

# The Postcolonial Turn in Italian Studies

## European Perspectives

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### Introduction

To date, Italy's imperial enterprises have received little attention in comparative colonial studies. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller write, it was not until recently that Italian colonialism was accounted for in Italian national history. This positions historical studies on Italian colonialism in a double marginalization, with respect to its role in modern Europe, and with respect to its construction of the Italian national consciousness. However, though more limited in time and geographically restricted than that of the French and British empires, Italian colonialism had a significant impact on the development of metropolitan conceptions of race, national identity, and imagination (Ben-Ghiat and Fuller).

Conversely, while the field of postcolonial studies, as illustrated by Edward Said's publication of his seminal *Orientalism* in 1978, has reached a spectacular level of diffusion and consolidation both at institutional<sup>1</sup> and commercial levels,<sup>2</sup> the field of Italian postcolonial studies is still in its infancy. This does not mean that Italian postcolonialism is less urgent, cogent, or vital, but simply that it is, not surprisingly, somewhat belated compared with other European postcolonialisms. It would obviously be dangerous, and literally against its premises and principles, to dissect the operations, role, and political valence of postcolonialism into national enclaves, so as to reproduce the history of European empires and assemble the various "post-colonial responses" along the lines of the old metropolitan centers (London, Paris, Amsterdam, Lisbon, Rome), or to organize them in terms of importance, prestige, and dominance. However, it is no coincidence that revisiting the Italian colonial

past has been subjected to a rather prolonged silence, an act of denial which I have conceptualized as a full-blown “colonial unconscious” (Ponzanesi, “Fragments” xxv). This refers to the discarding, discrediting, and generally repressing of the history of colonial expansion. This questionable colonial history had brought Italy to its imperial peak under Fascism with Mussolini and his infamous Ethiopian war, and to its downfall with the shame of defeat and the handing over of the majority of the colonies to the British in 1941. The absence of an independence struggle and the unfinished colonial business (Burton) between Italy and the African colonies have relegated the Italian colonial chapter not only to historical oblivion but also to the unstable legacies of instrumentalized and nostalgic memorizing. Therefore, it is the relationship between a complex politics of memory and a distorted form of historiography writing after World War II that needs to be taken into account for the Italian case, together with a rather slow or indifferent response to the development of cultural studies as a field that focuses on connecting different contexts and methodological approaches, which have somewhat confined Italian postcolonialism to the investigations, studies, and publications by academic scholars operating abroad, mainly in North American and North European academia.<sup>3</sup> The irony should not be lost here, as one of the major influences on postcolonial thinking is Antonio Gramsci, whose cultural reading of his concepts of hegemony, subalternity, and the role of the intellectual, have given a crucial impulse to Edward Said’s understanding of colonial discourse analysis, to the South Asian Subaltern Studies Collective, to Gayatri Spivak’s influential theories on whether the female subaltern subject can speak, and to more recent revisitations and critical reevaluations of the concept of cosmopolitanism as a desirable but also contested notion (Chambers, *Esercizi di Potere*). This means that, until recently, the cultural aspect of “colonialism” has barely been taken into account in Italian academia, thereby precluding a more interdisciplinary understanding of Italy’s colonial past and a more contextual and comparative reading of Italy’s postcolonial present. Such reading would connect Italy to the rest of Europe and allow for the establishment of transnational connections on the history of empires and their aftermath.

For this purpose, this chapter first attempts to place Italian colonialism, and the development of postcolonial criticism, within a European framework, accounting for some comparison and differences. As I will briefly discuss, postcolonial critique has had different fortunes and genealogies within various European countries: yet there are common issues and paradigms that are worth addressing. After a brief survey of the meaning of Europe from a postcolonial comparative perspective, I explore the particularities of the postcolonial “turn” in Italian studies, providing some of the background for its inroads and recent boom in Italian academia and scholarship. I conclude by making a number of suggestions for further development, indicating how Italian postcolonial studies could be further improved and strengthened, avoiding prescriptive or totalizing narratives.

