RACIALISED BODIES, VULNERABLE SUBJECTS: THE ITALIAN ZIGULA

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Sommario
In questo articolo mi concentro sull'esperienza in Italia di alcuni membri di un gruppo etnico e linguistico – gli Zigula – presente in Somalia già all'inizio del XX secolo. Questo saggio fa parte di un progetto più ampio che indaga la storia degli Zigula come esempio particolare e istruttivo di diaspora africana, per mostrare come movimenti transnazionali e contatti con culture diverse portino alla costruzione di identità ibride. Analizzo inoltre due aspetti dell'esperienza italiana degli Zigula. In primo luogo, spiego perché si tratta di un'esperienza postcoloniale. In secondo luogo, attraverso vari esempi, mostro che gli Zigula italiani sono soggetti vulnerabili che, a causa della loro mancanza di riconoscimento, devono costantemente giustificare la loro presenza in Italia. La mia analisi si basa principalmente sui risultati di un'intervista semi-strutturata con F., una donna zigula italiana quarantenne arrivata in Italia all'età di cinque anni. Il mio obiettivo principale è quello di mettere in evidenza un'esperienza diasporica controversa e diversa da quelle analizzate finora.

I was at Fiumicino Airport in Rome, waiting for my biological mother, who was returning from Tanzania. I was with one of my cousins, who is also a Zigula; that is a Black person. It was late at night. There were only a few people around, and the police stopped us asking to see our documents. I gave them my Italian ID. They quickly checked my document before asking me to show them my 'Permesso di soggiorno' ('Permit to stay'), which, of course, being an Italian citizen, I did not need. I was shocked. Luckily, however, I also had my passport with me to further prove my Italian citizenship. They did not interrogate my cousin. He was a Black person with an African/Tanzanian passport, so his presence in this case was not as problematic as mine. We were two

non-white bodies inhabiting a white space, but with my passport, I was somehow threatening the Italian national identity. This anecdote, besides revealing some aspects of my personal story, relates a situation that I am sure many Black Italians would find familiar[1].

In this article I focus on the experience in Italy of some members of an ethnic and linguistic group – the Zigula – based at the start of the 19th century in Somalia. This article is part of a larger project investigating the history of the Zigula as a distinctive and instructive example of African diaspora to show how transnational movements and contacts with different cultures lead to the construction of hybrid identities. In this article I analyse two aspects of the Zigulas' Italian experience. First, I explain why it is a postcolonial experience. Second, by means of some examples, I show that the Italian Zigula are vulnerable subjects who, because of their lack of recognition, constantly need to justify their presence in Italy. My analysis is primarily based on the results of a semi-structured interview with F., an Italian Zigula in her 40s who arrived in Italy at five years of age and was fostered and then adopted by an Italian family from Faenza, in Emilia Romagna[2]. My main focus is to bring to light a diasporic experience that is controversial, multifaceted and, importantly, different from those analysed in the literature to date. The experience of the Zigula in Italy and its colonial and postcolonial implications have, so far, received scant interest.

The Zigula, originally based in Tanzania, experienced a number of migrations within and outside Africa. At the end of the 18th century, to escape a serious drought, they left Tanzania for Somalia. There they were enslaved by the local Somali population and subsequently experienced Italian colonisation. During colonisation (1908-1941), the trusteeship (1950-1960) and afterward, when the Italian presence in Somalia was less official but still of significant import, some young

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[1]   In her article 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness', Sara Ahmed portrays a similar encounter that happened in another airport, at the borders of New York City. Ahmed describes how bodies who are seen as 'out of place' and thus recognised as 'stranger' are stopped and questioned. The 'search and stop', which Ahmed defines as 'a technology of racism', is one of the most frequent episodes of racism that Black subjects experience in Italy. Being legally Italian does not make any difference and often can cause more trouble (Ahmed, 2007:161).

[2]   The larger project is partly based on several interviews held in Italy, Kenya and Tanzania during 2019 and 2020. I would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust and Cardiff University for funding the research leading to this article and the larger project of which it is part.

Zigula had the opportunity to learn Italian and to study to become elementary teachers in Catholic institutions. Thanks to these relationships and in particular to the connection with Italian missionaries, some moved from Somalia and Tanzania to Italy, where, since the 70s, a group of Zigula has settled and live, prevalently in Emilia Romagna. While some Zigula also left Somalia and returned to Tanzania to escape discrimination and exclusion, others, who fled Somalia in the 90s, after the beginning of the Somali civil war, eventually reached refugee camps in Kenya. A small number of them have been relocated to the United States of America, while many are still waiting in the camps.

