitably as at least nominally free agents within a late flowering of European world domination.

Moreover, the Schneiders' account of the mutual entanglement of national politicians with Sicilian mafiosi, a situation not unique to Italy (see Herzfeld 2022: 10, 29, 53–54), reveals the complex complicities that support forms of action radically at odds, at a purely legalistic level, with the formal rules of the institutional framework within which they occur. 'Lack of proof' (as reported by the Schneiders) has a disconcerting resonance with the charge of incompetence (in Mahmud's account): we are not 'competent', in that other sense of the Italian *competenza*, to push legal proceedings to their supposed final goal, and so we refuse all responsibility.

Silence, however, is not only a mafia prerogative; it also takes the form of an avoidance of talk with the 'wrong people', as Theodoros Rakopoulos recounts, by people who define themselves as anti-mafia activists. That silence, too, entails complicity – a necessity where mafiosi and their nominal opponents must coexist. It enables virtuous self-performance at the formal expense of state institutions but may, on occasion, help those who simply want to improve the local economy and ecology. For those caught talking to mafiosi, the consequences – losing their jobs, for example – are convincingly material. As Rakopoulos says, 'words are not dangerous because of their content, but because of their mere existence' – or, rather, because their occurrence triggers a more or less predictable reaction. Their threatening materiality depends not on content, but on context. Silence, concomitantly, is an expressive denial of content. It is in Rakopoulos's 'meta-talk' (and in

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Naor Ben-Yehoyada's engagingly paradoxical 'silence-talk') that we may find explicit content capable of furnishing the grounds for decisive action.

Such dynamics speak to the importance of defining (and constantly reworking) lines of contrast between insiders and outsiders. Those lines separate mafiosi from anti-mafia activists, but, as Ben-Yehoyada shows, that distinction is a contested social construction. It depends on who chooses to hear what. Each side to each conflict lays exclusive claim to factuality – to, in a word, *datità* ('data-ness'). The rhetoric of inclusion can also convey implicit threats of its opposite, of exclusion. The proffering of 'hospitality' to refugees, overtly presented as evidence in support of the *brava gente* image, often serves to put these strangers in their place, denying them membership in the body politic (e.g. Quagliariello 2021).

For those immigrants who do make it through the initial passage and arrival, as Grotti and Brightman show, inclusion in some form of kinship may afford a feeble first grip on Italian society. Further progress is extremely difficult; the obfuscatory rhetoric of *accoglienza* (welcome) makes it even harder to achieve. Even for those who (like Mahmud herself) are highly educated and culturally Italian, and born in Italy, the sense of exclusion never disappears.[10] Official incompetence in the face of immigration, as Mahmud points out, spreads its harm unequally; its effects are especially devastating for those whose physical appearance (or other palpable signs of otherness) serves to classify them as non-Italian. Anna Tuckett demonstrates that such comprehensive discrimination, built into the Italian sense of collective identity, shapes the unequal application of immigration law.

Throughout this volume, we encounter numerous antinomies: insider and outsider, mafia and anti-mafia, *brava gente* and racists, *bella figura* and brute reality, saints and sinners. Their importance arises from their lability, notably in what Magnus Course identifies as the merging of the religious and the secular. Such chimerical binaries frame debate and create lines of opposition. Their clarity, however, stumbles on the quicksand of real social relations.[11] It is rhetorical, not empirical. Saints can indeed channel migrants (or vice versa); they can also channel *camorristi* – who are locally viewed less as evil deviants than as victims of state persecution (Pantellaro 2023). Course's comment on the religious and the secular – that through Catholic iconography 'it is possible to say quite different, even opposed things towards a highly variegated set of ends' – can easily apply to the other antinomies. The institutions of the state (and to some extent of the church) demand binary clarity; social experience belies it (see also Palumbo 2020: 49, 58).

The Durkheimian antinomy of the religious and the secular contains the seeds of its own undoing, as when Evans-Pritchard (1956) employed the metaphor of refraction to suggest that social life was the frame through which deity made itself manifest. The social character of iconography so tellingly

portrayed by Course is familiar everywhere in Italy, a country whose Catholic traditions inflect bureaucratic practice as well as ritual observance. Since all humans are sinners, the logic goes, praying to a portrait of the Madonna may – as in many parts of Rome – be more indicative of an attempt to compromise with the divine than of deeply committed piety. The church may – and in at least one case in Rome did – attempt to reorganize such images to suit its insistence on bureaucratic control.[12] For most people, however, the profane is already part of the sacred – as witness the theological allusions with which quite aggressive profanities, in the narrower sense of the unprintable, are often laced.