### European Postcolonialisms

As mentioned in the opening to this chapter, Italy was a very belated colonial power compared with the rest of Europe, and an even more belated country in acknowledging its colonial past and postcolonial predicament. We might perhaps console ourselves by acknowledging that France, despite its much more significant historical and geographical involvement with the imperial project, has also responded rather late and very reluctantly to the “postcolonial turn.” The whole debate on *Francophonie*, Francophone studies, and more recently, on French postcolonialism has been received with hostility. Said as initiator<sup>4</sup>, and postcolonial theory in general, has been accused of having misread French poststructuralist thought and of having made a melting pot of Foucault and Gramsci without seriously engaging with French theory.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, postcolonial theories have been experienced as a form of neocolonization, as an imposition of an Anglo-American fashion upon the more rigorous and intellectual French tradition. As Jean-Marc Moura has written, the characteristics of postcolonialism as a critical school concentrates on studying all strategies of writing that confound colonial codes, imperial codes, and national boundaries. However, this notion of the postcolonial is resisted by French academia, which tends to study postcolonial texts as an expansion, or ghetto, of the so-called official canon:

If you take France’s and the Francophone world’s literary histories, you will see that most of them treat this Francophone literature as a kind of extension of French literature, which does not need to be contextualized to be understood. People simply think that it is in French, and so should be spoken about it as if it were French literature. Postcolonial criticism does the opposite: it insists on specificities, and on the fact that you first of all need to position it in anthropological, sociological, and even economic terms before discussing and analyzing it in the way that you would with French literature. It is a global movement, therefore, as it defines itself in global terms, and a movement which, within this globalization, insists on each of these literatures’ specificities. (Moura, “Postcolonial Criticism”)

In a recent polemic on postcolonial studies, Jean-François Bayart accused the field of explaining current social divides (such as the *banlieue* riots in France in 2005) as the protracted effect of the past “colonial divide” by postulating a continuity that underlies modes of representation and behavior from the colonial era in the contemporary period (56). He complains, therefore, that the field is simply a catch-all term that is not only ambiguous and ambivalent but also fragmented. This is because postcolonial studies is a “river with many tributaries” (58), as there are many sources, and it is attached to different groups, categories, and claims. Bayart acknowledges, however, that postcolonial studies is now also flourishing in France, but he rejects the virulent claim that the country has resisted or is resisting this paradigm out of provincialism, conservatism, and above all, the impulse not to face its own colonial past. Through a long argument in defense of France and against the postcolonial essentialization of France, Bayart points out that postcolonial studies owes much not only to French theory but also, and above all, to the intellectual,

literary, artistic, and political trends that focused on the colonial question in the France of the 1950s. Therefore Bayart concludes in defense of France that “we’ve done our bit!” (59) with writers such as Aimée Césaire, Léopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Octave Mannoni, who are seminal to the development of the field, and other French philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu, who have inspired the critique of other forms of domination such as gender, sexuality, and class, though they do not directly address issues of empire. More recently, Édouard Glissant and Étienne Balibar have kept the critique of colonial formations in sharp focus. Bayart’s tirade against the accusation of French antipostcolonialism is well taken, as it persuasively argues in considerable detail the way in which French culture has been inspirational, and even foundational, for postcolonial studies. However, it also reconfirms the blindness, or intellectual resistance, toward the transformation that these notions or inspiration from French theorists and intellectuals underwent by traveling elsewhere and coming back in the form of postcolonial theory. The latter is rejected as imported and colonizing, reaffirming a natural resistance toward theories traveling back to France from other contexts. Bayart concludes that it is because of empire and colonialism that we can discuss common principles and that therefore even a disagreement on the notion of the postcolonial is possible.

My emphasis on France is not only to argue that it offers a clear case of anti-postcolonialism, despite it being a nation with a prolonged and important imperial past, but that on the contrary France, similar to Italy, is experiencing a real “post-colonial turmoil” with critics acknowledging or dismissing the field, provoking a lively debate within French academia and public debate at large, and also proposing a rereading of postcolonialism from new disciplinary and political perspectives.

I would also like to extend this attention to Germany and the Netherlands, as very few studies have been conducted in these countries from a postcolonial perspective. In the case of Germany, as also for Italy, colonialism was short lived in nature and archived in the national memory until recently; in the case of the Netherlands, a country that can boast a long and prestigious colonial past, post-colonialism has barely found inroads into academia, if not within the realm of English studies, whereas its societal relevance for immigration and the current problems with Dutch multiculturalism and its backlash are more than evident.<sup>6</sup>

Germany acquired colonies in 1884, later than other European powers, and lost these territories soon afterwards as a result of its defeat in World War I (1918). Like Italy in 1861, Germany achieved national unification very late (1871). German overseas dominions included Togo, Cameroon, Namibia, and Tanzania in Africa, and Tsingtao and New Guinea in Asia. However German colonial past is not acknowledged in Germany and less known outside of Germany than other European empires. As in the case of Italy (1882–1943), the relatively short-lived colonial history stimulated neither immigration from former colonies nor the development of an African literature in German. However, even though there has not been a systematic attempt to address German colonial and postcolonial history, there are several interesting publications and projects related to this field (Zantop; Lützler; Friedrichsmeyer; Lennox and Zantop), along with an increasing number of publications that deal directly with colonial discourse in German

culture. Therefore some critics affirm that it is no exaggeration to say that German Studies is going postcolonial (Lubrich and Clark).