The Italian context is significantly different from that of other European countries such as the United Kingdom or France. Italy has only in the last 30 years become a country of inward migration, having been a land of emigrants for a sustained period of time. Two main factors make the Italian context particularly complex. First, the persistence in Italy of a racialised identity, initially constructed in the early 20th century during Fascism and colonialism and set in opposition to darker-skinned people. Second, unlike in France and the UK, no single ethnic minority has dominated recent immigration into Italy, and very few immigrants who live in Italy come from the ex-Italian colonies. Furthermore, the Italian language is spoken almost exclusively in Italy, so for many African immigrants Italian is a third language, in addition to native and colonial languages. In modern Italy the idea of a Black Italian is still thought of as an oxymoron, as demonstrated by widespread media and political attitudes and discourses. The Zigulas' place in this sociohistorical context is particularly instructive because of their long-standing relationship with Italian people and culture. They settled in Italy prior to the recent migration, hold Italian passports and include among their number Italian-born members. In addition, an earlier generation had direct experience of Italy as a colonial power in Somalia, where they lived in servitude.

The 'diasporised' identities of the Zigula[3]

To understand the trajectories that brought the Zigula to move within and outside the African continent, it is necessary to examine their history. Thus, I briefly illustrate how the Zigula first arrived in Somalia as slaves, how they settled there and how they lived during the Italian colonisation. I also explain how the different labels used by the Zigula to self-identify were created and, in particular, when the term Somali Bantu gained popularity. Finally, I specifically focus on the events that prompted the Zigula migration processes, both within and outside the African continent.

The Zigula arrived in Somalia, probably in different waves, in the 19th century, after being captured by the Sultan of Zanzibar and other Arab slave traders. Furthermore, according to Lee Cassanelli, due to the drought that hit Tanzania in 1836, some Zigula decided to sell themselves as slaves (quoted in Declich, 1993:93). Along with other people from Malawi and Mozambique, they were forced to work on the Somali plantations. These groups, taken together, were identified as *Mushungulis*, a term that was used to indicate a worker, a foreigner and also a slave. Among them, the Zigula were the first to regain their freedom. Guided by their two leaders, Majendero and Wanankhucha, they fought against the Somalis, and they subsequently settled in the area of the Jubba River. In Somalia, even if they were free, they lived as second-class citizens and were discriminated against, as demonstrated by the use of derogatory terms such as *ooji* and *adoon*, used to emphasise their past as slaves. They were also considered inferior because of their physical features, for example their large nose and their particular gait, which were perceived as more African. Two terms were commonly used to identify and distinguish between the *Mushungulis* and the Somalis. The first, *Jareer*, means 'hard hair' and was used to refer to the *Mushungulis*, who had slave or non-Somali ancestry, while the word *Jileec*, which means 'soft', described those identified as ethnic Somalis[4]. The alleged national homogeneity of

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[3] My reconstruction of the Zigula history is drawn primarily from the work of Declich, Menkhaus and Besteman.

[4] According to Menkhaus (2010:93) "the term *jareer* is now widely used by the Somali Bantu themselves, and carries no pejorative connotations; indeed, the name is employed with a

Somalia, grounded on a shared Arabic origin, a common nomadic culture and a common language, was used to justify the discrimination and the exclusion of the Zigula and the other Bantu populations. However, as appropriately stressed by Keren Weitzberg, these anti-Bantu sentiments were not universal among the Somalis. These were often apparent in "the ways in which prejudiced thinking intersects with structures of power" (Weitzberg, 2017:18)[5].

The subordinate situation of the Zigula was exacerbated by the Italian colonisation, during which the Jubba Valley villagers were obliged to work for free in colonial projects while Somalis did not have to provide free labour. During the Italian colonisation at the beginning of the 20th century, as Francesca Declich (2000:32), one of the most prominent experts on the subject, points out, the Italian colonialists were especially interested in those descendants of slaves who, unlike the mostly nomadic pastoralist Somalis, were skilful farmers[6].

The Italian colonial authorities started using the term 'Bantu' to indicate *Jareer* people. The use of a unifying term, which was imposed from the outside and referred to different ethnic identities, did not contribute to developing among them a group consciousness and a sense of community. Only after 1990 did the term gain popularity. When the civil war started, they began to flee Somalia, and they were accepted as refugees in the Kenyan Camps, such as Dadaab and Kakuma. In the camps, by accepting the use of the catchall term 'Somali Bantu', they could present themselves as a minority group, explaining the abuse and the discrimination they suffered from Somalis and which allegedly were still continuing in the camps. Thus, they had the opportunity to create "a positive ethnic identity distinguished by shared cultural characteristics" and to narrate their stories in front of an international audience (Deramo, 2017:93). The attention received determined the choice by the USA to accept the Somali Bantu as

certain sense of pride, perhaps because of its double meaning (suggesting both hardness of hair and hardness of the people themselves)".

