

**“Hannibal’s Children: Immigration and Anti-Racist
Youth Subcultures in Contemporary Italy”**

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The night of 14 September 2002 was moonless. A stormy sea lashed the rocky coastline at Capo Rossello, a small town near Agrigento on Sicily’s southern coast. Shortly after midnight, the wind carried the sound of screams out of the darkness to the restaurants along the beachfront. The screams grew in intensity and then, suddenly, stopped. Some time later, bodies began to wash up on the beach. As the townspeople learned the following morning, a flimsy wooden boat carrying passengers from Liberia had foundered in the rough waves near shore. 128 people were dumped into the heaving waves near Capo Rossello. At least 36 of these people drowned while trying to swim to shore. This mass drowning was not unique. Italy has been experiencing a sharp increase in immigration over the last few years. These immigrants are increasingly coming from various points in Africa rather than from Eastern Europe. Every month, hundreds of impoverished people set out in poorly equipped boats from Libya, Tunisia, and other sites along the Northern Africa coast. Every month, dozens die as they try to reach Italy and Spain. The Italian coast guard has contributed to this body count by aggressively pursuing and turning back boats loaded with immigrants fleeing Africa (Bruni 2002).

These horrific deaths have sparked intense debate concerning immigration in Italy. Although news of immigrant deaths arrives with numbing regularity, the mass drowning at Capo Rossello made a particularly dramatic impact on the controversy surrounding clandestine immigration to Italy as a result of its date. Five days earlier, on 9 September 2002, a harsh new anti-immigration law came into effect in Italy.¹ The so-called Bossi-Fini law mandates that foreigners secure a contract for employment in Italy

before they are granted a residency permit. In order to obtain official documents, immigrants now have to agree to be fingerprinted, suggesting that the state regards all immigrants as potential criminals. Implementing the ‘zero-tolerance’ platform adopted by Silvio Berlusconi during his successful campaign to become prime minister several years ago, the Italian government has made it far more easy to expel immigrants, has toughened punishments for immigrants who break the law, and has imposed stiff penalties for immigrant smugglers (Renaud 2002). The rights of legal immigrants, who are now tied to their employers by the threat of deportation should they lose their jobs, are also dramatically curtailed by this law. The Bossi-Fini law has, in other words, helped place Italy in the vanguard of the swing towards a racially exclusive and exploitative definition of belonging among the member states of the European Union. Moreover, the law’s passage signals the domination of Berlusconi’s government by its two principal right wing ideologues, Umberto Bossi of the formerly secessionist Lega Nord [Northern League], and Deputy Prime Minister Gianfranco Fini, head of the Alleanza Nazionale [National Alliance], the cleaned-up successor to Mussolini’s fascist party.

Italy’s ruling coalition appears to be following a strategy similar to that of other xenophobic organizations such as Jorg Haider’s Freedom Party in Austria, the Pim Fortuyn List in the Netherlands, and the National Front in France. Arguing that they need to counter the populist appeal of such anti-immigrant politics, Europe’s social democratic parties are falling over themselves in a desperate attempt to draft draconian new border control legislation. Ironically, the increasing conflict over what Italians call *extra-comunitari* [non-European immigrants] is tied to a central aspect of European integration: the development of a new conception of citizenship.² Although a shared

sense of European identity and the institutions to legitimate that identity remain notoriously difficult to consolidate, it has proven far easier to forge a common conception of those who do not belong. Yet even in this regard the heterogeneity of notions of belonging in particular nations and regions cannot be overlooked. While it is important to note the similarities that link different expressions of racism throughout 'Fortress Europe,' such racism can only be combated effectively if its specific constituents are noted on a national and sub-national scale. Such an approach is particularly essential in Italy, where strong traditions of regional autonomy and inequality offer an inescapable background for discussions of immigration. Indeed, the complexities and contradictions in Italy's history of nation-formation make it a particularly volatile site when it comes to the contemporary controversies raging around definitions of collective identity and citizenship.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of Italy's political establishment intensified the specificity and heterogeneity of Italian politics during the 1990s. When immigration from Eastern Europe, Northern Africa, and places further afield increased in these years, mobilization for and against immigrants' rights in Italy took on an extremely localized character. As in other parts of Europe, Italian anti-immigrant groups tended to mobilize in the name of law and order and the 'defense of the native born' (Della Porta 2000, 121). Yet as the corrupt character of the post-war nation-state in Italy became more apparent as a result of scandals like 'Tangentopoli', anti-racist activists revived regional traditions which challenged the facile equation of nation and belonging that has animated popular racism in Northern European countries such as Britain (Gilroy 1987, 43). Reflecting the collapse of the Christian Democrats and the fragmentation of the left

during the 1990s, such anti-racist movements also tended to be relatively independent of established political parties and institutions. The occupied urban spaces known as *centri sociali* [social centers] act as venues for this grassroots political culture, providing asylum for otherwise marginalized social groups such as unemployed working class youths, women's groups, and *extra-comunitari*. The social centers function not simply as a locus for extra-parliamentary political organization, but are also sites for the sustenance of entire alternative social worlds, of an autonomous public sphere (Virno, 1996, 253). Working out of the *centri sociali*, Italy's anti-racist movements and the youth subcultures that grew up alongside them play a key role in articulating the nation's heterogeneous ethnic identity and history of transnational connections. In addition, the tradition of autonomous working class organization has helped to catalyze alliances between Italians who've had to migrate around the country and *extra-comunitari* based on shared histories of racial and economic oppression.