There is also growing interest in the literature of immigration, namely from Turkish-German migrants such as Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Feridun Zaimoglu, at times referred to as postcolonial German literature (Lützler and Spence). Recent studies have also explored blackness in Europe and specifically in Germany (and blackness in German national identity). Examples include the project on Black Europe (<http://www.best.uni-mainz.de/modules/Informationen/index.php?id=13>), the Berlin event around the Black Atlantic (<http://www.blackatlantic.com>) organized in 2004 by Tina Campt and Paul Gilroy, and the Leeds-Utrecht-Munich Postcolonial Europe research project (<http://www.postcolonialeurope.net>). When talking of new postcolonial engagement with German culture, the work of Claudia Breger and Tina Campt should be mentioned. Again most of these studies are published by scholars operating outside German academia, such as Meyda Yegenoglu (Ankara, Turkey), Claudia Breger (Indiana, USA), and Tina Campt (Barnard, USA), who work outside of the field of *Germanistik*, more in the fields of cultural studies and gender and race theories.

Unlike Germany, the Netherlands has a voluminous history of colonial expansion to the East and West Indies, and what it has in common with Italy is a very belated acknowledgment of its postcolonial status. Without its immense and lucrative empire in Southeast Asia (Indonesia) and the Caribbean (Suriname and the Dutch Antilles), the Dutch nation would, in the modern era, be little more than a small, insignificant European democracy (Boehmer and Gouda 40). Annexed to this colonial history and its legacy, the Netherlands also has a stratified history of immigration and diaspora, which does not relate directly to the colonial territories but today includes immigrants from Turkey, Morocco, Eastern Europe, and Ghana, and asylum seekers from Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and other regions. These immigration patterns range therefore from direct postcolonial flows from Indonesia and the Dutch Caribbean, to guest workers in the 1960s, and to recent refugees and asylum seekers in the 1990s. History departments have widely acknowledged the impact of colonialism as a history of expansion and conquest, yet barely at all from a postcolonial perspective, thereby relegating postcolonial studies to the fields of English, gender studies, and cultural studies rather than to the study of Dutch literature and history.<sup>7</sup>

As Elleke Boehmer and Frances Gouda have argued in their overview of postcolonial studies in the Netherlands, postcolonial criticism, whether in the Netherlands's political arena or in academic discourse, does not have the same relatively firm historical base as can be found in Britain and France. This has consequences for the understanding of the history of Dutch colonialism in the past as well as for today's multiculturalism and its predicament. They write,

So the status of the Netherlands as an ex-colonial power remains unproblematized, and consequently the manner in which the history of colonialism might link up with the formation of national and migrant identities today is left insufficiently examined. Debates—about race, racism and identity in university forums for example—are not seen to link up in any direct way with conditions in the country at large.

Concomitantly, the Netherlands is widely said to lack a homegrown postcolonial critical discourse with which to properly address the experience of its diasporic populations. (39)

As in France, postcolonialism is seen as a remote and hegemonic discourse imported from elsewhere which does not fit the specificity of “Indische Letteren,” the canonical studies of literary practices in the Dutch Indies, imbued with a kind of “nostalgerie.” However, unlike France and similar to Italy, the Netherlands did not pursue a linguistic and cultural policy in the colony, the famed *mission civilisatrice*, by, for example, not using Dutch but Malay as the *lingua franca*. There was therefore no colonially educated élite that could write back in the language of the masters. Accordingly, as is the case for Italy, the development—or the belatedness—of a postcolonial critical thought seems to be linked to some disciplinary entrenchment. There is also a similarity in colonial practices which explain today’s belated postcolonialisms in these countries and also the sense of speaking a “minority” language within the postcolonial debate.