[5]   Two Bantu scholars, Mohamed A. Eno and Omar A. Eno, have written extensively about the situation of the Somali Bantu in Somalia. In their work, they have fiercely challenged the notion of an ethnically homogeneous Somalia.

[6]   As stated by one elder Somali Bantu, now living in the USA, during an interview with Besteman: "The Italians were only colonising the *jareer*, not the Somalis" (Besteman, 2016:80).

refugees in the USA. Along with the so-called Lost Boys of Sudan, they were the only African people welcomed in the USA. Beginning in the 1990s, the label 'Somali Bantu' started to circulate also among educated Jareer in Mogadishu, who wanted to draw attention to their conditions in Somalia. As specified by Kenneth Menkhaus, the Jareer people started to identify themselves as Somali Bantu out of necessity. This allowed them to distinguish their experience from that of the Somali population and to gain the camp authorities' consideration (Menkhaus, 2010:98-99; Besteman, 2012:291-92).

Some Zigula managed to move back to Tanzania before the start pf the Somalian civil war. While in Somalia, in fact, the Zigula proudly maintained their traditions and their ancestors' language, which they thought could be used as a passport to go back to Tanzania, their country of origin, if their situation worsened and they found themselves at risk of becoming slaves again (Declich, 2010:169). The strong group consciousness of the Zigulas was crucial in persuading the Tanzanian authorities to recognise and accept them in the country's territories (Declich & Rodet, 2018:448).

We could ask whether the Zigula experience can be considered as diasporic. In order to answer this question, we must first provide a definition of diaspora. We can start by considering William Safran's 'centred' diaspora model. According to Safran (1991:83), diasporic people can be defined as "expatriate minority communities" that are dispersed from an original "center"; that maintain a "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland"; that "believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country"; that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return when the time is right and that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland. With respect to Safran's definition, James Clifford contends that, although it is necessary to define diaspora, it is also important not to adhere strictly to an 'ideal type'. If this model is rigidly applied, some significant diasporic experiences such as the African/American and the Caribbean/British would be excluded. These cultures, Clifford (1994:315) also argues, could be relegated into a category of "*quasi diasporas*" because they show only some diasporic features or moments.

Similarly, the Zigula's trajectories do not completely correspond to the definition of diaspora provided by Safran, primarily because of their

complex and ambiguous relationship with the idea of homeland. For many Zigula, Somalia, where they were oppressed and marginalised, cannot be considered as motherland. It is often Tanzania, where they were originally from, that is identified with the notion of home and which also comes to represent the place of return for some of the Zigula who live in a diasporic condition. During my fieldwork in Tanzania, in 2019 and 2020, I noticed that people of older generations usually defined themselves just as Zigula, and often they hid the fact that they were born in Somalia, fearing that they could be treated as foreigners by other Tanzanians. It is interesting to note that sometimes the place where they first settled in Tanzania is recorded in their passport as their place of birth. As reported by Declich and Rodet (2018:448), the younger Zigula self-identify just as Tanzanians simply to avoid discrimination in the job market. The Zigula who live in the refugee camps are generally defined as Somali Bantu.

The notion of homeland is particularly controversial for the Italian Zigula, the vast majority of whom have become or have always been officially Italian citizen. Nonetheless, because of their African features, they often experience the feeling of not belonging and of being regarded only as second-class citizens in Italy. As stated by Clifford (1994:310), "many minority groups that have not previously identified in this way are now reclaiming diasporic origins and affiliations". It is thus unsurprising that some Italian Zigula have rediscovered a strong connection with a prior home, often symbolised by an ideal image of Africa and, in particular, of Tanzania. Drawing on these considerations, it is possible to affirm that the Zigula, independently of their different diasporic trajectories, have developed a similar approach to the notion of home. For them, "'home' in diaspora, with its interrelated experiences of loss of origin and return to roots, can be redefined as 'homing', a continuous search for and approximation of a 'home base' in both imagination and practice" (Lee, 2010:127). These aspects emerge clearly in my analysis of the Italian Zigula and the complexities of their postcolonial and multicultural identities.

The Zigula in Italy: A postcolonial trajectory

The Italian presence in Somalia was still of relevant importance even after the United Nations trusteeship, under Italian administration, ended

in 1960. Until 1991, Somalia has been one of the priorities of Italian cooperation activities (Calchi Novati, 2008). The story of the state's radio station, Radio Magadishu, founded in 1951, clearly reflects the endurance and persistence of the ties between Italy and Somalia[7]. In this period, some young male Zigula had the opportunity to learn Italian and to study to become elementary teachers in Catholic institutions[8]. Thanks to these relationships and in particular to the connection with Italian missionaries, some moved from Somalia and Tanzania to Italy, where, since the 70s, a group of Zigula has settled and lives predominantly in Emilia Romagna.

