CONTESTING RACE AND CITIZENSHIP
INTRODUCTION
Contested Borders in the Time of Monsters

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.

—Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks

Changes will occur that we cannot even begin to imagine, and the next generation will be both utterly familiar and wholly alien to their parents.

—Walidah Imarisha, Octavia’s Brood

On October 7, 2013, Italian prime minister Enrico Letta declared a national day of mourning. Just four days earlier, a twenty-meter fishing boat carrying over five hundred Eritrean, Somali, Ghanaian, and Syrian asylum seekers from Libya caught fire and capsized just one kilometer off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa. While the bodies of all the victims were never recovered, by October 11 it was estimated that the death toll had reached at least 359—making this shipwreck the deadliest disaster in the Mediterranean since World War II. The spectacle of hundreds of coffins lined up in seemingly endless rows inside a spartan Lampedusa airplane hangar (the coffins for children, one journalist observed, were adorned with stuffed animals) came to symbolize the incalculable scale of violence reproduced daily as migrants were attempting to traverse the maritime borders of Europe in the Mediterranean Sea—or, as commentators increasingly began to call it, the “Mediterranean graveyard.” In response to the tragedy, Letta publicly declared during the October 7 commemoration that all those who had perished in the shipwreck while attempting to reach Italy were “Italian citizens as of today.”

Yet, while the dead were awarded posthumous citizenship, what of the 155 asylum seekers who were rescued? They were investigated for illegal entry, which under the 2009 “Security Set” immigration law is regarded as a criminal offense. These survivors were shunted into overcrowded detention centers and faced deportation to their countries of origin, while the European Union unveiled plans for a new high-tech surveillance system that would track migrant boats
attempting to cross the Mediterranean. And, in cities and towns across Italy, the children of immigrants who were born and raised in Italy were also being legally barred from Italian citizenship due to a restrictive nationality law that links citizenship to blood descent.

These contrasts represented in dramatic fashion the coming together of the many forces that characterize our current conjuncture: explicit racial nationalisms, heightened border securitization, and restrictions on certain forms of transnational mobility. Indeed, we are now firmly entrenched within what the Sardinian-Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci infamously called the “time of monsters.” All around us swirl the morbid symptoms of late neoliberal capitalism and ever more widespread economic precarity and dispossession. Alongside these rapidly intensifying political economic crises, our current moment is also characterized by some of the largest-scale mass movements of people across borders in recent history. The global population of people displaced by economic instability, environmental degradation, the disintegration of authoritarian regimes, and long-term insurgencies has reached its highest levels since World War II, and these transborder movements have been met with a proliferation of new technologies for the surveillance and fortification of national borders. And across the globe—from the United States, to Brazil, to the United Kingdom, to India, to Myanmar—there has been a frightening resurgence of explicitly racist, xenophobic nationalisms that seem to mark a break from the liberal “color blindness” that characterized the post–World War II era.

Southern Europe, and Italy in particular, stands at the forefront of these global transformations. Still ravaged by the 2008 to 2009 Eurozone economic collapse, Italy has faced a series of national government failures along with long-brewing right-wing backlashes to migration, the transnational forces of globalization, and the European project itself. In addition, Italy is an important port of arrival in the context of European refugee emergency, with both a relatively accessible Mediterranean geography and deep colonial ties to four of the primary African countries from which people have been so violently displaced en masse—Libya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Migrants who arrive in Italy face varying degrees of neglect, marginalization, and outright violence. And, paradoxically (as a relatively young country with a tenuous nation-building project and long history of being marginalized as “racially inferior” to a supposedly “Aryan” northern Europe), Italy has also emerged as a key node in the global far-right, neofascist, and white nationalist / Eurocentric political resurgence.

In recognition of Italy’s geopolitical and analytical significance for understanding the current conjuncture, critical scholars of migration have responded by investigating the securitization of the Mediterranean border, the politics and limitations of migrant solidarity movements, and even the lived experiences of
refugees. But comparatively understudied are the many concurrent contestations unfolding around national citizenship—mobilizations that have been disproportionately propelled by the activism of Black people in Europe who are not necessarily migrants or otherwise recent arrivals in these countries. Yet, as the seemingly contradictory conferral of honorary Italian citizenship on deceased migrants and the criminalization of those who survived reveals, citizenship—and its profound historical entanglement with questions of racism and the politics of difference—remains an important part of the analytical puzzle if we wish to understand just how the boundaries of Europe (and in a broader sense, the liberal nation-state itself) are being remade, negotiated, and undone today.

One of the most prominent citizenship mobilizations unfolding in Europe today is the movement to reform Italian nationality law. Italy has among the most restrictive citizenship laws in Europe. Italian nationality is conferred on the basis of jus sanguinis (right of blood), which has left unrecognized and disenfranchised as many as nine hundred thousand children of immigrants who were born and raised in Italy. This is therefore the place from which my story begins. Contesting Race and Citizenship asks why and how so many Black Italians have adopted national citizenship as a privileged terrain of struggle over racial justice, inclusion, and belonging in Italy. In this book, I argue that citizenship—and specifically, the long-standing debate about the legal inclusion of Black subjects within European polities—is key to understanding the connection between subtler, late-twentieth-century “color-blind” or “cultural” racisms and the resurgence of overt racial nationalisms during the last decade. After all, in the wake of World War II—after the horrors of Fascism and subsequent international campaigns challenging the “myth” of race—racism and racial nationalism did not simply disappear. Instead, they were re-embedded within the seemingly race-neutral apparatus of national citizenship.

But rather than asking whether citizenship is inherently “good” and “just” (i.e., as the highest legal principle or a path to rights and inclusion) or “bad” and “unjust” (i.e., as an apparatus of racial exclusion or a form of liberal accommodationism), in this book I am more interested in the political work that citizenship does. National citizenship is a powerful yet often overlooked crucible within which racisms are being reproduced and reconfigured, new racial distinctions are articulated, and the constitutive exclusions of liberalism are laid bare. And, as generations of women of color, transnational, and postcolonial feminist theorists have argued, this process is in turn inextricable from the power-laden dynamics of gender and sexuality. Italy, as a post-Fascist country currently embroiled in the global resurgence of racial nationalisms, undoubtedly offers valuable historical insights about fascist entanglements of race, citizenship, and nation. But at the same time, a closer engagement with the linkages between liberal and fascist racisms in
the Italian historical record—and their reverberations in the present—also encourages us to acknowledge racial nationalism not merely as an extremist, fascist aberration, but rather as foundational to the liberal nation-state itself.