The aesthetic of *contaminazione* [contamination] is an integral component of these anti-racist subcultural formations (Sciorra). Mixing rap, rai, and ragga with the tarantella and other regional musical traditions, Italian hip hop groups that call themselves *posses* in an Italianized version of African-American slang affirm the composite character of Italy's urban youth subcultures. Groups such as Bisca, 99 Posse, and Mau Mau connect these youth cultures to the multi-ethnic and hybrid character of Italy's 'traditional' regional folk cultures, undermining models of pure local identity.³ The aesthetic of *contaminazione* developed by Italian *posses* is thus based on a long history of internal national hybridity, as well as on an embrace of the cultural forms brought by recent immigrants from places such as North Africa and Eastern Europe to

Italy since the 1970s. As a result, contemporary hip hop music reminds Italians that their diverse regional cultures have always been highly mongrelized and cannot be used as resources for racist exclusion.

Recovering the Hybrid History of the Mezzogiorno

Racism was a problem in Italy long before the arrival of significant groups of *extra-communitari* in the 1990s. As John Dickie has argued, the Mezzogiorno, the underdeveloped southern portion of Italy that is often seen as beginning at Rome, provided a source of stereotypes against which the nation as a whole defined itself following unification in the mid-nineteenth century (1999, 1). At the time of national unification, the South was politically under-represented and consequently suffered disproportionately from injurious economic and social programs put in place by the new liberal regime. As happened in many colonized regions, the Mezzogiorno's underdevelopment was blamed on the supposedly uncivilized character of its inhabitants (Dickie 1999, 3). Residents of the southern half of the Italian peninsula were seen as more African than European. It is ironic, then, that Mussolini was to argue during the fascist period for colonization of the horn of Africa and Libya as a solution to the chronic poverty and under-employment that beset the South. Italy, however, lacked the resources for the kind of settler colonialism pursued by major European powers like Britain and France. As a result, a minuscule percentage of Italy's population actually settled in Africa during the colonial years. In addition, the colonial project failed to provide a solution to the problems of the Mezzogiorno (Palumbo 2003, 20). Indeed, after 1945, the Mezzogiorno displaced Africa as the prime site for the articulation of national anxieties.

As a result, the broader Mediterranean world of which Italy forms a part, a regional identity that the fascist regime had foregrounded in its colonial rhetoric, largely ceased to be a subject of public attention and debate.

The political and economic subordination of the Mezzogiorno following unification produced a set of unique conditions, making Italy not only the country of the largest European mass emigration, but also catalyzing a substantial internal mass migration during the post-1945 period (King and Andall 1999, 135). When the industrialized cities of Northern Italy went through an economic upswing during the late 1950s and 1960s, national attention focused on the question of how to deal with the supposedly pathological characteristics of the Mezzogiorno and of the southern migrants who were being drawn north by the boom. Economic refugees arriving in industrialized cities of the North such as Turin and Milan experienced severe forms of social and economic discrimination. Such prejudice was generated in many cases by the continuing circulation of racial stereotypes concerning the 'barbarous' denizens of the Mezzogiorno (Foot 1999, 161). While marked by substantial regional variation, many of Northern Italy's cities remain polarized by these sub-national geographies of race and belonging. Adding to this complex history of internal discrimination, the industrialized regions of the North as well as southern cities like Naples and Palermo are now the destination for immigrants from many different underdeveloped nations and regions, making Italy one of Southern Europe's most significant 'frontier states' (Melotti 1997, 85). Italy's historical relation with its African neighbors in the Mediterranean basin has therefore once again become an issue of public concern.

Faced with racializing claims concerning the rights of indigenous Italians, *posses* based in the Mezzogiorno are developing hybrid musical traditions that undermine the exclusionary racialization of Italian culture. Bands like Sud Sound System from Puglia, Nidi D'Arac of Salerno, I Nuovi Briganti and Agricantus from Sicily, and 99 Posse and Almamegretta of Naples blend a firm commitment to the use of the vernacular of their particular regions with exploration of local musical traditions such as the tammuriata and the tarantella (Sciorra). These musical experiments grow out of the leftist 'roots revival' culture of the 1970s, when groups such as the Nuova Compagnia Di Canto Popolare revived regional dialect singing and pan-Mediterranean folk forms (Mitchell 1996, 143). The aim of these pioneers was to create an engaged and locally responsive musical culture that could hold its own against the apparently monolithic force of American popular musical genres like rock and roll. Such regional modes of expression are 'contaminated' in the recent work of a younger generation of musicians by musical forms derived from the cultures of the African diaspora, including dub, reggae, and rap. Instead of seeing non-indigenous popular culture as a threat, in other words, the *posses* who embrace *contaminazione* look for musical and political affinities in the transnational cultural forms of the black diaspora.