In his astute analysis of the revitalization of 'tarantism', Giovanni Pizza illustrates the historical phases in a struggle between church and people over the delimitation of sacred and profane space, showing, as Berardino Palumbo (2020) does elsewhere, that the boundary is continuously negotiated. Boundaries, as Barth (1969) argued for ethnicity, or 'hinges' in Pizza's terms, do exist; they are sometimes movable and they serve as points of exchange as well as hostility; where locals perceive what Pizza calls 'the uncertainty and blurring of rule and law',[13] the margins flood all formal demarcations. The imagined boundaries that originated in a symbolic geography opposing north to south shifted with the economic winds charted here by Michael Blim. In terms of the contrast framed by Cammelli ('a shift from looking for something to possess to looking for something to belong to'), Pizza shows us how church and state, and perhaps academia at times, seek to demarcate (and thereby possess) spaces where people instead seek to live and, indeed, simply *belong*.

Iconography is subject to the same tug of war as space. In Naples, the merging of saints' identities with those of migrants and *camorristi*, two categories that the state 'illegalizes', signals protest and exemplifies Italians' profoundly anti-institutional understanding of membership in a civil (*civile*) society. The reworking of iconographic themes provides a means of asserting social inclusion (belonging) against bureaucratic control of the territory (possession by demarcation).

The sacred and the profane thus merge in social experience. Another binary that displays comparable fluidity is that contrasting the cultural with the genetic. The interchangeability of these concepts in everyday discourse draws sustenance from the official *ius sanguinis* definition of Italian citizenship – but it is the state, too, that takes every possible opportunity to represent itself as both essence and defender of *cultura*. Italians allege that a particular attitude 'is not in my DNA' and that it is 'not in my culture [*cultura*]'. These popular expressions seem to index genetics and culture separately. They function interchangeably, however, and their sheer banality protects them from critical reflection and thereby enables the racialization

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of belonging.[14] I have heard these expressions applied to (and self-applied by) leftists who would be horrified at the suggestion that they were racists. Indeed, as Tuckett and Grotti and Brightman show, many are not. The rhetorical conflation of DNA and culture, however, implies the potential for racist perspectives of which the bearers may sincerely – and sometimes justifiably – believe themselves innocent.

Generic complaint about Italian racism nevertheless always implies a measure of self-exception. The phrase 'Non sono razzista, però . . .' (I'm not a racist, but . . .) has a more or less global currency (Herzfeld 2007). Heywood offers us a sympathetic account of how the citizens of Mussolini's birthplace want to reduce his legacy to a determined ordinariness. The risk, if they succeed, is that later generations will attempt to recover a sanitized rendition of that same legacy in all but name, as indeed the current right-wing government seems intent on doing and as other governments have already tried to do. Cammelli's clever gloss on Holmes's account of the new fascism – that Italians experienced 'a shift from looking for something to possess to looking for something to belong to' – nicely captures the social force of rhetorical changes that have reshaped the Italian political landscape.

The neofascists' 'media squadrism' in Cammelli's account is a particularly virulent rhetorical deployment of a violent mythology, projecting its poison far beyond – but also within – ordinary social interaction. It appeals to a modernity to which those who oppose its violence also belong. For that reason, Cammelli warns us, an anthropological assessment cannot simply dismiss it as either mindless or monstruous. Its intimations of familiarity are precisely the source of the unease it generates in us.