The use of the notion of postcolonial when analysing the Italian context has sometimes been questioned. As previously mentioned, the Italian context is in fact significantly different from that of other European countries, such as the UK, France and also the Netherlands, where the vast majorities of immigrants came from their former colonies. Italy has become a country of inward migration only since the late 80s, having been a land of emigrants for a sustained period of time. Furthermore, no single ethnic minority has dominated recent immigration into Italy, and very few immigrants who live in Italy come from the ex-Italian colonies. It is, however, possible to acknowledge the atypicality of the Italian context whilst affirming its postcolonial character (Fiore, 2013:73).

The Zigula's experience strongly supports this claim. Their migration to Italy is a postcolonial trajectory. In the simplest terms, their route is postcolonial because, to paraphrase a popular slogan, the "Zigula are here [in Italy] because the Italians were there [in Somalia]". The same considerations are voiced by the Italian writer of Somali and

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[7] The recent 'restoration' initiative of an Italian language broadcast on the radio reflects the ambiguities and controversial aspects of this relationship. This decision, which triggered strong reactions, was defined by the Somali researcher Abdinor Dahir as "a new form of cultural imposition". It highlights the urgent need to examine Italian colonial legacy in Somalia from the perspective of the colonised (Ali, 2021).

[8] Italian Catholic priests always supported the idea of a colonial civilising mission. In accordance with the colonial authorities, they often had a prominent role in the educational system (Pretelli, 2011).

Pakistani origin, Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, who affirmed, "I didn't go to Italy, it was Italy that first came to me"[9].

Understanding these trajectories through the framework of postcoloniality is illuminating because, as Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, among others, have demonstrated, it helps in the study of Italian colonial past, which cannot be considered a minor, closed or irrelevant experience. It also allows us to focus on its impact on the construction of Italian national identity and to better understand how the consequences of Italian colonisation still reverberate on present-day Italy. Postcoloniality so understood is a dynamic, rather than static, condition. It does not signal the end of oppression but instead, in Teresa Fiore's (2017:54) words, "it emphasizes the reverberations and extensions of it, while also including the forms of agency that individuals claim in response to it". Furthermore, a postcolonial perspective, by drawing our attention especially to the relationship between colonisers and colonised, brings to the fore the racial ideologies developed by that encounter. The analysis of the discourse on race and on how Black bodies have been racialised and represented in Italy requires an investigation of how racial ideas have developed since the Italian Liberal State (1861-1925). The situation of Black people who live in Italy and of those who have started self-identifying as Black Italian or Afro-Italian is strictly related to what happened when Italians colonised African territories.

Racialised citizenship in Italy

The liminal and peripheral racial status of Italians, who as immigrants in the USA and Australia have seen their whiteness questioned, has determined the establishment of a model of normative citizenship that does not mention whiteness but implies it. According to this normative model, no differently from what we have seen more generally in Europe, Italian identity, which is described as Mediterranean, is formed in opposition to those who are regarded as immigrants, foreigners and especially darker-skinned people. Gaia Giuliani explains the construction of Italianness adopting the notion of "altero- and auto-

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[9]   I heard Ramzanali Fazel affirming this during a conference in 2020. On this, see also S. Ramzanali Fazel's memoir, *Lontano da Magadisho* (1994).

referential racialization", as formulated by Colette Guillaumin. This notion refers to a system of racialisation that is centred on the Other while the Self is hidden (Giuliani, 2014:572-573). Only the contrast with those who are recognised as Other because of the colour of their skin permits the Self to affirm its identity. This contraposition becomes a unifying trait able to construct a common racial identity in an Italian nation that seemed "impossible to internally homogenise" (573).

Italy started its colonial enterprise in Africa in 1869, a few years after the unification of the nation, which happened in 1861. Contrary to what is generally thought, the Fascist regime carried on the plans of the Liberal administrations. According to Italy's Liberal governments, African colonisation was crucial not just in solving the economic and social problems of a young nation but also in creating "a sense of homogeneity and belonging" that was, otherwise, totally absent (Furno, 2010:36). The encounter between the Italian colonisers and the African colonised allowed Italy to cement its unity by weakening its internal differences. We could affirm "that colonialism makes [Italy] 'white'" (Ahmed, 2007:153). The work of historians such as Nicola Labanca and Angelo Del Boca has been fundamental to debunk the myth of Italian colonialism as a benign project. In particular, Del Boca clearly stated:

> The myth of 'Italian good people', which has been allowed to hide so many infamies, [...] actually appears, upon examination of the facts, a fragile, hypocritical artifice. It has no right of citizenship, no historical foundation. It has been arbitrarily and slyly used for over a century and still has its supporters today. However, the truth is that Italians, in some circumstances, behaved in the most brutal way, just like other peoples in similar situations. Therefore, they have no right to any mercy and much less, self-absolution.
> (Del Boca, 2005:8 - my translation)

The invisibility of the bodies of colonised people on Italian soil before the late 80s made it easier for Italy to distance itself from the legacy of colonialism, strengthening the myth of Italians as gentle colonisers and helping to corroborate the assumption that being Italian means to be

white or, better, non-Black[10]. In this context, racism and Blackness did not acquire any centrality in the political and social debate that developed in Italy after World War II. The discourse on race is broached with the same indulgent attitude generally applied to Italian colonialism. A "combination of denial, paternalism, and 'innocence'" that, as argued by Alessandro Portelli (2005:360), "makes possible in Italy things that would be unthinkable elsewhere". Italians still have the tendency to depict their nation as tolerant and to underestimate the importance of racial problems, stigmatising any form of racism as simply the bad behaviour of a few Italians. However, this image does not correspond to reality, and this can be seen, for example, if we focus on the legislation concerning Italian citizenship. Italian citizenship, which is granted by birth and is based on *jus sanguinis*, right of blood, is considered as "one of the most restrictive citizenship laws for immigrants" (Blakely, 2009:18). Italian citizenship legislation is based "on descent and ethnic belonging" (Clò, 2013:275) and makes it extremely difficult for immigrants to become legally Italian. According to Law 91, which in 1992 reformed the previous 1912 law, immigrants have to prove that they have been residing legally and continually in Italy for 10 years. They also have to fulfil economic requirements, showing that in the three years before their application they have had an annual regular income of at least 8,000 euros. Children born to foreign parents can apply only when they come of age, at 18, and before they turn 19. Besides all the bureaucratic complexities, those who apply for Italian citizenship also have to cope with an uncertain and discretionary process (Fiore, 2017:185-186). In this regard, one of the Zigula I interviewed stated, "When you finally have collected all the documents and you send them to Rome you have to wait for 735 days. Within the notorious 735 days you will know if your application was successful, you will get an answer. Thus, I ran the risk of reaching the

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[10] The trajectories that in the 1960s brought to Italy university students from Ethiopia and Somalia and domestic workers from Eritrea can also be defined as postcolonial. Of particular interest in this context is Sabrina Marchetti's book, *Le ragazze di Asmara. Lavoro domestico e migrazione postcoloniale* (*Asmara Girls. Domestic work and postcolonial migration*), published in 2011, which focuses on the memories of some women who arrived in Italy to work as domestic help for wealthy Italian families. Because their presence was primarily restricted to the private and domestic sphere, it was perceived as less threatening to Italian identity than current more visible arrivals.

734th day and then, who knows, maybe at that point a problem could come up"[11].

Italian society still cannot conceive that Black Italians exist; Black people are, instead, mainly perceived as immigrants. The binomial association that links being Black with being an immigrant, does not just exclude the right to be recognised as a citizen, especially for those with an immigrant background but who were born and/or grew up in Italy, but enhances the idea of the Black body as a foreign body. In this view, Black people's presence, if not regulated and constrained, could threaten Italian racial purity. Because of the meanings with which their African features are invested, Italian Zigula often experience the feeling of not belonging and of being regarded only as second-class citizens in Italy. When, as happens frequently, someone asks them where they are 'really' from, they usually say Tanzania, where their biological kin now mainly live. They often feel forced to justify their being at the same time Black and Italian.

One of the Italian Zigula I interviewed, F., who teaches the Italian language to migrants and refugees, told me that, although she has Italian citizenship – which is compulsory for all government jobs – she chooses whether to tell her students she is Italian or Tanzanian depending on the situation. At times she says she is Italian when she intends to reaffirm her position as an Italian teacher or if she wants to keep some distance from her students. On other occasions, she replies that she is Tanzanian to show them her closeness and to suggest a common background. However, we do not always have the power to choose how to describe our identities. For Black people in Italy, the rights of citizenship are inextricably linked to being recognised as Italian. F., if she had to, would probably define herself as 'Romagnolo-Tanzanian', a label that evokes a sense of belonging and attachment to a local more than a national territory. This definition is the latest outcome of a long and never-ending process during which she has often questioned her identities and felt her vulnerability. Identities, as Stuart Hall pointed out, need to be thought of "as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'" (1996:2) and always "constituted within, not outside, representation" (4). Thus, they should be more about our routes than our roots. They should be regarded as an effort to illustrate the

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[11]   The interview took place on 17 February 2019.