In addition to drawing on such global black cultural forms, contemporary Italian hip hop groups foreground the African roots of local musical traditions. On 'O Cielo pe' Cuscino' [The Sky for a Pillow], for instance, Almamegretta emphasizes regional forms such as the tammuriata of Campania that are based, in part, on Northern African musical traditions. The song begins with a sample of a field recording by a folk singer, who delivers an impassioned chant in the style known as *fronne 'e limone* [lemon branch], a

style closely related to typical Arabic vocal techniques. By recuperating such relics of the pan-Mediterranean cultures of the past, groups like Almamegretta lay claim to the African roots of regional culture in Italy. Proclaiming themselves ‘Figli di Annibale’ [children of Hannibal] on their debut album, Almamegretta imply that the genetic legacy of the Carthaginian general who fought the Roman republic is still evident in contemporary Italy.⁴ This genealogical assertion undermines racist agitation against non-Europeans by suggesting that many Italians themselves are partially African. The band further emphasizes this history of geographical mobility and mixture through its name, which derives from a Latin phrase meaning ‘migrant soul.’ Almamegretta thus helps reawaken the historical connections between Southern Europe and Northern Africa that were suppressed by nationalist European historiography in the past (Abu-Lughod 1998, 4).

While drawing attention to the constitutive role of African cultures in Southern Italian folk tradition using methods of stylistic *contaminazione* such as Almamegretta’s *fronne ‘e limone* chant, contemporary hip hop groups from the Mezzogiorno also express solidarity with neighboring Mediterranean cultures through the lyrics of their songs. In 99 Posse’s song ‘spara!’ [‘shoot!’], for instance, this solidarity extends to identification with immigrant communities faced with racist violence:

...Quando il traffico ti inchioda in un ingorgo bloccato

quando vedi un immigrato

Quando pensi a come vive, alle sue storie di merda

quando ne senti la puzza e non vorresti sentirla

Quando prima di ogni cosa vuoi levartelo di torno

E poco importa se i tuoi soldi sono un po' anche di suo nonno...

Allora spara bastardo, dai sparagli addosso

Tanto domani sono morti lo stessi dai

Noi siamo belli, loro sò brutti dai

Loro sò brutti, ma brutti davvero

E poi spara anche a me: sono uno di loro, e tu

Spara! Sono un arabo

Spara! Ho sbagliato a nascere

Spara! Sono un immigrato e tu

Spara! Sono povero

E tu

[...when traffic traps you in a blocked alley

when you see an immigrant

When you think about how he lives, about his crappy experiences

When you smell his stench and you don't want to smell it anymore

When more than anything else you want to get out

And it doesn't matter that some of your money comes from his grandfather...

So shoot, you bastard, go on, shoot him

Go on, he'll be dead tomorrow anyway

Shoot them, kill them all

We're beautiful and they're ugly

They're ugly, really ugly

And shoot me too: I'm one of them, and you

Shoot! I'm an arab

Shoot! I shouldn't have been born

Shoot! I'm an immigrant, and you

Shoot! I'm poor

And you?]

As these lyrics suggest, 'spara!' disorients the listener, shifting perspective multiple times in order to trap the listener into confronting the implications of anti-immigrant sentiment. The song begins by setting the listener up to identify with a commuter trapped, like the yuppie protagonist in Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*, in a ghetto. The group focuses our attention on the visceral disgust this commuter feels for the poor immigrant. The body of the other literally threatens to engulf this bourgeois subject. After vividly evoking the biopolitics of objectification that reduce immigrants to phobic others, however, 99 Posse introduce a hint of irony by suggesting that the middle class subject is responsible on some level for the poverty of the immigrant. By asserting that European wealth comes from the historical exploitation of non-European peoples and their land, 99 Posse underline the colonial politics that lie behind phobic representations of the other. Having introduced this challenge to complacent European identity, the band then dares the fictional bourgeois subject they have created to kill the immigrant who disgusts him. The repeated goading injunction to shoot makes the stakes behind even commonplace forms of racial antipathy quite clear. At this point in the song, the identificatory patterns suddenly shift, and the singer, who has declared his unity with the bourgeois subject by

saying ‘we’re beautiful and they’re ugly,’ reveals that he too is an immigrant. The smug sense of complicity that has been fostered throughout the rest of the song is thus dramatically shattered. The listener suddenly has to decide whose side s/he is on.