On an empirical level, this book represents one of the first full-length accounts of Black politics in Italy. I attend to the incredible proliferation of Black Italian movements, projects that address the Italian nation-state and the wider Black diaspora, the “unspoken whiteness” of Italian identity, and the interlocking racist violence of Fortress Europe (the hardened external borders around Europe established in relation to the dissolution of borders between individual European countries as part of the supranational vision of the European Union). What are the possibilities and limitations of these emergent mobilizations? What new formations are possible, and what older ones are resuscitated in this attempt to challenge the racial borders of Italy and of Europe? I am interested in opening up discussions of the migrant “crisis” by focusing on a largely invisiblized generation of Black people who were born or raised in Europe but have been thrust into the same racist, xenophobic political climate as the immigrants and refugees who are arriving in Europe across the Mediterranean Sea from the African continent. How are these Black Italians now actively remaking what it means to be Italian and to be European today?

But this is not only a descriptive story of social movements and Black identities. The point of Contesting Race and Citizenship is not to problematize and surveil Black Italians—by asking questions such as whether they feel “more Italian or more African.” Instead, I endeavor to show how their mobilizations exhume long-buried links between the bureaucratic apparatus of liberal citizenship and racism, a connection that has effectively paved the way for the explosion of far-right, neofascist, populist politics across Europe and much of the rest of the world. The new Black Italian politics point to the many contradictions at the heart of the liberal project, and of citizenship itself: Is it possible to mobilize for rights and recognition without reproducing the racial state? If, as Engin Isin writes, citizenship represents “how relentlessly the idea of inclusion produces exclusion”—namely, through the distinction between “citizen” and “alien”—then what new forms of differentiation and exclusion are emerging through efforts to expand Italian citizenship?

Does activism that engages with the racial state’s language of citizenship have the potential to radically reformulate that category from within—and to what extent can it inadvertently preclude the articulation of alternative solidarities between Black Italian citizens-in-waiting, migrants, and refugees? To answer these questions, in this book I trace not only mobilizations for national citizenship, but also the more capacious, transnational Black diasporic possibilities that emerge when activists confront the ethical and political limits of citizenship as a means for securing meaningful, lasting racial
justice—formations that are centered on shared critiques of the racial state, as well as shared histories of racial capitalism and colonialism.

In Italy and beyond, citizenship has become a container for debates about the relationship between race and nation. In the United Kingdom, supporters of Brexit (the UK’s departure from the European Union) have explicitly contrasted the figure of the suffering white British citizen with the figure of the immigrant “undeserving poor.” And in the United States, former president Donald Trump repeatedly expressed his desire to abolish birthright citizenship because it creates a “magnet for illegal migration.” DREAMers (undocumented individuals who arrived in the United States as young children) continue to mobilize in a tenuous state of legal liminality, held hostage by politicians who are using them as pawns to fund the further militarization of the US–Mexico border. And in response to political criticism from the so-called “squad” of progressive Democratic congresswomen of color—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts—Trump and his supporters responded with vitriolic tweets and chants of “Send them back!” The fact that three of these four women were born in the United States, and all four are American citizens, alludes to the ways that the question of who constitutes a legitimate national citizen is repeatedly made intelligible through an overlaid grid of racial difference. To paraphrase a formulation coined by abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore, race and citizenship together constitute a powerful, “fatal coupling” in our modern world.

**Entanglements of Race and Citizenship**

How did citizenship become such an important terrain of contestation over racism in Italy? While a range of fields has attempted to comprehend the social, political, and cultural dynamics of national citizenship, the answer to this question remains surprisingly elusive. Indeed, the strategic importance of national citizenship for Black Italians seeking to challenge biologically determined notions of Italianness points to some limitations in contemporary citizenship theory.

The liberal sociology of citizenship has focused on citizenship primarily as a legal contract between the state and the individual that produces access to formal rights. Scholars working in this tradition have examined the various paths by which migrants become citizens, as well as the political, cultural, and historical reasons for differences among countries’ nationality laws. As Bloemraad and colleagues observe, these analyses often use distinctions between ethnic and civic conceptions of citizenship, or assimilationist and multiculturalist approaches to incorporation. In response to these liberal understandings of citizenship as
access to formal rights, critical citizenship studies instead considers national citizenship in relation to dynamics of inclusion, exclusion, and differentiation. While sociologists of citizenship have also recognized the exclusions inherent to the apparatus of national citizenship, critical citizenship studies tends to emphasize the various forms of insurgent citizenship “from below” (urban citizenship, global citizenship, etc.) that have emerged as a counterpoint to the state’s exclusionary practices. But while these interventions represent a powerful reimagining of citizenship, race is often peripheral to these analyses, and the ongoing sovereignty of the state is downplayed in favor of these transgressive, nonnational acts of citizenship.

The field of Black studies has taken on the relationship between citizenship and racism through an analysis of Blackness’s position within liberal understandings of rights, subjectivity, and political agency. As Orlando Patterson argues, racialized chattel slavery represented “social death,” predicated on the preclusion of the right of natality; for this reason, newly emancipated Black Americans mobilized for US citizenship through claims to birthright citizenship that culminated in the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. In contemporary accounts—particularly those focused on the United States—scholars emphasize the persistent condition of second-class citizenship for Black folk in the afterlife of slavery. But in a different geographical context, Black European studies has instead emphasized the normative claim that Black people in Europe should be recognized as national citizens rather than migrants. This is an intellectual and political project meant to contest the idea that Black people are eternally Europe’s outsiders—that they are perpetual migrants and newcomers, regardless of how long (and for how many generations) their communities have been firmly established in Europe. Indeed, as Barnor Hesse has observed, “[Black Europe] is located at the intersections of non-Europe / Europe, outside / inside, other / same, immigrant / citizen, coloniality / postcoloniality.”