Given these different accounts of colonial histories, Italian postcolonialism should not be understood as “minor” or “belated” in comparison with the rest of Europe, nor even as less institutionalized or canonized. Italian postcolonialism should be seen as an integral part of the development of postcolonial studies; however, it has until now operated along the margins of dominant structures and hegemonizing discourses, including other dominant discourses on postcolonialism such as the French and the British ones. The geopolitical and cultural specificity of Italian postcolonialism helps readdress and requalify the precepts and principles of postcolonial theorizing by including the history of a different European south. This refers to Italy and its ambivalent relationship with Europe and Africa, alias the Mediterranean, as a new trope of ambivalence and subaltern histories (Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*; Fuller; Fogu and Re). Understanding this minority position within postcolonial studies helps to prevent postcolonial theory from becoming a new master discourse which privileges the English linguistic hegemony and the chronological ordering of responses over European colonialism along former colonial divides (Britain, France, Netherlands, Italy, etc.). It is therefore also important to study the incongruence within, and the way in which postcolonial theorizing does not fit all European contexts in the same way and needs not only be appropriated and modified but also transformed in order for the Anglophone paradigm to remain effective and alert to an internal rehegemonizing tendency (Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture*). This way of conceiving “traveling theory,” as Edward Said did, is intended to understand how theory travels from its original point to new locations and to see whether theory acquires new force and impact in the trajectory. It also explores the way in which theory becomes transformed into something different in the new location or travels back to its location of origin with a new élan. (Said “Traveling Theory” and “Traveling Theory Reconsidered”; Ponzanesi, “Edward Said”).



### European Heresies and Postcolonial Legacies

Making sense of past colonial legacies is important when this process is linked to the recent debate on European identity. This is one way to follow Luisa Passerini's invocation to approach colonialism as a European rather than as a national experience and to rethink European identity as a cosmopolitan one—before and beyond national identities—rather than as different sovra-national identities or a common EU identity (“Europe and ‘Its Others’”).

Europe is a contested topic. In light of current multicultural debates that reenact the clash of civilizations and fear of the other, not unlike the racial taxonomies of the colonial era, it is of the utmost importance to locate the origin, development, and impact of specific debates and to establish how academia can respond to the pressure of rising populism in the public arena, a populism that severely undermines notions of hospitality and human rights. Various European thinkers, ranging from Paul Gilroy to Étienne Balibar, Iain Chambers, Luisa Passerini, Graham Huggan, Philomena Essed, Gloria Wekker, and Gail Lewis among others, are reassessing the role of Europe in its postcolonial “multitudes” (Hardt and Negri). These critics analyze how, under the banner of Europe as a unifying concept, colonial operations of inclusion and exclusion are still at work. These are resurrected in reemergent racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and asylophobia at comparative and intranational levels (Ponzanesi and Blaagaard). Here the accent on Europe is not simply on a shared identity and common history but mostly on the retrieval of Europe's repressed past and silenced histories, and on the integration of the Other into Europe's project of modernity (or “interrupted modernity” as Chambers claims in *Mediterranean Crossings*) and notion of citizenship.

As Huggan highlights, “for Gilroy Europe has entered its ‘postcolonial phase.’” By this he seems to understand a sense of suspension or hiatus in which the social, cultural, and political divisions previously produced by Europe's historical relations with its colonies have become increasingly eroded, but are still found to operate in terms of racial phobias and phantasms rearing up—or sometimes summoned up—at what he calls “the terminal point of European trading activity’ disclosing both material and discursive connections to an earlier colonial world” (Huggan, “Perspectives on Postcolonial Europe” 247). Therefore, as Gilroy writes, Europe is not innocent and does not reside outside the disruptive forces of colonization: “Though that [imperial and colonial] history remains marginal and largely unacknowledged, surfacing only in the service of nostalgia and melancholia, it represents a store of unlikely connections and complex interpretative resources. The imperial and colonial past continues to shape political life in the overdeveloped-but-no-longer-imperial countries” (*After Empire* 2). This is also in line with Gilroy's incitation to rewrite history and its colonial and fascist pasts from new perspectives and with new understandings, since these protracted silences of Europe's many colonial histories are crucial to comprehend the era of postcolonial Europe. As Gilroy further writes,

The modern histories of numerous other European countries [besides Britain], particularly Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands, might also be used to

construct equivalent arguments amidst the wreckage of their colonial extensions and the injustices of their inconsistent responses to immigration. These analyses would be based upon their obvious difficulties in acknowledging the pain and the gains that were involved in imperial adventures and upon the problems that have arisen from their inability to disentangle the disruptive results supposedly produced by an immigrant presence from the residual but potent effects of lingering but usually unspoken colonial relationships and imperial fantasies. (*After Empire* 109)

The quest is therefore to retrieve Europe's colonial unconscious in all its multiplicities and differences, along with the acknowledgment of the continuities between radicalized and gendered politics at the height of empires and contemporary multicultural realities, keeping the focus on the specific interaction between colonial policies and global dynamics.