The assertion of Arabic identity that features in the refrain to ‘spara!’ could certainly be taken on a literal level. Given the history of Moorish occupation in Sicily, there are significant cultural and genealogical links between Southern Italy and Northern Africa. North African immigrants can thus be seen as reestablishing their residence in a land to which they once held claim. As the song’s Arabic refrain says: ‘Io sono uno straniero, sono qui per riprendermi / solo una piccola parte di ciò che i vostri antenanti / hanno preso dalla mia terra’ [I’m a stranger, I’m here to take back / just a little bit of what your ancestors / took from my land]. However, like Almamegretta’s declaration of Italians’ hereditary link to Hannibal, 99 Posse’s identification with racial otherness seems intended more to catalyze an affiliatory politics that links economically and socially marginalized Italians to *extra-communitari* who share a similar fate at the hands of the Italian ruling classes and the state.

99 Posse, in other words, use ‘spara!’ to set up a counter-identification against the forms of racial stereotyping and scapegoating that have become an essential element in European politics. As Stuart Hall suggested while discussing the British mugging scare of the 1970s, ‘race’ can come to function as a crucial symbol that condenses fears associated with a broader sense of crisis brought on by economic collapse, social fragmentation, and political conflict (1978, 333). In the British case, an authoritarian consensus was created by politicians such as Margaret Thatcher, who appealed to invented traditions of British ‘decency’ and respect for ‘law and order,’ while representing blacks as inherently alien to

such traditions and hence ineluctably responsible for their breakdown. As work on racist mobilization in Italy has demonstrated, a very similar process of authoritarian consensus formation has unfolded there during the 1990s (Della Porta 2000, 121). 99 Posse's 'spara!' works to unravel this politics of authoritarian consensus by underlining the common marginalization experienced, as the song's introduction argues, by 'hippies, the terminally ill, drug addicts, illegal immigrants, punks, squatters, homeless, the unemployed, HIV+ people, [...].' The song's highly complex politics of identification sets the process of authoritarian consensus formation in train, only to interrupt that process by baring its bloody results. Ultimately, 99 Posse challenge the authoritarian consensus building ideologies that the Berlusconi government has employed very adeptly in the name of all those that this politics victimizes.

L'intera umanità è una merce [All of humanity has been commodified]

As well as reviving and enlarging on the Mezzogiorno's hybrid musical traditions, contemporary hip hop groups are also committed to critiquing the historical exploitation of the southern portion of Italy. For many of these groups there is a clear link between the Mezzogiorno's history and contemporary attitudes towards *extracomunitari* in Italy. In their song 'Tammuriata del Lavoro Nero,' the Neapolitan group Bisca links the tradition of regional emigration as a result of unemployment that has affected the Mezzogiorno with contemporary labor migration to Italy from underdeveloped nations. Using the melody of a popular post-war song that describes the birth of a black child to a Neapolitan woman, Bisca puns on the idea of *lavoro nero* ['black' or illegal work], the

ill-paid jobs that both black and white unemployed workers in the South are forced to assume:

E' nat' nu lavor' e nat' nir'

e a feccia 'o pigl'n gir'

sissignore 'o pigl'n gir'

e' nat' in' e campagne

e' nat' 'miezz' a via

e' nat' int'e cantier'

int'e famiglie da borghesia

[A job is born and it's born black (illegal)

and the scumbags make fun of it,

that's right, the scumbags make fun of it.

It's born in the countryside

it's born in the middle of the street

it's born at the work site,

and among rich families.]

Bisca employs the *tammuriata*, a traditional folk rhythm of the South, to emphasize the precarious and exploitative nature of work in the Mezzogiorno. Because of the lack of regular employment in the region, workers must take jobs in the informal or 'black' economy. According to Bisca's song, such irregular and poorly remunerated 'black' labor is derided by the well off. Yet, as 'Tammuriata del Lavoro Nero' shows, the Italian economy is vitally dependent on low wage workers, who are employed in all sectors, from agriculture to housekeeping for wealthy families. Current immigration legislation

ensures that *extra-communitari* are the most frequently employed workers in this informal sector. Hence, the pun on ‘black’ labor in Bisca’s song. As Sally Booth and Jeffrey Cole argue, the Mezzogiorno has attracted immigrants as a result of the region’s burgeoning demand for cheap, flexible, and unprotected labor (1999, 191). Immigrants accept the kinds of highly exploitative work that native Italians, who tend to be cushioned by family and state support, generally avoid. The Mezzogiorno is thus characterized by a combination of extremely high official unemployment statistics and growing numbers of migrants doing *lavoro nero* aboard fishing boats, in fields, and in urban bars, markets and homes.

Despite these seemingly contradictory statistics, this combination is a convenient one for employers. In fact, it is in the interest of the capitalist economy in general to maintain high levels of immigrant illegality and the draconian policing measures that ensure such illegality (Coccia 2003). For if immigrants are illegal, they can only accept ‘black’ work, which, of course, is by definition poorly paid. So-called clandestine immigrants therefore constitute a reserve army of superlatively ‘flexible’ subjects, a juridically non-existent labor force with no recourse to any of the legal protections or forms of collective bargaining that citizenship guarantees. The diffusion of xenophobia and racism ensures that a significant percentage of immigrants will be kept invisible, subjected to conditions of extreme exploitation that contribute to the increasing flexibility and destructuring of the entire labor force (Wallerstein 2002). *Lavoro nero* therefore erodes the resources of resistance of all workers in Italy, producing a vicious downward spiral of wages and living standards for all.