When these North American and Black Europe studies approaches to citizenship are put into direct conversation with each other, what can inadvertently emerge is a teleology of Black politics across the diaspora that goes something like this: first, we should focus on achieving national citizenship; only then can we begin to question how the very categories of the liberal state are shot through with racism (and anti-Black racism specifically), in ways that ultimately preclude the realization of substantive citizenship. But this linear story did not square neatly with my experiences in Italy. I found that Black politics had taken on a range of divergent (rather than cumulative) forms, in which Black immigrants, refugees, and second-generation Black Italians were articulating distinct political goals and different relationships to citizenship. For Black people born and raised in Italy, citizenship was a means of obtaining rights; for newly arrived ref-
ugees, it functioned as a strategy of racial filtering and exclusion on behalf of
the Italian state.

In a 2019 Instagram post, the Italian-Ghanaian writer, curator, and medical
student Theophilus Marboah highlighted what is at stake in Black Italian strug-
gles for recognition, through this clever “remixing” of a James Baldwin quote
from Notes of a Native Son:

For the history of the American Negro is unique also in this: that the
question of his humanity, and of his rights therefore as a human being,
became a burning one for several generations of Americans, so burn-
ing a question that it ultimately became one of those used to divide the
nation.33

For the history of the Black Italian is unique also in this: that the
question of his citizenship, and of his rights therefore as a citizen, be-
came a burning one for several legislatures, so burning a question that
it ultimately became one of those used to divide the nation.34

Marboah’s reformulation is especially poignant because the original text is, in
fact, an excerpt from “Stranger in the Village”—an essay Baldwin wrote about his
experiences in Leukerbad, Switzerland (just about four hours from Milan, Italy).
Baldwin describes a snowbound alpine village where “no black man had ever set
foot,” on a continent where “the black man, as a man, did not exist,” except as an
abstraction geographically bounded to Europe’s colonies. For Baldwin, this ob-
servation is what distinguishes Europe from the United States, where “even as a
slave, [the black man] was an inescapable part of the general social fabric and no
American could escape having an attitude toward him.”35 Marboah’s engagement
with Baldwin thus provides a subtle, yet loving, disruption of the comparison at
the heart of “Stranger in the Village.” Marboah suggests that Blackness has long
been central to Italian understandings of citizenship—and indeed, that it is pre-
cisely the invisibilization of the Black man [sic] in Europe that has systematically
externalized Black communities as foreign to European nation-states.36 By link-
ing Baldwin’s analysis of rights, humanness, and Blackness to the Italian context,
Marboah also helps us to see how “citizen” in Italy effectively functions as a racial
proxy for the category of the “human.”

In these ongoing struggles for citizenship, Black Italian activists have made
use of shifting alliances and tactical engagements with the state for purposes that
may include, but also extend beyond, the objective of nation-state recognition.
Their relationship to citizenship is continually in motion—Black Italians alter-
natively accept the terms of nation-state citizenship and sometimes reject them
outright; they also “stretch” the discourses and practices of citizenship in the
sense of Fanon’s famous stretching of Marxist analysis to the colonial context;
and they swerve citizenship, engaging strategically with it on the terrains of law, cultural politics, and political economy but simultaneously decentering it as the apex of anti-racist struggle.\textsuperscript{37} Indeed, as Charles T. Lee argues, “social movements adopt a more variable use of political strategies, creatively negotiating with complicitous logics and antidemocratic powers to recraft spaces of social change in varied locations and social contexts.”\textsuperscript{38}

**Black Mediterranean Geographies of Citizenship**

Why look at the racial politics of citizenship via Blackness—and specifically, Blackness in Italy? A significant proportion of the refugees landing on the shores of southern Europe from the Mediterranean are from sub-Saharan Africa, and the threat of a supposed “African invasion” figures prominently in far-right political messaging. But even beyond this current moment, the idea of Blackness has long served as a foil against which the boundaries of liberal categories (citizen, natural rights, sovereignty, freedom) were constructed. In the context of Italy, for instance, Heather Merrill notes that Blackness specifically works as a symbol of nonbelonging: “African bodies are (re-)marked as iconic signifiers of illegitimate belonging, represented for instance in media images of packed fishing vessels entering the country clandestinely through southern maritime borders, and in tropes of itinerant street peddlers and prostitutes, suggesting that their very being in an Italian place threatens the moral purity of the nation state.”\textsuperscript{39}

Yet the empirical context of Italy also demands that we move away from any generalized notion of Blackness (and its relationship to citizenship). After all, the Black diaspora in Italy includes refugees, asylum seekers, first-generation migrants, and foreign university students; it spans multiple generations, some with direct ties to Italy’s former colonies, and some who have been in Italy since the 1960s; it includes people who were born in Italy, and individuals with a range of citizenship and immigration statuses. For this reason, scholars have increasingly turned toward the “Black Mediterranean” as an analytical framework for understanding the historical and geographical specificities of Blackness in Italy and the wider Mediterranean region. This work explicitly draws on and extends Paul Gilroy’s powerful theorizations of the Black Atlantic by asking how Blackness is constructed, lived, and transformed in a region that has been alternatively understood as a “cultural crossroads” at the heart of European civilization, a source of dangerous racial contamination, and—more recently—as the deadliest border crossing in the world.\textsuperscript{40} My emphasis on this sort of “racial regionalization” points to the importance of geography and spatiality in understanding the politics of
Blackness—indeed, as recent work in the field of Black geographies has argued, Blackness is neither singular, fixed, nor ontologically predetermined.41 Since the origins of the Italian nation-state itself, the process of constructing the ever-shifting racial boundaries of Italian citizenship has been bound up with notions of Blackness, Mediterraneanness, and the production of space.42 Following the Risorgimento project of Italian national unification, which lasted from 1848 until the incorporation of Rome as Italy’s capital in 1871, citizenship was defined in relation to both southern Italians and Africans. The consolidation of the geobody of Italy out of a patchwork collection of city-states and empires into a nation-state was intertwined with processes of internal colonialism.43 Southern Italy was understood by northern Italian elites through an Orientalist lens of cultural and civilizational inferiority due to its perceived geographical and racial proximity to the African continent (i.e., the so-called Southern Question). This racial mapping must also be understood as a response to northern European racial theorists’ dismissal of the Italian peninsula as a site of racially impure, degenerated Mediterraneans.44 And, in a foreshadowing of the ways that Black Italians today draw on diasporic resources from Black Americans, these debates about southernness and Mediterraneanness in Italy also unfolded in relation to struggles over racism, nationalism, and citizenship in the United States. Giuseppe Mazzini, a politician, journalist, and leader of the Italian unification movement, once declared that Italians were the “the negroes of Europe”—a metaphor intended to highlight the subjugation of Italians and rally support for the nationalist cause.45 Across the Atlantic, in the United States, southern Italian immigrants were systematically classified as racially proximate to Black Americans (due to the transnational influence of the same racial theories that orientalized southern Italy during and after the Risorgimento), and were only fully incorporated into the category of whiteness around the mid-twentieth century.