Italy cannot therefore be understood outside the European perspective, and even though it has a different history, as far as colonialism and multiculturalism are concerned, this history, however, reflects and informs other European contexts. Italy's belated and repressed colonial past (coupled with the lack of a clear decolonization moment) has led to a resistance to the fluxes of immigration that significantly intensified in the 1980s and 1990s, as the promulgation of Italy's first immigration law in 1990 testifies, impeding the gradual development of a multicultural consciousness. We could state that, as far as Italy is concerned, multiculturalism has been a missed opportunity, whereas in the rest of Europe, and particularly in northern countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and France, a multicultural policy has been implemented at government level for several decades. However, the general feeling now is that multicultural policies have "failed" and these countries are facing a severe backlash.

Italy, for example, moved some of its detention centers to Libya in 2004, a country that does not recognize the Geneva Convention and therefore does not apply the protocol on refugees rights.<sup>8</sup> Given the recent turmoil in Libya and the demise of Muammar Qaddafi, the likely assumption is that this policy will not be continued. Nonetheless, this episode exemplifies the relationship that Italy has had throughout its postwar period with former colonies, privileging the managerial and opportunistic approach above an ethical relationship, thereby rendering farcical colonial ties and postcolonial responsibilities. The embarrassment of Libya, as the historical critic Nicola Labanca has defined it in a recent article, implies that the past weighs on the present, but also that if adequately acknowledged, the past can also offer opportunities for the future and inspire positive action ("The Embarrassment of Libya"). Labanca refers to recent scholarly works that focus not so much on the understanding of whether colonialism transformed the Third World or was a mere parenthesis for the "dark continent" but more on the understanding of how this parenthesis transformed Europe itself and Europeans (1). From this point of view, the Italian presence in Libya, and in the colonies at large, has had a surprising influence on the people, culture, and politics of Italy. Recent controversies reminded ex-colonial powers of their past crimes and make it clear that decolonization is never accomplished, particularly on cultural and ideological levels.



Not unlike France, Italy seems to suffer from a memory war (Stora), which implies that remembering, or forgetting, serves different national interests and cultural enclaves. It is therefore high time Italy confronted its prolonged amnesia and politics of remembering along European lines in order to learn how to transform the present starting from the past. This would lead to a more integrated understanding of what it means to live in a postcolonial European polity.

### The Postcolonial Turn in Italian Studies

Postcolonialism, though belated and controversial, can no longer be thought of as external or marginal to Italian studies. On the contrary, it is experiencing a moment of explosion and expansion, again at a time when postcolonial studies in other countries are on the wane in favor of more all-encompassing categories such as global or transnationalism studies or even world literature.

In order to assess the state of the art of Italian postcolonial studies, it would be useful to define exactly what postcolonialism is and does (see Lombardi-Diop and Romeo in this volume), in short, to define postcolonialism as a critical tool and not as a catch-all term. Postcolonialism should be understood here not as a chronological transition from a colonial to a postcolonial status, but as a theoretical tool that aims to critically assess the operations of empires and their lasting legacies and effects in present day society. As such, the postcolonial framework is not only very welcome in the Italian arena but also much needed in order to correct forms of amnesia or suspect projects of historical revisionism. However, we should ask ourselves: what exactly does the term “postcolonial” designate? And how exactly are postcolonial theory and practice related to Italian studies? For the sake of clarity, I will distinguish here three main areas for the application of a postcolonial critique and offer an analysis of how they operate in the Italian cultural context:

- Reassess and evaluate the colonial past from new critical perspectives, accounting for subaltern positions but also offering new insights into the colonial encounter.
- Acknowledge texts, voices, and images by migrants (either from former colonies or not) and other minorities; revise the literary canon and redefine the notions of cultural value and aesthetics.
- Rethink theory and epistemology in accordance with perspectives of alterity and dissonance.

We could argue that Italian studies are truly flourishing as far as the first aspects are concerned, with numerous scholars—ranging from historians to anthropologists and cultural theorists—who have carried out pioneering work in recent decades, opening up not only an obscure chapter of Italian history but also transforming the way of dealing with the colonial archive and reinterpreting knowledge production from a postcolonial perspective (Del Boca; Labanca *Oltremare*; Sorgoni).

The second aspect is also extremely buoyant at the moment with scholars operating not only in Anglo-Saxon academia but also in Italian departments in Italy on

appraising, acknowledging, and interpreting new literary voices and artistic productions by migrants in Italy. The tension is whether to define migrant writing as postcolonial or not, but the issue here should be on the understanding of postcolonialism as a critical tool that aims to account for the operations of dominations by emphasizing and voicing resistance and more inclusive patterns of thinking about nation, language, and identity. As such, the field is catching up with its European counterparts, though it is still a fragmented field in need of more cohesive and coordinated approaches, as this volume highlights.