These conditions are unfortunately ideal for the gestation of right-wing movements. These movements typically capitalize on local anger at the erosion of economic and social wages by blaming the immigrants who arrive in the wake of post-Fordist economic restructuring. While Booth and Cole's research in Palermo did not find any of the organized neo-fascist activity that characterizes Northern Italy and other European nations, they nonetheless describe Sicilians as ambivalent concerning the presence of migrants from Africa (1999, 200). Aware that the Moors ruled their island for centuries during the Middle Ages, many Sicilians acknowledge their historical ties with North Africa but remain suspicious of immigrants from the Maghreb. Bisca's 'Tammuriata del Lavoro Nero' suggests that, at least among the highly politicized sectors of youth culture associated with the *centri sociali*, there is a clear understanding of the politics of *lavoro nero*. As the website for one such *centro sociale* states while calling for a boycott of the Bossi-Fini law:

'Chi sostiene queste leggi razziste ha previsto l'aumento dei clandestini...Sarà sempre più difficile entrare in Italia 'regolarmente': più un individuo è ricattato, più sarà disposto a lavorare per una miseria ed a vivere in qualsiasi condizione' [Those who support these racist laws know that there will be an increase in the number of 'illegals'...It will be ever more difficult to enter Italy legally: the more an individual is blackmailed, the more s/he will be willing to work for a pittance and live in miserable conditions] (Eterotopia 2002).

The cosmopolitan musical traditions and anti-racist culture associated with Italian *centri sociali* are not, however, evident simply in the South. In fact, Turin, the home of FIAT motorworks and historical center of organized working class militancy in Italy, has

been one of the principal sites of activity for the *posses*. Tony Mitchell argues that this is chiefly a result of the Mediterranean migration patterns from Southern Italy, Africa, and the Middle East which converge in Turin (1996, 149). One of the most interesting of the groups to have emerged from the Turinese scene take their name from the local dialect's slang for a vagrant: *mau mau*. This term of course originally derives from the name given by the British to the protagonists of the Kenyan uprising against colonial rule, but was used by Piedmontese during the economic boom of the 1960s to refer to migrants from the Mezzogiorno. In one of their most biting satirical songs, 'Razza Predona' [Predatory Race], the members of Mau Mau ventriloquize the perspective of a typical Northern racist. Articulating characteristic petty bourgeois disdain for those just below him in the economic chain, the speaker condemns 'sta tribù di lavavetri' [this tribe of windshield washers] for turning every stoplight into a marketplace. Mau Mau's song satirically catalogues the typical stereotypes of racial difference that afflict migrants, whether they are from the Mezzogiorno, Eastern Europe, or Africa. The song becomes particularly scathing in its second section, which focuses on an exchange between a Mau Mau bandmember named Nsongan and the caricatured Piedmontese racist:

-Eh tu, mi capisci? Come ti chiami?

-Nsongan.

-Che cosa fai qua?

-Suono il tamburo.

-Ale si a sunè il tamburu.

-E con che suoni, con I negretti della tua tribù?

-Il mio gruppo si chiama MAU MAU.

-E bene, I ritmi dei selvaggi.

Ora fate il vostro spettacolo di folclore

e poi tornate giù.

-Veramente cantiamo in dialetto Piemontese

in Italia, e poi abito qui da dieci anni,

e poi pago anche le tasse; e tu, le paghi?

-Ehi! Sun pa fole mi!

[-Hey, you? D'you understand me? What's your name?

-Nsongan.

-What're you doing here?

-I play the drums.

-Hear that, he's here to play the drums!

And who do you play with, the little black kids of your tribe?

-My group is called MAU MAU.

-Oh, the rhythms of the savages!

Well, get on with your display of folklore

and then go home.

-Actually, we sing in Piedmontese dialect,

in Italy, and I've been living here for ten years,

and I also pay taxes; and you, do you pay them?

-What! I'm not crazy!]

Identity is thoroughly ironized here. Since Nsongan is black, the speaker immediately treats him as a primitive, speaking exaggeratedly slowly and recycling tired clichés of

African identity from the colonial era. And yet Nsongan speaks standard Italian, while his interlocutor speaks in Piedmontese dialect. It is Nsongan rather than his interlocutor who, then, appears to have the best stake to claims of mainstream Italian identity and its prerogatives. In addition, as Nsongan points out, his group sings in the local dialect. In a globalized world, is Piedmont folkloristic or is Africa? How are claims to belonging in the national popular adjudicated, and by whom? Mau Mau invoke a litany of racist stereotypes only to reveal their arbitrary character. This exchange, in other words, unmask the relativism of ascriptions of development and underdevelopment, universality and localism.