Italy’s precarious national-racial identity was also shaped in relation to its trans-Mediterranean empire building on the African continent, which was unfolding alongside national unification.46 And multiple, spatially extended diasporas—from the mass exodus of Italian emigrants after the Risorgimento to the large-scale arrival of African migrants in the 1980s and 1990s—have contributed to both the redefinitions of Italianness and the legal frameworks governing citizenship. These observations about the geographies of Italian racial formation are very much in keeping with Etienne Balibar’s influential observation that racism develops via both (super)nationalism and supranationalism.47 In other words, the particular conflation of race and citizenship in Italy was formed not only in relation to the consolidation of the new country’s national identity, but also through Italy’s participation in broader, transnational trajectories of Euro-Mediterranean race-thinking and imperialism. Contemporary
Black Italian struggles over citizenship today are therefore shaped by a long, global history of spatial contestation over the racial boundaries of Italianness in relation to Europe, Africa, and the Mediterranean.

While the framework of the Black Mediterranean helps us to ground Black Italian politics in historical and geographical specificity, the Black Mediterranean is also not simply a claim to an incommensurable difference or exceptionalism that sets the region apart from the rest of the world. Rather, drawing again on insights from Black geographies, supposedly “marginal” sites are actually relational spaces that offer profound insights about the workings of power and the organization of the modern world. In this sense, then, Italy also becomes a powerful site from which to theorize about race, citizenship, and Blackness on a global (rather than purely regional) scale. After all, if we take Cedric Robinson at his word, the origins of racial capitalism actually lie in the Mediterranean, which served as a laboratory of sorts for the technologies of dispossession and exploitation that were then exported to the Atlantic. And today, some of the most powerful mobilizations against border fortification, state racism, and coloniality are taking place across the Mediterranean. The duality of the Black Mediterranean as a site of both racist subordination and of innovative resistance reflects the many contradictions at the heart of the Mediterranean itself as a symbolic and material space. On the one hand, the Mediterranean has been a locus of engagement, exchange, and cultural florescence for thousands of years. On the other hand, it has long been a center of economic extraction, racist violence, and imperial ambition—indeed, today, the Mediterranean is immediately recognizable as the symbol of Fortress Europe’s brutal border regimes.

The Black Mediterranean is thus a site where many different historical forces and subjectivities have converged, in ways that complicate linear understandings of politics and solidarity. It is a place where racism, xenophobia, and (post) colonialism cannot easily be separated into discrete political and analytical silos. For this reason, the Black Mediterranean is also a political demand—one that calls for radical and transgressive forms of solidarity that can actively subvert state categories such as “migrant,” “citizen,” and “refugee.” As Ida Danewid contends, this is an ethical demand based not on abstract humanisms (like so many white European-led “migrant solidarity” movements), nor on biological or “blood” kinship ties, but rather on the shared histories of racist injustice and Black struggle across the Mediterranean, from colonialism to Fortress Europe. These Black Mediterranean struggles with, for, and against citizenship provide glimpses into what Katherine McKittrick in Demonic Grounds describes as “alternative spatial practices and more humanly workable geographies.”

Here, it is worth noting that Italy does not exhaust the geography of the Black Mediterranean. While this book is focused specifically on Italy, there are still
many other stories to be told. Spain, Portugal, and Greece, for instance, are notable as emerging sites of inquiry in the burgeoning field of Black Mediterranean studies. And beyond Europe, the broader Mediterranean region has long been a site of anti-Black racism, from the “slave markets” for sub-Saharan African migrant labor in Libya to the surveillance and violence enacted against sub-Saharan African migrants traveling through Algeria. In addition, North Africa has also played a central role in the racial capitalist political economy of the Black Mediterranean, as a site of European aspiration for the establishment of new economic footholds on the African continent in the wake of post–World War II decolonization. For this reason, Italy is not a stand-in for the Black Mediterranean as a whole; rather, I am interested in what the framework of the Black Mediterranean can disclose about struggles over race, nation, and citizenship in Italy today.

The Black Diaspora in Italy

Despite systematic denials and obfuscations, Italy was deeply entangled with both the Mediterranean slave trade (which, many historians argue, helped to establish the commercial foundations for the transatlantic slave trade) and African colonialism, in ways that continue to shape current contestations over the boundaries of Italianness and national citizenship. As Cedric Robinson notes in Black Marxism, Italy was a major hub in the networks of trade, intellectual dialogue, and cultural production linking what would come to be known as the European, African, Arab, and Asian worlds. In particular, between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, the merchants and financiers of the Italian maritime republics established extensive Mediterranean trade networks. The use of enslaved labor (which, in this context, was not limited to Black Africans but also encompassed European Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Slavs) was central to agricultural production in the Italian outposts of the Mediterranean. This economic system ultimately served as a template for the use of enslaved Africans in the Atlantic colonies during the transatlantic slave trade. The Genoese in particular were key players in the lucrative trade that expanded rapidly from the Maghreb and the Mediterranean basin across the Atlantic Ocean. Genoese merchant capitalists served as influential creditors and provided capital that ultimately “determined the direction and pace” of Spanish and Portuguese expansion across the Mediterranean and Atlantic, and the emergence of the transatlantic slave trade itself. I’ve directed my attention to the writings of Cedric Robinson here because his work explicitly rearticulates the Mediterranean with the transatlantic slave trade, pointing to the deep historical ties that connected the Italian peninsula to the transnational circuits of racial capitalism and Blackness.
Italy was also a “strident imperialist” and significant colonial power, even before the rise of fascism in the twentieth century. In the approximately seven decades from 1869 (when an Italian company purchased the Bay of Assab) to 1943, Italy’s colonial footprint gradually spread over Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, Ethiopia, Albania, the Dodecanese Islands (in what is now Greece), and a forty-six-hectare territorial concession in Tientsin, China. The Italian Empire came to an end with the 1947 Treaty of Peace with Italy (part of the Paris Peace Treaty), through which Italy was forced to relinquish control of its colonies and occupied territories. Still, as Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo note, Italian geopolitical and economic ties persisted in many of the former colonies, even after formal political decolonization was complete—most notably in the trusteeship of Somalia from 1950 to 1960 granted to Italy by the United Nations. In addition, the kinship ties, social networks, economic relations, and material infrastructure established through Italian colonialism laid the groundwork for the first waves of migration from North and sub-Saharan Africa to Italy during the second half of the twentieth century.