That reflexive realization should make us more rather than less alert to the dangers that the resurgence of fascism represents. It sometimes portrays itself as a version of 'compassionate conservatism', as in the 'act of love' claimed by hardcore rightists calling for the expulsion of African migrants and in claims of sympathy towards the 'Janus-faced icon of a criminal-victim' (both described here by Peano). That sanctimonious stance also exploits values associated with an ostensibly well-meaning Catholic church. Pope Francis recently joined forces with the far-right prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, to argue that Italians should stop lavishing affection and care on pets and devote themselves to producing more children.[15] Is this an echo of American-style 'replacement theory'? Right-wing white Italians fear that collectively they will be displaced by people who look different or that the national stock (*stirpe*) will fall prey to miscegenation. While the pope's motivation may have been the standard Catholic opposition to birth control, Meloni's shows itself to be more bluntly white-nationalist. Whatever their respective intentions, the ultimate effect of their combined voices is clear. We only need ask why they did not instead urge adoption and intermarriage as the obvious

adaptations to both a declining birth rate and a swelling migrant presence – both long the subject of concern among Italian politicians of right *and* left.[16]

The assumption that Italians must be racially 'white', grounded in what Gramsci recognized as the everyday hegemony of 'common sense', infuses much right-wing political discourse. Conversely, leftist critics view Italian racism as a betrayal of an equally essentialized notion of national culture and have argued, as mayor Paolo Amenta does in Grotti and Brightman's account, that the migrants are a source of revitalization. For leftists, the migrants' contribution to the genetic continuity of the nation is both necessary and welcome. In that context, moreover, generosity to outsiders, even (or especially) to those 'illegalized' (see De Genova 2017) by the state, is part of being *civili* – in other words, of *civiltà*. Such 'civilized behaviour', which often entails opposition to the state, contributes to the *brava gente* image. As such, however, it is *also* a refraction of colonialism's 'civilizing mission'.

The logic of racism is capable of multiple inversions. Deep suspicion of Romanian migrants, for example, may stem from the fear that, because they speak a Latin language that enables them to master Italian easily and because they do not stand out phenotypically, they represent a *hidden* threat of miscegenation. A similar bias inflects the Catholic Church's charitable support of Latin American migrants, who find themselves the objects of forms of discrimination that seem to contradict the church's official attitude (Napolitano 2016). So, while the preferential treatment of (for example) Ukrainians and Syrians as opposed to Eritreans does signal racist bias, popular attitudes to genetic origins may at times prove unexpectedly subtle.[17]

Racism is often disguised as an argument about culture. The Italian term *cultura* has lofty implications, as the expression of ultimate value. It also serves as an idealized panacea. Thus, for example, Noelle Molé Liston reports on what she sees as the surprising reversion to culture and literacy – rather than technology – as the best means of combating fake news. 'Above all, we need culture, education and knowledge of users': the ordering of these three ideals is hardly coincidental. The model of culture thus invoked is the elite perspective currently in the gun-sights of far-right scepticism, but it also reflects a more widely shared (and official) view – despite a high illiteracy rate – that Italy is fundamentally a place of real culture.

Many of those who support the claim of Italian cultural supremacy, including the former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, have long controlled the most important cultural media and therefore also access to news. In this way, the goal of curing public gullibility with culture suffers an endless short circuit. Molé Liston says it succinctly: 'the technological form of information may change but citizens must still defer to a small elite group of proper information gatekeepers: the powerful white men become the illuminati of the digital age.' As her observation shows, moreover, the definition of truth in

the media draws on the racial hierarchy that suffuses the official conception of culture. Molé Liston's account of how dexterously Meloni manipulated the story of a rape to her political advantage also illustrates the dangerously turbid waters separating information from opinion and propaganda – all this in the name of that selfsame scepticism to which anthropology itself, with its relativistic understanding of cultural and social difference, has inadvertently but inevitably contributed.

The present volume is the antithesis of fake news. Like all anthropological writing that rests on immersive fieldwork, it does represent a potentially embarrassing exposure of culturally intimate collective secrets. The touch of the *lamentela* that inflects some contributions – not only those of Italian authors – usefully admits to those spaces where state and church enjoin their own protective versions of *omertà*. That commentator on fake news was closer to the truth than we might first think. Technology is not the answer to the questions raised here. On the contrary, the best antidote, not only to fake news, but also to racism and all the other topics of complaint and concern, is education in a particular, self-critical discipline with a global perspective. That antidote is, in a word, anthropology; and this book is a good place to start.

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NOTES

1. Writing this chapter was a daunting task. I thank Paolo Heywood for some highly creative interactions as I sought to describe the sense of consistent significance in the book's rich range of themes.
2. See particularly Palumbo (2003).
3. See, for example, Gallo (2022: 23) for an innovative approach to the question via attitudes towards and by the community's youths. Bolotta's (2021) study of Thai slum schoolchildren similarly tackles local stereotypes (focusing on an un-Thainess attributed to bad karma) as themselves constitutive of social realities.