The dialogue concludes with Nsongan bringing such issues down to a material plane: who does and who does not pay taxes? The Piedmontese racist's claim of indigenous identity is patently hypocritical, Mau Mau implicitly suggest, given his refusal to pay taxes. The issue of taxation is, in addition, symbolic of a broader economic dynamic. Since Italy's booming post-Fordist economy is dependent on the kind of super-exploitative labor that relatively few in Italy are willing to engage in, immigrants are vital to the economy. The labor and tax revenues contributed by immigrants have played a significant role in Italian economy development over the last two decades. Moreover, since Italy has a negative population growth rate, the world's lowest, it is in the national interest to establish equitable paths towards legal immigration in order to replenish the labor force upon which the country's relatively generous welfare state is built. Instead of doing so, however, demagogues such as Umberto Bossi of the Lega Nord cast immigrants as parasites, depriving native born Italians of their natural rights. Mau Mau seem to conjure up precisely this racist argument, only to invert it by demonstrating that

it is the Piedmontese who are parasitic on immigrant labor. Like Bisca, the group thus articulates a blistering critique of the economic arguments that underpin the authoritarian consensus in Italy.

Nessuna persona è clandestina [No One is Illegal]

The economic exploitation that groups such as Bisca and Mau Mau decry is maintained through measures like the Bossi-Fini law that dovetail with wider immigration controls established by the European Union. Like the controls on movement created by South Africa's apartheid regime, such legislation guarantees a high level of economic exploitation at the cost of the thorough dehumanization of its victims, the *extra-communitari*, as well as of those who benefit from such exploitation. The hip hop *posses* and the anti-racist culture of which they are a part work to disclose these mechanisms of exploitation and degradation not just on a national level but also on a trans-European scale. The connections they forge with anti-racist movements in other sites across Europe and around the world challenge the exclusionary identity politics implicit in much European Union immigration legislation.

In addition, through their aesthetic of *contaminazione*, Italian *posses* help articulate a pan-Europe counter-discourse that questions the basic tenets of the European Union. 99 Posse's song 'facendo la storia' [Making History] is a particularly powerful example of the kinds of trans-European, anti-racist connections the *posses* seek to establish. Like Almamegretta, who collaborated on a remix of a song by the important Bristol 'trip hop' band Massive Attack, 99 Posse look to Black British culture for inspiration and affiliation. On 'facendo la storia,' 99 Posse collaborate with the seminal

dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, remixing a song of his that documents the defiant struggle of West Indian immigrants to establish themselves in an increasingly xenophobic Britain during the post-1945 period. Although the band does not overtly explore the parallels between the situation of Black Britons and *extra-communitari* in Italy in ‘facendo la storia,’ they do take up the theme of the racialization of Southern Italians that they employ elsewhere to make precisely such connections. By highlighting the correspondences between the experience of immigrants from the Mezzogiorno in Northern Italy and that of immigrants arriving in Britain from the Caribbean, 99 Posse underline the need for trans-European networks of solidarity. Their remix of Linton Kwesi Johnson’s work offers a concrete example of precisely such forms of cultural and political cooperation:

Now tell me something

Mr Padania

Tell me something

Nun te rette ‘mpiccio quanno mezzo meridione

S’appresentaje là ‘ncoppe c’a’ valigia e’ cartone

Benvenuto terrone, ato che secessione

T’è piacuito e t’abbuffà ‘ncoppe a disperazione,

Ma nun l’hanno maje inventato

E nun l’inventeranno maje

O’ ristorante ca t’assetti mangi e aroppo te ne vaje,

Paghi il conto, e lasci pure a’ mazzetta,

O sennò s’incazza o’ iammo

E te fa come a' purpetta

It is no mystery

We're making history

It is no mystery

We're winning victory

[It didn't bother you when half the South

Showed up there with a cardboard suitcase

Welcome terrone⁵, you said, instead of secession

You like to gorge like a pig on desperation

But they have never invented

And never will invent

A restaurant where you sit down, you eat, and then you leave;

You pay the bill and you also leave a tip

Or else the cook gets pissed off

And turns you into a meatball]

Linton Kwesi Johnson speaks the lines written in English in 'facendo la storia' in his smoothly purring bass voice. Into his classic account of Black British resistance to racism, 99 Posse interpellate a response to the racist politics of Umberto Bossi, whose calls for the secession of the Northeastern region known as 'Padania' are based on total hypocrisy. Like Mau Mau's 'Razza Predona,' 'Facendo la storia' argues that the North's post-war wealth is to a large extent based on the labor of Southerners. The song uses an extremely powerful metaphor based on revoltingly excessive consumption to underline

the cannibalistic quality of this informal apartheid system and to challenge the racist politics of secession articulated by Bossi and the Lega Nord.