The last field—developing a home-grown postcolonial theorizing—is where most of the work still needs to be done. This should not only account for the adaptations of existing critical tools to the specificity of Italy and its culture but also make sure that new postcolonial tools are developed from the reality and materiality of Italian culture itself to then travel further. This is an invitation to consider that postcolonialism is not just a framework imported from American academia, but that postcolonialism and postcoloniality are inherent to every culture and society and that, as such, they are everywhere and at work in the most unexpected locations. For instance, by the way a supermarket in Milan is laid out to cater for its customers, we could analyze whether it accounts for a multicultural society with different needs and tastes or continues to provide a selection of “national identity” products that correspond to preimmigration days.

It is therefore useful to establish how and when postcolonial theory is meaningful in analyzing the Italian context, while drawing larger conclusions from a European perspective. Postcolonial critique borrows heavily from the poststructuralist theories of the holy trinity in postcolonial studies—Said, Bhabha, and Spivak—in addressing traditional postcolonial issues connected to the act of writing back, the appropriation and abrogation of language, the patterns of hyphenation and hybridization of cultural identity, and the question of race and ethnicity as connected to citizenship and belonging. However these issues, and the ‘poststructuralist inspired’ postcolonial approach indicated previously, take on a completely different dimension, sound, and relevance when translated to the Italian context. See, for example, what we could define as the new wave in Italian postcolonial writings, which include authors such as Igiaba Scego, Cristina Ali Farah, and Gabriella Ghermandi to name a few, all postcolonial in the technical but also in the intellectual sense of the word. Postcolonial because they have one or both parents who come from Ethiopia, Eritrea, or Somalia, while at the same time being full Italian citizens and juggling different cultures and mother tongues such as Italian, Amharic, and Somali. They are also highly educated writers who have graduated in Italy and some with PhDs. As Spivak would say, this makes them the perfect “native informants,” capable of presenting the experience of the outsiders with the language of the insiders, but they are also Italian authors *tout court*. They choose to address their complex origins, identity, and language use in a postcolonial way, emphasizing issues of resistance, in-betweenness, writing back, and embracing a poetics of relations, multiplicity, ambivalence, and subversion. What makes Italian studies postcolonial is therefore not so much the technical and chronological relationship with the former colonies (Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya) but the awareness, and with that the consciousness, of forms of domination and resistance

within Italian culture as related to power structures that are connected to both colonial policies and new global dynamics. It is a counter-hegemonic stance that addresses issues of institutionalization, canonization, and governmentality from different subject positions, in which not just a position of marginality or subalterity is articulated, but a field of tension and translation is also created. Postcolonialism does not stand for binary opposition or for the reversion of simple power relationships. It is more than a simple talking back, but it implies the operation of transformation and contamination that affects the different agents, organizations, and ideas involved. As such, postcolonialism is a never-ending process that requires renewal and critical alertness in order not to become another dogma or empty tool.

### Conclusions: Future Directions

By way of conclusion, I would like to reflect on some possible future directions for Italian postcolonial studies that would pave the way to a truly European postcolony. The first suggestion would be to intensify the field of comparative postcolonial studies in order to account for multiple alliances and divergences. In this way Italian studies would free itself from its own national ghetto and acquire visibility and credibility by engaging with other traditions.

Secondly, intensify and expand the role of cultural studies. It has been proven to be a very fruitful tool to study culture not only in its multidisciplinary dimension but also to break down the old divide of high and low culture, which is rather persistent in the Italian context. This would facilitate the integration of postcolonial studies, and migrant literature for example, as part of a renovated understanding of “culture.” This implies connecting history with politics, gender studies and visual culture, connecting media (i.e., newspapers, television, and cinema or photography) to new technologies, but also remixing genres and escaping closed boxes as already innovatively suggested by Benedetto Croce in his polemic on artistic genres (1894).

Thirdly, analyze texts in their double-layered form of representation, both aesthetic and political. As Spivak asserts in her “Can the subaltern speak?” there are two understandings of the word “representation”: *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*. This would imply that postcolonial artifacts, and culture in general, should be analyzed both in their political aspect (and here is where postcolonialism differs from postmodernism) and in their aesthetic specificity. Postcolonialism is not just a discourse but is conveyed through specific media, genres, and voices. Therefore, even in the Italian case we should focus on the literariness and poetics of postcolonial texts (Fraser), on the aesthetics of postcolonial films (Naficy; Ponzanesi, “The Non-Places of Migrant Cinema in Europe”; Ponzanesi and Waller), and on the semiotic aspect of world press photography, advertising, and political campaigns (Zarzycka; Ponzanesi, “Beyond the Black Venus”; Cheles and Sponza; Gribaldo and Zapperi).