"process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (4). Especially for diasporic subjects, their sense of self is not tied to the idea of roots, an immutable point of origin, but are projected forward. It is the result of constant negotiations. Memories, both individual and collective, are a fundamental element of this process. They are retold and loaded with new meanings that allow diasporic subjects to make sense of their experiences.

Multicultural Italian identities

Italian migrant literature and in particular postcolonial female authors' works have, since the 90s, played a crucial role in describing and promoting a discussion about the demographic change Italy has been experiencing and the difficult and contested development of a multicultural society. As pointed out by Sonia Sabelli, writers such as the Italian-Ethiopian Gabriella Ghermandi and the Italian-Somali Igiaba Scego and Cristina Ali Farah have with their narratives aptly promoted and emphasised the necessity to look critically at the Italian colonial past. They gave centrality to the stories of racialised subjects, who started speaking with their own voices. Thus, they have contributed to deconstructing racial stereotypes and ideologies consolidated during Fascism and now used as an instrument for ordering and regulating the presence of Black people and their migratory flows. These authors also clearly indicate the necessity to talk about race and challenge the idea of implied whiteness as the legitimate colour of contemporary Italy (Sabelli, 2013:292-293).

In her memoir, *La mia casa è dove sono* (*Home is Where I Am*), Scego tries to define herself by asking what it means for her to be Italian. She describes her identity "as a crossroad, a junction, a mess, a headache", and as a result she feels trapped like an animal, condemned to a perennial anguish (Scego, 2010:158). At the end of the book, she concludes that to find a proper answer to such a complicated question represents an impossible task. The reason behind this impossibility is that the path, which metaphorically could bring about a recomposition of subjective identity, is not just particularly tortuous but like a 'doodle' that encompasses multiple and different pathways and traces. The

ability to tell her own story, to listen to and narrate the stories of other people who had similar experiences, thus becomes the only reasonable answer that can be provided.

Scego also deals with the same issues in 'Dismatria' (translated as 'Exmatriates', 2011). This is a tale that ends with the image of the narrator's family members, who together open their luggage, in which they have stored a wide range of different objects, all of which have a personal and intimate meaning. Gathering baggage that has been hidden, sometimes with a sense of shame, and revealing its contents becomes a moment of reconciliation. It evokes a liberating gesture that functions as an individual and collective catharsis. The suitcases have a metaphorical relevance, and their contents represent their personal universes, their extravagances and their anguishes. They also seem to offer a way to conceal the fear of not belonging or not being able to find enough room for all the diverse pieces that composite identities are made of. This condition also implies a sense of loss and the attempt to resist it. A colourful chaos occupies entirely the white, cold floor of the living room. Nothing seems to be out of place, and the objects produce the sense of abundance and richness that characterise multicultural identities.

The experiences of the Italian Zigula, who are the subject of my research, exemplify these complexities and multiplicities. They bring to the fore the significance of a tortuous and longstanding colonial encounter and demonstrate that Blackness is not a monolith but that instead it presents different facets. Some Italian Zigula directly emigrated from Africa as children and were fostered or adopted by white Italian families. Others arrived in Italy as adults to complete their studies and to work. Others still were born in Italy; some are the children of mixed-race unions. They all inhabit different Italian spaces in different ways. Telling and knowing their stories can be a useful instrument to understand different aspects of Blackness in Italy. These stories also reveal that identities, and in particular diasporic and multicultural identities, far from being something fixed, are mobile and multifaceted.

Collective memories, collective identities

Collective memory is fundamental for the formation of diasporic identities and the creation of those forms of community consciousness Clifford refers to. Collective memory allows us to reinterpret the past and the present and consequently to look at the future from a different perspective. Through collective memory, existing narratives are replaced, others become central and new narratives are created. This dynamic contributes to demonstrate that identities are not stable and fixed but are continuously renegotiated. Identities are narratively constructed. It is through narrative that diasporic subjects can make sense of their self and also exercise their agency, choosing what part of their story is most relevant. This process, as I will demonstrate, entails also a reappropriation and reinvention of the past. Memories are not retrieved once and for all but are constantly recreated and invested with new meanings.