Like Mr. Padania in 99 Posse's song, global organizations such as the World Trade Organization permit transnational capital to gorge off the labor of migrants while denying such migrants the basic rights of citizenship, making them ever more susceptible to exploitation. During the mid- to late-1990s, a trans-European network of anti-racist organizations began engaging with these forms of exploitation, connecting the oppression of immigrants to broader forms of neo-liberal inequality. In Italy, groups such as Ya Basta! and *tute bianche* [white overalls] emerged following the 'Intercontinental Encounter' organized by the Zapatistas in Chiapas during 1996 (Ya Basta 2002). Ya Basta! in particular was formed to establish solidarity between activists in Italy and the EZLN, providing much needed international monitoring during the periodic military crackdowns of the Mexican government against the Zapatistas. In addition to offering such support, however, Italian activists learned a great deal from the Zapatistas's defiant stand against neo-liberalism and their brilliant tactics of coordinated global communication. As Bisca and 99 Posse affirm on a track entitled 'Resiste Chiapas' [Chiapas is Resisting] from their collaborative album of 1995 *Guai A Chi Ci Tocca* [Woe To Those Who Attack Us]: 'gli indigeni del Chiapas...hanno il merito di aver dato al mondo una grande lezione di lotta e dignità [the indigenous people of Chiapas have given the world a great lesson in struggle and dignity]. The Zapatistas's opposition to neo-liberalism's prioritization of capital over people helped inspire opposition to the rightward turn of European social democracy. In Italy, Ya Basta! developed important links with the *tute bianche*, a movement of the economically and socially marginalized

which played a significant role in protesting the G8 meeting in Genova and in workshops at the second European Social Forum in Florence during 2002 (Hobo 2002).

A fundamental theme of these Italian social movements has been the insistent claim that ‘Nessuna persona è clandestina’ – no one is an illegal immigrant. By making this radical claim, activists question the parameters of citizenship established both by the nation-state in general and the new European Union in particular. As the Italian *posses* have become more connected to global social movements such as the Zapatistas, in other words, they have begun advocating for a model of citizenship based on domicile rather than the accidents of birth or blood. For the Italian *posses* and for the broader European anti-racist network that informs their work, freedom of movement for all people is a fundamental right that has to be advanced against neo-liberal policies of opening borders to capital flow while closing them down to human migration. The blistering attacks on anti-immigrant racism found in songs by the Italian *posses* of the 1990s have helped inspire movements such as the European Noborder Network.⁶ Meeting for the first time in 1999, the Noborder Network grew out of the recognition that contemporary capitalism’s central contradiction may lie in the increasing mobility of capital and increasing immobility of all but the most privileged people (Noborder Network 2001). This form of global apartheid helps maintain the system of differential labor costs that is fundamental to maximizing profit levels (Wallerstein 2002). The Noborder Network has organized protests against a whole new stratum of transnational state organizations that monitor and control the movement of people, including the International Migration Organization, the Intergovernmental Counsel on Migration, and the International Labor Organization. Based on economic interests rather than humanitarian principles, these

organizations have contributed to the wholesale criminalization of immigrants and refugees. The Noborder Network challenges such ruthless neo-liberalism through direct action protests against detention camps and airlines that cooperate with deportation orders, and through netstrikes against the increasingly powerful electronic surveillance systems that monitor people's international movements within Europe.⁷ The increasing centrality of these protests to the movement for a social Europe attests to the success of the long campaign that the Italian *posses* have participated in to forge connections between the historically marginalized peoples of Italy and those they might once have seen as aliens.⁸

Conclusion: the Future of Fortress Europe

Struggles over place, George Lipsitz has written, are the specific form in which contemporary social crises occur (1994, 3). Over the last decade it has become a truism that the static boundaries of place and identity imposed by the modern nation-state are being dissolved or at least severely eroded by complex transnational flows of capital, culture, commodities, and communities. Our language for understanding social identities and their transformation has taken on an increasingly geographical and even hydraulic vocabulary as borders seemed to collapse in the face of the post-Fordist economy's myriad forms of mobility. A close examination of changes in the European Union's immigration legislation over the last quarter century suggests that such notions of mobility need to be heavily qualified.

In 1968, an EEC agreement established a two-tiered framework for the work force within Europe. This meant that the citizens of member states would be free to travel

throughout the community in search of work while so-called guestworkers, many of whom had been residents of particular European states for many years by that point, would remain trapped in their ‘host’ countries (Webber 1991, 12). As the economic slump of the 1970s began to take effect, the few avenues of legal immigration that had been available during the preceding period of labor shortage were closed. Asylum seekers and other refugees were placed by EU governments in detention centers and attacked by neo-fascist parties in national media as leeches and terrorists. As Mediterranean states such as Spain, Greece, and Italy, which were once significant labor exporters, started to boom economically, they inevitably began to attract immigration flows from less developed nations in the region. Although Italy and the other Mediterranean members of the EU have connections to Africa and the Middle East that reach back millenia, they now were seen by other members of the Union as bridge-heads for an alien invasion. Étienne Balibar has persuasively argued that the anti-immigrant animus that surfaced in many affluent European nations during and after the economic crisis of the 1970s emerged in tandem with the post-Fordist downsizing of the region’s welfarist state. Such racism therefore expresses misplaced anger at the rolling back of entitlements associated with social democracy (1996, 370). These manifestations of what Balibar calls ‘class racism’ are highly contradictory. Not only does the increasingly racialized construction of European identity fly in the face of Southern Europe’s longstanding connections to the Mediterranean world. It also threatens to choke off the flow of flexible labor on which the new economy has been based. Nevertheless, at meetings held in Schengen and Dublin, harsh immigration laws and policies were drafted by ministers and police chiefs during