The fourth and final suggestion would be to capitalize on the scholarship already available and disseminate it. This would perhaps imply an old colonial

move, namely, the translation of Italian postcolonial studies (from the Italian into English) but also the further translation into Italian of crucial texts, both by theorists and by non-Italian writers and artists.<sup>9</sup> The two-way commerce, by applying Said's notion of the traveling theory, should guarantee a kind of internationalization of Italian postcolonial studies.

As Italo Calvino once wrote, in transforming the unbridgeable delay of the Italian novel as a genre with respect to the French genre into an advantage, the Italian novel had a greater capacity to adapt to new situations because it became less specialized (1995). So the marginality to which Italian postcolonial writings are often relegated as an object of sociological research or as a "separate" genre that relies on exoticism and the consumption of the other can easily be turned into a blessing in disguise (Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*).

To close, the belatedness of the Italian postcolonial tradition can then be transformed into an advantage, meaning that its innovative and experimental character can be seen as a renewal of both postcolonial studies in general and of the Italian cultural field in particular. Though belated, the postcolonial turn in Italian studies can no longer be ignored. On the contrary, it has been embraced by academia at large, reaching not only the more traditional realms of *Italianistica*, the ivory tower of Italian studies (with many new dissertations by promising young scholars),<sup>10</sup> but also other disciplines such as sociology and political theory (Dal Lago; Mezzadra; Mellino), anthropology (Sórgoni; Salih), history (Del Boca; Labanca; Triulzi; Barrera; Poidimani), film studies (Waller; O'Healy; Ponzanesi; Duncan; Capussotti), literature, and cultural theory at large (Chambers; Curti; Portelli; Lombardi-Diop; Romeo; Buonaiuto and Laforest; Comberlati; Coppola, Di Maio). Along with exciting new generations of postcolonial scholars emerging from various Italian universities, such as Naples, Turin, Venice, Bologna, Bari, Lecce, Palermo, Rome, and Verona to name a few, the field of Italian postcolonial studies abroad (United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Northern Europe) is continuing to flourish and create important synergies. It is only the beginning of the postcolonial turn in Italian studies across borders.

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move, namely, the translation of Italian postcolonial studies (from the Italian into English) but also the further translation into Italian of crucial texts, both by theorists and by non-Italian writers and artists.<sup>9</sup> The two-way commerce, by applying Said's notion of the traveling theory, should guarantee a kind of internationalization of Italian postcolonial studies.

As Italo Calvino once wrote, in transforming the unbridgeable delay of the Italian novel as a genre with respect to the French genre into an advantage, the Italian novel had a greater capacity to adapt to new situations because it became less specialized (1995). So the marginality to which Italian postcolonial writings are often relegated as an object of sociological research or as a "separate" genre that relies on exoticism and the consumption of the other can easily be turned into a blessing in disguise (Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*).

To close, the belatedness of the Italian postcolonial tradition can then be transformed into an advantage, meaning that its innovative and experimental character can be seen as a renewal of both postcolonial studies in general and of the Italian cultural field in particular. Though belated, the postcolonial turn in Italian studies can no longer be ignored. On the contrary, it has been embraced by academia at large, reaching not only the more traditional realms of *Italianistica*, the ivory tower of Italian studies (with many new dissertations by promising young scholars),<sup>10</sup> but also other disciplines such as sociology and political theory (Dal Lago; Mezzadra; Mellino), anthropology (Sórgoni; Salih), history (Del Boca; Labanca; Triulzi; Barrera; Poidimani), film studies (Waller; O'Healy; Ponzanesi; Duncan; Capussotti), literature, and cultural theory at large (Chambers; Curti; Portelli; Lombardi-Diop; Romeo; Buonaiuto and Laforest; Comberiat; Coppola, Di Maio). Along with exciting new generations of postcolonial scholars emerging from various Italian universities, such as Naples, Turin, Venice, Bologna, Bari, Lecce, Palermo, Rome, and Verona to name a few, the field of Italian postcolonial studies abroad (United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Northern Europe) is continuing to flourish and create important synergies. It is only the beginning of the postcolonial turn in Italian studies across borders.