Collaborative remembering implies that individual memories are circulated and communicated to other people who identify themselves as a group because they share a common image of their past. According to Maurice Halbwachs these groups comprise "families, neighborhood and professional groups, political parties, associations, etc., up to and including nations" (quoted in Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995:127). Everyone belongs to different social groups, which influence and determine not only what we remember and how but also what we should or are allowed to forget. This is particularly important in the case of those Italian Zigula who grew up in Italy, fostered by Italian families and in a predominantly white environment. They arrived in Italy when they were still children, mostly aged between three and six. Initially they struggled to settle into their new families, and it seems that, even if probably unconsciously, they have attempted to create new identities by trying to forget their past. F. related an anecdote, which can help to illustrate what I am trying to point out. F. was fostered by an Italian family who, after a short period of time, decided that they could not keep her. She had to spend some months living with one of her uncles, who at that time was underage, until a new family was found. As soon as she started speaking some Italian, one of the daughters of her foster (and later adoptive) parents began to ask her questions and to write her answers down in a journal. She wanted to know her story and her

feelings, and she thought that it would be important for her to have an instrument she could rely on in the future to recollect her memories. When I interviewed F., asking whether it was possible to read that journal, she confessed that she had destroyed it, when she was about 10 years old, because she did not want to remember[12].

When Zigula children arrived in Italy, they had to adjust to the Italian context, and this led to an often-unconscious process of erasure of the culture of origin. These children did not have the opportunity to choose how to integrate into their foster families nor, because of their young age, were they able to decide whether to maintain their identity as Zigula. The first worry of the host families was that these children became accustomed to and assimilated into the Italian context as soon as possible, learning the language and how to behave 'in a suitable manner'. They had to replace their culture of origin with the new one, and this implied a cultural loss, symbolised primarily by the loss of the Zigula language. The fact that they also maintained relations with their biological parents and relatives made their situation even more complicated. They did not have the necessary tools to maintain an open dialogue with them, but, at the same time, they could not be completely understood by their foster families since there were some elements of their experience they felt could not be shared with them. In particular, they could not communicate to their foster family members that, in order to be recognised as part of the family, the family should recognise their Blackness and try to understand what it means to be Black in Italy. On the contrary, by using a colour-blind approach, family members seemed to refuse to see them entirely and to refuse to understand their experiences. This is not to say that Blackness is "an overarching identity marker which erases any other form of differentiation" (Furno, 2010:15); nonetheless, Blackness is most likely the first element Italian Zigula were and are judged on; many of their experiences, although not all of them, are strictly related to being Black. Often within the families, their vulnerability as Black bodies in Italian society did not receive the consideration it deserved. More specifically, Italian Zigula experienced different grades of vulnerability and a constant shift between two different situations. Within the family environment, they were regarded

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[12] Transracial foster care and adoptions, their complexities and the unbalanced relations of power they create are a major subject of my research that I cannot discuss here.

firstly as adopted or foster children and only secondly as Black, while outside the home they were seen primarily as Black and then as members of white families.

Now grown up, this group of Italian Zigula has informally devised practices of collective remembering that function as processes where the problems and ambivalences of their position, which have been frequently censored in the attempt to assimilate, are no longer silenced but brought to the fore and discussed as central. Furthermore, remembering produces the kind of awareness that is instrumental to facing and overcoming their traumas. By collectively remembering and sharing memories about their past and the experiences they went through growing up in Italy, the Italian Zigula might be able to make full sense of their personal stories. Remembering, in the case of the Italian Zigula, involves dealing with past traumas, such as leaving their biological parents without a clear explanation, living in a foreign country and adjusting to families and to a society where often no one looks like them and where they are discriminated against because of their appearance.

In order to create a stronger bond with the members of the Italian Zigula community who live in Emilia Romagna and to attempt to reappropriate her country of origin, F. invented the 'Tanzaquiz', a game to test participants' knowledge of Tanzanian history and culture. The quiz is always played on 8 December. Previously, every year, her adoptive family, who live in Faenza, welcomed relatives and friends into their home on that date to celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, who is deeply revered in the town. When her parents' relatives stopped coming, principally because of their age, she decided to continue this family tradition but only invited her Zigula relatives. At the beginning, she also confessed she was extremely disappointed when her adoptive siblings showed up because she needed to have, within the family, a space designed just for her and her biological relatives. The Tanzaquiz has now reached its eighth anniversary. My interviewee illustrated that the quiz was first thought up to fill the time spent together during their annual meeting. By remembering the evenings she spent with the local Scouts group, she came up with the idea of doing a quiz on a topic that could unite all the Italian Zigula. At the heart of the quiz were two elements: the will to recreate a sense of community and then to broaden further the

knowledge of their roots. The quiz is divided into different topics. For each answer, players can gain from 10 to 40 points, according to the difficulty of the questions. There is also a team test, such as constructing a proverb or listing some typical spices or even telling stories about Tanzania. For these team tests, the organiser also takes inspiration from the most popular quiz shows broadcast on Italian television, such as *Caduta libera* (*Free Fall*), *I soliti ignoti* (*Identity*) and *Affari tuoi* (*Your Business*). The quiz also includes questions about the Zigula language, asking the meaning of words and expressions such as 'Mama ndogo' (Little mother) or 'Mama mkubwa' (Big mother).