From the time of Italian national unification at the end of the nineteenth century up until the mid-twentieth century, Italy was primarily a country of emigration. During this period, millions of Italians abandoned rural poverty in search of economic opportunity abroad—not only in the Americas, northern Europe, and Australia, as widely recounted in popular culture, but also in the Italian colonies of Africa. By the mid-1970s, however, Italy finally achieved a “net positive” immigration balance (i.e., more arrivals than departures). This shift resulted from both the enactment of restrictive entry or “guest worker” policies in countries that had previously been receiving Italian immigrants, such as Switzerland and Germany, as well as an increase in transnational labor migration into Italy spurred by the decline of Fordism (a system of industrial production characterized by, among other features, standardized assembly-line production, higher wages to support mass consumption, and state intervention to stabilize periodic crises through the promotion of full employment and the institution of welfare programs).

According to Heather Merrill and Donald Carter, the first major generation of immigrants in Italy comprised mainly foreign contract workers and university students. During the 1970s, Wendy Pojmann explains, the largest groups of non-European immigrants living in Italy were men from Africa and the Middle East working in either unskilled manufacturing in northern Italy or agriculture in southern Italy, and women from the Philippines, Cape Verde, and the former Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa who were recruited by Catholic charities to provide domestic services for white Italian mothers who were increasingly working outside of the home. Toward the end of the 1980s, Italy’s immigrant population began to represent a new plurality of national groups, most of which had no
apparent connection to Italy or Italian colonialism. This fact distinguished immigration to Italy from the patterns that characterized earlier sites of immigration to Europe such as Britain, France, and the Netherlands. By 1991, North and sub-Saharan Africans constituted the second-largest immigrant population in Italy, surpassed only by Italian return migrants. But while fears of a supposed “African invasion” continue to suffuse political discourse and mainstream media narratives in Italy, today the African immigrant population is actually far surpassed by the number of Romanians and Albanians living in Italy.

Italy does not collect official ethnoracial statistics (with the exception of data on certain historical linguistic minorities)—a legacy of post-Fascist reconstruction after World War II. This absence of ethnoracial statistics in Italy makes it especially challenging to estimate the number of people of African descent living in Italy today. Still, it is possible to triangulate the numerical significance of this group from the various official “proxy” numbers that are readily available. The Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (or Istat, the country’s national statistics body) estimates that there are over one million Africans with non-Italian citizenship living in Italy, and that they make up roughly 20 percent of Italy’s immigrant population. About 360,000 hail from sub-Saharan Africa (primarily Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana). In addition, approximately 20 percent of children in Italy today have at least one immigrant parent, a number that demographers predict could grow in the coming years as white Italian birth rates decline. Notably, Italy does not have banlieue-style peri-urban residential segregation on the same scale as countries such as France. This means that African immigrants and their children are comparatively dispersed across many different neighborhoods, cities, and regions of Italy. Historically, however, the Black presence in Italy has been largely concentrated in the wealthier, industrial northern half of the country, particularly around the cities of the Industrial Triangle economic powerhouse (Milan, Turin, and Genoa). As immigration patterns continue to change, however, the demographic balance of Black Italy has gradually begun to shift to the South, leading to rapidly expanding African communities in cities such as Naples and Palermo.

**From “African Immigrants” to “Black Italians”**

While scholars have devoted ample attention to the circumstances of first-generation African immigrants and refugees in Italy, the experiences of Black people born and raised in Italy remain comparatively understudied. This constitutes a significant lacuna in the existing literature on race, immigration, and
citizenship in Italy. Indeed, the centrality of the refugee crisis in Italy raises the question of what can be learned by studying Black people who grew up in Italy in particular, as opposed to those who arrived as migrants. I believe, however, that the mobilizations of Black Italians (and the discursive repertoires that have cohered around citizenship reform activism) will also shape the terrain of struggle for newly arrived refugees. In other words, while Black Italians and Black refugees did not come to Italy at the same time, their stories are now profoundly intertwined even as they are positioned differently in relation to the possibilities, promises, and perils of Italian citizenship.

One of the most notable characteristics of this generation of Black Italians is their hesitant transition toward a collective sense of Black identity and away from the category of “immigrant.” Heather Merrill and Donald Carter note that during the early years of migrant settlement in Italy in the 1980s and 1990s, newcomers from across Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia banded together in interethnic activist and labor organizations. For these groups, “immigrant” as a form of collective identity performed important political and coalitional work. Increasingly, however, Black Italians are rejecting the intergenerational imposition of the category “immigrant” (as seen, for instance, in the ubiquitous label “second-generation immigrant”). They are also turning away from an exclusive identification with specific African countries of origin, arguing that these national distinctions mattered more to their parents than to their own everyday lived experiences. Instead, they are moving toward new forms of self-identification that can capture the experience of racialization that stems from being born or raised in Italy. This shared condition is akin to what W. E. B. Du Bois called “double consciousness,” or what Frantz Fanon alternatively described as dealing with “two systems of reference”—the lived experience of fracture and alienation generated by daily engagement with racialized social and economic structures.

This doubleness, for both Du Bois and Fanon, occurs when Black people must view themselves simultaneously through the distorting veil of white prejudice and through their own modes of self-understanding. Yet, this experience also generates what Du Bois in The Souls of Black Folk referred to as “second sight,” a “privileged epistemological standpoint” that allows Black folk to see the world as it is, laden with racist hypocrisy. Over the course of interviews with Black Italians across Italy about their lives and preferred forms of self-identification in 2016, I was regularly told some version of the following after a moment of surprise, followed by careful reflection: “You know, I didn’t even begin to think of the term ‘Afro-Italian’ [or ‘Black Italian’] until three, maybe two years ago.” This is confirmed in a 2002 article by Jacqueline Andall, “Second-Generation Attitude? African-Italians in Milan,” one
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of the earliest studies focusing on the children of African immigrants in Italy. Andall observed that the young people she interviewed saw Blackness and Italianness as mutually exclusive categories. Indeed, many of her interlocutors found it easier to identify with a general sense of Europeanness, African identity, or a wider Black diasporic consciousness than with Italianness specifically. Yet she also predicted that the up-and-coming “younger second generation” of African Italians might not necessarily dismiss the possibility of being both Black and Italian as many of the older, “involuntary pioneers” had done previously. When she wrote this almost twenty years ago, Andall’s hunch was absolutely correct: the children of African immigrants today are increasingly organizing themselves under the collective terms “Afro-Italian” and “Black Italian.”