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4. 'L'Italia, questo incredibile Paese, dove vi sono le radici della civiltà, del pensiero, dell'arte, del bello, che hanno determinato la crescita dell'umanità, questo Paese che possiede circa il 70% del patrimonio culturale mondiale, non è mai riuscita a diventare una potenza culturale viva, né a mettere a frutto l'immenso capitale che possiede' (Boscaro n.d).
5. See Herzfeld (1987).
6. In comparison with Greece, Italians are less likely to try to hide these 'negative' dimensions of national identity from outsiders, whereas they may be equally or more defensive about similar aspects of their local identities. This reflects the widely divergent evolution of the two nation states since their emergence as territorial, sovereign states.
7. Both Guano and Mahmud, in very different contexts, describe attempts to cover up inequities (the term they both appropriately use) with rhetorical devices – in the first context an aesthetic of revitalization, in the second the feel-good language of humanitarianism.
8. On the deceptive rhetoric of participation, see Arnstein (1969). Pizza's appreciation of the importance of conflict parallels that of Scandurra (2003: 10) for urban conflict and its impact on social change.
9. Douglas Holmes (2013) has developed a more comprehensive theory of how rhetorical statements (in this case by central banks) can generate intentionally self-fulfilling prophecies. One wonders how far his experience of research in Italy might have directed this insight.
10. Skin colour is not the only determinant of prejudice. Growing up in England with a German surname indicating a high probability of Jewish ancestry, I never felt 'English', and in fact the distinction between 'English' (one of us) and 'British' (has the right passport) was something I learned early from my parents and that attitudes of my high-school contemporaries only served to reinforce. The ambiguous status of Jews in Italy receives only brief treatment in these pages but represents another curious paradox: an old community and thus part of Italian history, has also suffered a long history of exclusion and persecution. See, e.g., Caffiero (2004); Kertzer (1997, 2014).
11. I take this as the implication of Palumbo's allusion to 'semiotically derived cognitive models'. I do not think that 'cognitive' really describes these models; they are semiotic extensions of what was a deeply divisive and painfully inflicted linguistic binarism – an unstable binarism, to be sure, as is consistent with what both Palumbo and I are saying about the social realities in which it appears. My dissatisfaction with 'disemia' as a more rigid-seeming formulation (albeit descriptive of Greek cultural politics at the time) is what led me eventually to the more pliable formulation of 'cultural intimacy' (see Herzfeld 2016). Heywood's (2018) explorations of LGBTQ activism in Bologna shed critical light on the multiplex pliability of rhetorical binarisms.
12. For the changing significance of the *Madonnelle* and the impact of Catholic doctrine on bureaucratic practice in Rome, see Herzfeld (2009: 103–4 and 131–32 respectively).
13. See also Panella and Little (2021).
14. They work very much in the same way as the everyday ('banal') symbols discussed by Billig (1995). It is conceivable, though hardly demonstrable, that the intimate mutual entailment of (material) death with (social) rebirth described by Grotti and

Brightman plays into the conflation of genetics (as nature) and culture (as a socially shared possession). The emergence of the surviving migrants as potential citizens is marked by such acts of inclusion as the theatrical activity they describe – a clear illustration of moving from a state of natural decay to one of gradual incorporation into culture/society.

15. See the coverage by Nicole Winfield and Paolo Santalucia (2023).
16. On this concern, see Krause (2006); for comparable dynamics in Greece, see Halkias (2004); Paxson (2004).
17. The inauthenticity of *italianità* attributed to people of colour is paralleled in other, non-white settings as well. See Bolotta (2021: 17, 98, 182) on being 'insufficiently Thai' among internal migrants, who are often identified by appearance, in Thailand; a rather precise Italian analogy appears in Peano's observation (this volume) that the prevailing right-wing discourse came increasingly to represent southern peasants as akin to, or partly descended from, 'Africans'. Such complex racial dynamics are by no means unique to Italy. See also Tegbaru (2020), for instance, for an account of being an educated, UN-employed Ethiopian in Thailand. More reflexive Italians do point an ironic finger at their own surprise to hear people of colour speaking the local dialects that are, paradoxically as it may seem (but as Jillian Cavanaugh astutely notes), the hallmark of being 'authentically' Italian.

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