the early 1990s that ensured the political impotence of the workers in this new economy (Sivanandan 1993, 69). In Fortress Europe, then, mobility is for the privileged.

Measured against European standards, Italian legislation concerning immigration has historically been relatively liberal. Laws passed during the initial post-1970 phases of heightened immigration guaranteed all non-EU workers and their families who are legally resident in Italy complete equality of rights and treatment with Italian workers (Melotti 1997, 90). Such legislation also contained provisions that guaranteed the right to education, housing, health and welfare care for regularized immigrants. Unfortunately, legislative guarantees of immigrant rights have been largely theoretical as a result of the discrepancy between formal definitions of rights and their implementation in Italy. This discrepancy is, of course, particularly aggravated in the Mezzogiorno, where Italians have never benefited from the theoretical perquisites of citizenship. Despite the cultures of solidarity surveyed here, the pressures that result from this situation constitute a real threat. The passage of the Bossi-Fini law suggests that significant segments of the Italian public are not averse to taking the lead in the politics of anti-immigrant racial scapegoating that proliferated throughout Europe during the 1990s. In order to stem the growth of the racist, right wing culture that has gained significant hold in other European countries, Italy needs at the very least to confront its own history of internal discrimination and adopt progressive policies for the economic integration of immigrants.

It is no accident that contemporary Italian hip hop culture deals so explicitly with issues of racism. The tradition of *autonomia* from which Italian *centri sociali* developed is predicated on an embrace of extra-parliamentary politics and social movements (Hardt 1996, 5). As Italian hip hop culture demonstrates, youths who are economically and

socially marginalized by a corrupt political system and high unemployment rates see parallels between their situation and that of the *extra-comunitari* who began to transform Italian identity during the 1990s. Indeed, the very term *extra-communitari* suggests precisely the marginalization by state power and hierarchical organization that drives contemporary forms of *autonomia* in Italy. Italian hip hop's revival of regional identities that reconnect Italy to her Mediterranean identity should not be such a surprise then. The *contaminazione* evident in Italian hip hop attacks the EU-mandated isolation of Italy from its Mediterranean connections and also blasts the forms of economic and social marginalization imposed on immigrants in Italy. More broadly speaking, African and diasporic musical forms such as rai, raggamuffin, and rap exert a powerful appeal on Italian youth culture since they affirm connections with a broader world in the context of an increasingly insular official European identity. Undeniably, the racialized institutional framework of Fortress Europe threatens to legitimate and catalyze the same kinds of neo-fascist racism in Italy that are all too evident across Northern Europe. Yet the 'contaminated' work of the *posses* testifies to a grassroots anti-racist movement that has had a substantial impact on youth culture in Italy over the last decade. The cosmopolitan cultural forms and messages produced by contemporary *contaminazione* hold out the vision of an egalitarian, anti-racist, and social Europe that can be affirmed in the face of the European Union's increasing fortress mentality.

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1. The text of the Bossi-Fini law can be read online at
<<http://www.libertadimovimento.it>>

2. *Extra-communitari* also include non-European Union nationals from countries such as Albania that are, culturally speaking, a part of Europe.

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3. Biographical information and discographies for these and all the other bands mentioned in this article can be found on Joseph Sciorra's excellent website: <<http://www.italianrap.com>>.
 4. This notion of African heredity was subsequently developed in a film, directed by Davide Ferrario, that goes by the same title as Almamegretta's album. The soundtrack for this film features a song by Nidi D'Arac that makes the genealogical connection explicit. See *Figli di Annibale*. Original soundtrack. Italy: Compagne Nuove Indye (CNDL 10106), 1998.
 5. 'Terrone' is an insult directed at migrants from the Mezzogiorno by racist Northern Italians. Literally, it means 'someone who comes from the earth.' Perhaps the closest equivalent in English would be 'hillbilly,' although this lacks the affect of the insult, which has the impact of 'nigger' in English.
 6. The homepage of the European Noborder Network is <<http://www.noborder.org>>
 7. Information on current news and direct actions relating to *extra-communitari* can be found at <http://www.italia.indymedia.org/features/migranti>
 8. See the agenda of the workshop forum at the latest meeting of the European Social Forum's in Florence at <<http://www.fse.esf.org>>