Many of my friends in Italy have related to me some iteration of a story in which they grew up understanding themselves as Italian, but then experienced an episode around high school that brought into sharp relief the reality that this recognition did not run in both directions. One of the founders of the popular blog Afroitalian Souls told me the following one overcast afternoon in Milan in 2016, as we sipped coffees in the trendy canal neighborhood of Navigli:

For me, I grew up seeing myself only as Italian. I knew that I was African, but I was Italian, period. Because the few Africans I saw outside of my family were not regarded well, so I grew up saying, “I am Italian, you are African; we are not the same.” Then I went to Uganda, I fell in love with my country, and I thought, wow, I didn’t realize that I was always missing something! . . . Then I came back here, I thought to myself, geez, I am also Italian! Then when I had trouble getting Italian citizenship, I said, “Well, who cares about those Italians, I am also African.” And so I decided from that day, I was only African. I went from one extreme to another. Because I thought to myself, I was born and raised here. Why don’t they consider me to be Italian? Why do I have to go through this whole hassle with citizenship? . . . Now, however, I’m finding a balance. The fact that Italians don’t accept me doesn’t mean that I have to stop seeing myself as Italian.

Changing demographics certainly play a part in this story: Italy became an important country of immigration in the 1980s and 1990s, so the children of the immigrants who arrived during those decades and settled primarily in the industrial cities of northern Italy and around Rome are now well into their twenties and even their thirties. In other words, they have lived through humiliating episodes of discrimination at the hands of their high school teachers; they have struggled, and often failed, to successfully petition for Italian naturalization on
their eighteenth birthdays; they have dealt with racism when applying for jobs or apartment hunting; and they are old enough to vividly remember the racist and misogynistic attacks in 2013 that were directed by right-wing politicians against Italy’s first Black cabinet member, the Italian-Congolese former minister of integration and member of the European Parliament Cécile Kashetu Kyenge.79

Yet demographic momentum alone cannot explain the growing visibility of activism under the banners of “Black” or “Afro-Italianness.” It is also a deeply uncertain and precarious time in Italy, one in which Black Italians have been forced to publicly demonstrate their worthiness as citizens-in-waiting as a direct response to the scapegoating of Blackness as a drain on scarce state resources and a threat to national integrity. In the context of such racialized refusal of recognition, Black Italians have marshalled practices like entrepreneurship and ideas such as the sedentarist logics of birthplace to legitimate their presence in Italy.80 They are actively reworking the boundaries of Italianness, displacing blood and biological descent in favor of attributes such as cosmopolitan hybridity, economic productivity, and local cultural fluency. Increasingly, however, Black Italians are also questioning the normative “script” of citizenship activism for the ways that it generates new and pernicious forms of racial distinction between “assimilable” Black citizens-in-waiting and “nonassimilable” Black migrants. And from these challenging conversations about the meanings of national citizenship and its relationship to racial justice, exciting new political horizons have begun to emerge—ones that look beyond the Italian nation-state to imagine much more capacious diasporic and Black Mediterranean solidarities.

Methodological Approaches

An investigation of race, nationalism, citizenship, and Blackness in contemporary Italy poses a number of methodological challenges.81 The persistence and intensification of regionalism in Italy—often glossed as “fragmentation”—means that one cannot easily generalize from one part of Italy to the entire country. The sites of Black Italian organizing in Italy are also geographically dispersed. The centrality of the Internet and social media to the circulation of diasporic resources, creation of alternative media, and enactment of visibility politics among Black Italians poses a further challenge to a spatially bounded analysis. The Internet has become a haven for emerging conversations (and arguments) among a spatially dispersed generation of Black Italians. Through an ever-growing number of Facebook pages, YouTube channels, and blogs, Black Italians have been able to connect, achieve new levels of visibility, and create relatively autonomous spaces for discussion, political organizing, and cultural production.
For these reasons, the multiplicity of practices by which Black Italians are articulating Blackness and Italianness, and attempting to challenge Italian ethnic absolutism, cannot be adequately contained within one community center, neighborhood, or city.82 This emergent Black Italia does not have a singular geographical referent, but rather emerges from the interstices of everyday life, in what Heather Merrill calls “Black spaces.”83 It spans photo shoots in Milan’s Piazza del Duomo about respecting the bodily integrity of Black women; Afrobeat-influenced DJ sets in Rome attended by Black Italian youth and their white Italian schoolmates; efforts to decolonize high school curricula in Bologna; international sporting events during which racist outbursts incite conversations about whether Black players can be representatives of Italy; a growing community of writers remapping Italian colonial history in relation to the present; and online spaces for sharing news from across the African diaspora. Capturing the density and complexity of these networks therefore requires a different sort of methodological approach that does not take for granted places and subjectivities as bounded. As McKittrick observes, the “nowhere of black life . . . provides a template to imagine the production of space not through patriarchal and colonial project trappings . . . but instead as a project that . . . engenders relations of uncertainty.”84 In this sense, then, the simultaneous “nowhere” and “everywhere” of Black Italy represents less of a methodological challenge to overcome than a conceptual and political opportunity to contest the idea of the Italian nation-state as a discrete and homogenous unit, and of Black subjects as hopelessly contained within naturalized and pathological spaces.85

Contesting Race and Citizenship is based on multsited, mixed-methods research carried out between 2013 and 2019 with Black activists, artists, and entrepreneurs from across Italy. I conducted in-depth interviews and participant observation at activist meetings, cultural festivals, workshops, protests, and other events. I undertook virtual ethnography of social media communities oriented on citizenship and Black cultural politics across platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. I engaged in content analysis of reporting on migration and citizenship issues in Italy from the 1980s to the present. I drew on a range of cultural texts as alternative forms of Black knowledge production, including novels, memoirs, poetry, films, and music by Black Italian artists. I delved into the archives of nineteenth-century Italian positivist scientists to study the relationship between race, geography, and Italian national identity. And I engaged in critical public policy analysis of Italian immigration and citizenship laws.