The nature and the origin of the Tanzaquiz embody the diasporic and multiple identities of the Italian Zigula. It is a quiz about Tanzania, modelled on games played by Scouts and held on the day marking one of the patron saints of a town in Romagna[13]. The Tanzaquiz, by combining multiple belongings, challenges ideas about what is local and what is traditional. Through Tanzaquiz, she adapts an Italian paradigm for reaffirming a 'Tanzanian' identity. Therefore, it can be seen as part of those 'symbolic' journeys that according to Hall (2011:232) are not just 'necessary' but also 'necessarily circular': "This is the Africa we must return to – but 'by another route': what Africa has become in the New World, what we have made of 'Africa': 'Africa' – as we re-tell it through politics, memory and desire". By reinventing a family tradition, F. claims her space within the family environment and demands the recognition of her hybrid cultural identity.

In limine

Since the 1990s (when Italy first became a land of immigration), the Italian political debate has been dominated by issues of migration and citizenship. Migrants who first arrived in Italy in the 90s created communities independently of their origins in different parts of Africa, deciding "to adopt as their own the identity of 'African', which they originally rejected as a source of confusion and de-personalization" (Maher, 1996:170). Their children, born and raised in Italy, tried instead

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[13] It is perhaps important to mention that the town of Faenza has always distinguished itself for the pre-eminent role played by Catholic political parties. Thus, it has been commonly defined as 'the white island' in the 'red' Emilia Romagna.

to emancipate themselves from the image of immigrants and the related stereotypes.

In recent years, not just in Italy but all over Europe, we have witnessed a rise of far-right parties and an increase in racism and anti-immigration rhetoric. These factors have caused and accelerated the emergence of a sense of community and a memory discourse able to make sense of the experiences of Black people in Italy. The need to build a Black Italian community has become stronger among the younger generation, who have started, thanks to social media, to share their experiences. Many young Black people set up websites and pages on Facebook and Instagram in which they tackle different topics, from activism and literature to beauty and self-care (e.g. *Nappytalia, Afroitaliansouls* and *Graceonyourdash*)[14]. Besides racism, they also talk about recognition and identity. They often describe how they feel entrapped in a liminal space that, using Raffaele Furno's metaphor, can be compared to an airport. Furno specifically refers to Black African migrants in Italy, but this condition is not dissimilar to that of Black Italians to whom a full citizenship is denied and those who, although they were born in Italy, are not Italian citizens and do not have the legal rights that come with it. With the image of an airport, Furno (2010:14) evokes Black people's "unstable existence, not rooted in traditional coordinates of time and space". The metaphor also draws attention to the control and the bureaucratic processes Black bodies are always subject to. The sense of community surfacing among Black Italians is borne out of the necessity to face the difficulties of finding a space in Italy, a country that has always adhered to a model of citizenship in which only white Italians can be included. It is also a way of affirming that it is possible to be Black and Italian, regardless of which exact definition (such as Afro-Italian or Black Italian) is considered more appropriate. I started this article by recalling an incident that happened to me almost 15 years ago at Fiumicino Airport in Rome, and in the

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[14] In 2020 four important books by Black Italian women authors were published: *Negretta. Baci Razzisti* (*Black Girl. Racist Kisses*) by Marilena Delli Umhoza; *E poi basta. Manifesto di una donna nera italianai* (*That Is Enough. The Manifesto of a Black Italian Woman*) by Esperance Hakuzwimana Ripanti; *Corpi estranei* (*Foreign Bodies*) by Oiza Queens Day Obasuyi and *Ladri di denti* (*Teeth Thieves*) by Djarah Kan. They all discuss racism and the difficulties of living in Italy as Black people. Furthermore, recently podcasts (e.g. *Vabbèpodcast, Blackcoffee* and *The Chronicles of a Black Italian Woman*) have established themselves as ideal platforms to discuss Black identities and to create antiracist spaces in the Italian context.

end, I return to airports. Here, however, they come to symbolise Black citizens who are struggling to feel at home and claim a safe space in Italy. Seen through the airport metaphor, homing is a process in which "the points of departure and arrival" are redone and undone (Lee, 2010:128).

Among those Zigula who were born in Italy, some are the children of mixed-race unions. They are Italian born; they have one parent who is Italian by birth and often have no knowledge of either Somalia or Tanzania. Nonetheless, they are always being asked the same unsettling question: 'Where are you from?' They still inhabit a liminal Italian existence. The Zigula experience shows how the notion of Blackness in Italy is not a monolith but presents different facets. Nevertheless, the stories of the Zigula also help us to analyse aspects of the broader discourse about race in Italy, including the impact of Italian colonialism and its continuing legacy.

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