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## Notes

1. Through curriculum revision, new courses offered, readers, handbooks, manuals, introductory and advanced textbooks, plus conferences, keynote lectures, international research networks, and research projects.
2. By establishing literary prizes, festivals, film adaptations, and the star system.
3. See the pioneering work of Parati, Ponzanesi, Andall and Duncan, Ben-Ghiat and Fuller, Lombardi-Diop, Burns and Polezzi, Ponzanesi and Merolla, De Donno and Srivastava among others.
4. Though the work of Said was translated into French in 1980, it did not receive much attention (Edward Said, *L'orientalisme, L'Orient créé par l'Occident*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1980). Much better was the reception of the work by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak (the US translator of Derrida's *On Grammatology* [1967] which appeared in translation in 1976), who are well known for their "poststructuralist" jargon and heavy reference to French thought. However, only in recent years has there been a translation of their work into French (Spivak *Les subalternes peuvent-elles parler?* and *En d'autres mondes, en d'autres mots*) together with recent translations of work by Neil Lazarus (*Penser le postcolonial*) and new editions on postcolonialism (Smouts, Bayart, Livres Groupe).
5. See the work of Jean-Marc Moura, Alex Hargraeves, and Marc McKinney, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, and Mireille Rosello for the postcolonizing of French academia. An interesting book on the connection between postcolonialism and world literature is the volume by Alex Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy.
6. I will not delve into the analysis of postcolonial studies developing in other regions in Europe, such as Lusophone studies (Chabal; Pere; de Medeiros), the development of a Nordic postcolonialism (Charpentier et al.; Loftsdóttir; Blaagaard), or the understanding of the Eastern borders of Europe as a postsocialist/postcolonial location, where the violent Balkans are constructed as the "mirror image" of civilized Europe, as Todorova argues, but also as a place where "nesting orientalisms" already existed, instrumentalized to sustain nationalist narratives (Bakic-Hayden; Imre). Although these European regions are both relevant and interesting, the analysis of their postcolonial condition would be beyond the scope of this chapter, the objective of which is not to give a comprehensive account of the various "postcolonialisms" in Europe but to focus more on some exemplary paradoxes that put the delayed development of postcolonial studies in Italy into a wider perspective. For a detailed account of the historical developments of empire in Europe and their postcolonial legacies and literature in a European comparative perspective, see Poddar, Patke and Jensen.
7. The pioneering work of scholars such as Frances Gouda, Pamela Pattynama, Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, Berteke Waaldijk, Susanne Legêne, Gloria Wekker, Isabel Hoving,

Rosemarie Buikema, and Geert Oostindie should however be acknowledged here. Again it is significant that most of these scholars are scholars of gender studies, besides being historians, anthropologists, and literary critics, who are therefore used to following an interdisciplinary and comparative approach.

8. The detention and deportation of migrants from the Lampedusa detention center came to wider public attention in the fall of 2004, when more than one thousand “irregular” migrants were transferred from Lampedusa to Libya on military aircrafts (Andrijasevic).
9. On this respect the pioneering work of the Italian publisher Meltemi in Rome should be acknowledged, as it has recently translated into Italian the work of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Édouard Glissant, Paul Gilroy, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and Robert Young, and published the work of Italian theorists (or theorists working in Italy) such as Miguel Mellino, Iain Chambers, and Paola Zaccaria among others.
10. There has been the recent completion of a few exemplary PhDs on migrant literature in Italian university departments, which indicates that a change is taking place. Here I mention the PhD dissertations by Sonia Sabelli, “Scrittrici eccentriche. Generi e genealogie nella letteratura italiana della migrazione,” on female migrant writers (Sapienza, University of Rome); Roberto Derobertis, “Scritture Migranti. Dislocazioni e nuove configurazione letterarie,” on the theoretical and critical problems of the Italian literary discourses in an age of globalization (Bari University); Barbara De Vivo, “La letteratura postcoloniale italiana. Strategie di auto-rappresentazione in tre scrittrici africane-italiane” (Sapienza, University of Rome). Also the birth of the literary journal titled *Scritture Migranti (Migrant Literatures)* in 2007, hosted by the Italian department at the University of Bologna, signals a clear change of tendency within the academic structure itself. Two major online journals such as *Sagarana* and *El Ghibli* had already provided a platform for migrant writers and the critical analysis of their work. There are many new emergent scholars in the field along with the more established generation in Italian academia, which includes Armando Gnisci, Lidia Curti, Iain Chambers, Alessandro Triulzi, Sandro Mezzadra, and Miguel Mellino.