Because most African immigrants in Italy reside in the country’s northern and central regions, and the major cities in those regions are important hubs of Black political organizing, most of my fieldwork was carried out in the northern
half of Italy.\textsuperscript{86} In particular, Milan, Brescia, Verona, Padua, Turin, Bologna, and Rome were key sites of research for participant observation, interviews, and archival research over the course of this study. I did, however, also spend time in southern Italy and had the opportunity to interview Black activists from Naples and Sicily—experiences I describe in this book’s conclusion. I even traveled beyond Italy, going to sites such as Amsterdam to see how the emergent Black Italian diasporic politics I was studying engaged and linked up with Black European mobilizations in other countries.

A focus on everyday negotiations of citizenship constituted an important part of both my research praxis and my conceptualization of citizenship struggles. There has been a tendency among some scholars of migration to hail the abstracted figure of the refugee, whom they portray as embodying a fugitive form of “citizenship from the margins,” and who in turn is recruited as a polyvalent analytical vehicle for unpacking the violence of the state and its borders. On the other hand, there is a vast literature on the relationship between race, nation, and citizenship from the interrelated fields of cultural studies and American studies—but this work has been largely conceptual, and less geographical in scope.\textsuperscript{87} Ultimately, these various approaches, for all of their radical and deeply consequential theoretical insights about sovereignty, marginality, and the racial state, have not been able to fully contend with the fact that national citizenship still matters for so many marginalized groups. Indeed, this paradox only becomes evident through a close engagement with the ways different groups engage with citizenship (and its limits) in the realm of the everyday.

In this sense, then, my orientation on national citizenship in \textit{Contesting Race and Citizenship} is not an arbitrary conceptual choice, but rather is guided by the empirical demands of my research. I must admit that I did not set out to study citizenship when I first arrived in Italy to work on this project in 2013—in fact, I had assumed that to focus primarily on citizenship was to take for granted the exclusionary categories of liberal statecraft. Instead, I was interested in the ways the Italian-born children of African and Afro-Latinx immigrants were increasingly collectively identifying as “Black” or “Afro” Italian, as opposed to the “Ghanaian–” or “Nigerian-Italian” labels favored by the generation of their parents. But I soon found that I could not avoid encountering citizenship: almost every discussion about Blackness I had during my years of fieldwork inevitably circled back to questions of Italian citizenship, nation-state (non)recognition, and the racial dimensions of jus sanguinis and jus soli (right of blood) as legal frameworks for the concession of citizenship. Whether or not activists agreed on the extent to which struggles for racial justice should focus on national citizenship, it invariably constituted the backdrop to most discussions about the past, present, and future of Black Italian politics.
While I came to these discussions about citizenship equipped with a theoretical framework that emphasized national citizenship's constitutive and racialized exclusions, I was also not comfortable arguing that my activist friends had been duped—that, as victims of false consciousness, they were naively putting their hopes for racial liberation in the hands of the racial state. Indeed, I have no interest in presenting a sort of “gotcha” story, in which the punch line of the book is that my interlocutors were actually wrong about the point of citizenship all along. My commitment, instead, is to understand how activists came to their particular understandings of citizenship in relation to the project of racial justice—with all of its possibilities and limitations. After all, as profound theorists of their own conditions, they were always acutely aware of these contradictions, and their entanglements consistently pushed me to complicate my own sometimes overly narrow and binaristic understandings of citizenship.

In the spirit of Frantz Fanon’s phenomenological approach, then, this book privileges the analytical, political, and ethical significance of lived experience for understanding the dimensions of a particular conceptual problem-space. Indeed, I am interested in how Black Italian racial subjectivity is constituted, experienced, contested, and mobilized in relation to the many everyday sites and processes of racist violence Fanon described—including the gaze, epidermalization (the “fixing” of racial difference in the body), and language. The fact that the lived experience of Black Italianness was, for so many of my interlocutors, so intimately mediated by citizenship, in turn directed my analytical focus to the co-constitutive relationship between race and citizenship in the construction of the Italian nation-state. And because I could not easily brush aside citizenship, I then became interested in what political lessons the entanglements of race and citizenship could offer for Black struggles in other contexts.

As a self-identified Black Italian, I structured my engagement with these questions in a way that was necessarily reflexive, but also attentive to differences of power. I came to this research because the entanglements of race and citizenship in Italy have intimately shaped my own life. My mother is a white Italian who grew up in the small town of Trescore (about one hour from Milan); my father is a Black American who was born in rural Virginia and grew up in Oakland. They met when my father was drafted into the US Army and stationed in Italy; they married in Italy in 1976, and several years later returned to California, where I was born. Our household was bilingual, and I actually spoke Italian before I started speaking English. And since my mother was the youngest of thirteen siblings, I grew up spending every summer (and often winter) with her family in Italy. This is all to say that my life has been shaped by a deep connection to both diasporic Blackness and Italianness. I was struck by the profound resonances between the stories of Black Italians in Italy and my own lived experiences, and
their insights ultimately helped me understand myself and my family in powerful new ways.

But at the same time, I have the privileges of relatively unfettered transnational mobility that come with an American passport and an elite US academic institutional affiliation. In addition, I have Italian citizenship thanks to the same descent-based jus sanguinis framework that has simultaneously disenfranchised so many of my Black Italian comrades. In other words, despite the fact that I was born in California and they were born or raised in Italy, I am an Italian citizen simply because my mother was also born an Italian citizen. Yet it is also undeniable that I lived my research intimately, on the surface of my skin. I regularly endured the same types of questions that implicitly mapped race onto citizenship—“But where are you really from?” and “Where did you learn to speak Italian so well?”—that my interlocutors so frequently cited.

Ultimately, by grounding my analysis in these kinds of everyday negotiations and lived experiences (including those of my interlocutors and my own), I came to understand citizenship not simply as the highest goal of liberal politics, but rather as a complex, ambiguous, and deeply fraught terrain of struggle that can nonetheless become a platform for the articulation of other sorts of radical political solidarities. For that reason, this book is structured to trace a still-unfolding narrative and historical arc—as activists organize around citizenship, navigate the limits of liberal categories, and begin articulating other kinds of political visions and formations.

Overview of the Book

*Contesting Race and Citizenship* is organized into two parts. Part I, “Citizenship,” explores the challenges and contradictions that can arise when Black anti-racism advocacy is yoked to the goal of national citizenship. Chapter 1, “Italian Ethnonationalism and the Limits of Citizenship,” follows the emergence of the movement to reform Italian citizenship law from jus sanguinis to jus soli. While some scholars have been quick to dismiss these mobilizations as insufficiently radical because they are oriented on a politics of state recognition, I argue that they can actually reveal the complex ways that the boundaries of Italianness are being redrawn in the midst of interlocking economic, demographic, and migration “crises.” I show that as Black Italians become entangled in the ambiguous process of redefining Italianness away from racialized notions of blood descent and toward the supposedly “race-neutral” categories of culture and birthplace, they are in turn shaping the terrain of political struggle in Italy for newly arrived refugees from the African continent.
Chapter 2, “Black Entrepreneurs and the ‘(Re)Making’ of Italy,” focuses on one surprising branch of these citizenship struggles: entrepreneurship. During the last half decade, there has been a veritable explosion of Black Italian women’s entrepreneurship oriented on natural hair care, cosmetics, and African fashion. Drawing on interviews and participant observation with a group of young Black entrepreneurs, I show that these “Made in Italy” Afro-businesses are important—yet politically ambiguous—sites of struggle over access to Italian citizenship. In particular, Black women entrepreneurs are leveraging their businesses to advance glamorous and cosmopolitan images of Black life in Italy. Invoking older notions of Italo-Mediterranean meticciato (mixedness), these entrepreneurs also assert their worthiness as potential citizens by claiming that their diasporic networks can resolve Italy’s economic stagnation and restore the country’s status as a vibrant cultural and economic crossroads. Yet such claims only become legible in contrast to the figure of the refugee. Rather than a deracialization of Italianness, we instead witness the production of new distinctions between “productive” Black citizens (or citizens-in-waiting) and “unproductive” Black refugees—distinctions that invoke a much older liberal history of the racialized “undeserving poor.”

Chapter 3, “Mediterraneanism, Africa, and the Racial Borders of Italianness,” takes a step back in time. I situate contemporary debates in Italy about race and citizenship within a much longer trajectory of racial formation in the Mediterranean region, focusing on four key moments: national unification and colonial expansion, fascism, postwar reconstruction, and Italy’s transformation into a country of immigration. Drawing on research conducted in the archives of nineteenth-century Italian racial scientists, I show that (in contrast to what happened in northern Europe), meticciato was not necessarily seen as a threat to racial purity in the fledgling Italian nation-state. In fact, at times it was also understood as a source of racial and cultural invigoration—a potential solution to the challenges of modernity. Italy’s geographical proximity to Africa generated a range of efforts by scientists, politicians, and intellectuals to clarify the relationship between Italianness and Blackness. I argue that this historic precariousness of Italian “whiteness” in relation to northern Europe ultimately created a unique opening for Black activists to mobilize for a widening of the racial boundaries of Italian citizenship. At the same time, however, claims about Mediterranean racial fluidity can also (sometimes inadvertently) work to subsume and invisibilize Blackness within the overarching category of “mixedness.”

Part II of the book, “Diasporic Politics,” explores the new political horizons that emerge when activists confront the limits of citizenship. While Black Italians continue to mobilize for access to Italian citizenship, they are also increasingly engaged in forms of community that subtly challenge or undermine the
exclusionary functions of liberal citizenship. Chapter 4, “Translation and the Lived Geographies of the Black Mediterranean,” tracks the emergent politics of Black Italy in the aftermath of the 2016 murder of Nigerian asylum seeker Emmanuel Chidi Nnamdi. Drawing on participant observation and multiyear collaborations with several Black Italian organizations, I narrate the various ways Black activists attempt to craft a language that can attend to the specific contours of racism and exclusion in Italy. In this chapter, I also reintroduce the concept of the “Black Mediterranean,” a framework that characterizes the dense relations of cultural contact and racist violence linking southern Europe and Africa. The Black Mediterranean, I argue, provides an antidote to the whitewashed vision of Mediterranean mixing critiqued in chapter 3—while also allowing for historically and geographically situated engagements with the dense material and symbolic networks of Italian Blackness. While Black people born or raised in Italy have only relatively recently begun to refer to themselves collectively as “Black Italian” or “Afro-Italian,” I argue that these exciting new conversations draw on resources from across the global Black diaspora to contend with the possibilities of Black life in Italy today.

Chapter 5, “Refugees and Citizens-in-Waiting,” explores alternative forms of Black Italian political organizing that do not necessarily regard citizenship as a primary goal. Drawing on anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla’s notion of “strategic entanglement,” I argue that Italy’s continued descent into far-right ethnonationalism has sparked an important shift in Black Italian politics. Specifically, Black Italian activists are increasingly using shifting alliances and tactical engagements with the Italian state apparatus for purposes that include, but also extend beyond, the objective of formal nation-state recognition. I focus on the work of a group of Italian-born Eritreans in Milan who self-organized in response to the arrival of large numbers of Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers to the Porta Venezia neighborhood in 2015. Rather than draw distinctions based on birthplace or legal status, they instead sought to craft new and transgressive sorts of political alliances—based on what I call Black Mediterranean diasporic politics—oriented on the shared ties of anti-racist and anticolonial diasporic struggle.

Finally, the conclusion considers the broader implications of this Italian story. Southern Europe has become a hothouse for the many, seemingly apocalyptic forces shaping our present, from economic precarity and austerity to ethnonationalism and fascism to global mass migrations met by deadly border regimes and walls. I travel to southern Italy and speak to Black activists in Naples to consider how this conjuncture has taken shape in a “marginal” region of a “marginal” European country in a “marginal” corner of the Black diaspora. Through these engagements, I conclude that the Black Mediterranean actually represents
an instructive limit case wherein colonial legacies, neoliberal practices of migration management, and historically sedimented forms of anti-Black racism have all come together to produce not only new dynamics of racist violence and exclusion, but also inspiring new practices of border-transgressing, diasporic solidarity.