I briefly sketched my methodological approaches in the introduction to this book; however, I have included this methodological appendix to more thoroughly flesh out my fieldwork practice. I recall that during the first half of my time in graduate school, I would typically read ethnographic texts in graduate seminars with the goal of zeroing in on their central theoretical interventions. It was only later, when I was planning my own fieldwork and, subsequently, attempting to write a dissertation, that I returned to these beloved texts with an eye toward the way their authors stitched together elegant and apparently seamless narratives out of empirical data—and only then leveraged those insights into contributions to theory. In the spirit of that sort of demystification, I share how this process worked for me in the crafting of this monograph.

**Research Timeline**

I began this project in 2012, when I started the PhD program in geography at UC Berkeley. At the time, I was keenly interested in the ways that West African immigrants in Italy made use of digital technologies to reinforce transnational diasporic networks and also navigate structural racism in Italy. I spent the summer of 2013 in Italy with the goal of conducting preliminary fieldwork on these questions; it was then that I first learned about the citizenship reform movement in Italy, and this completely changed the course of my research. I returned to Italy for the summer of 2014 and began conducting more interviews with citizenship
reform activists, cultural workers, and entrepreneurs across a number of Italian cities such as Milan and Rome.

In January 2016, I moved to Sesto San Giovanni (next door to Milan), which became my home base for a year. This was when I conducted the bulk of the ethnographic and archival research for my dissertation and, eventually, the book you are currently reading. That year, I also formally affiliated with the department of philosophy, sociology, education, and applied psychology at the University of Padua (under the mentorship of Dr. Annalisa Frisina), an opportunity that also provided me with a valuable source of academic community and comradeship. I subsequently returned to Italy during the summers of 2017, 2018, and 2019 to conduct additional follow-up research.

Methods

In the writing of this book, I drew from four key sources of empirical data: archival research; media and policy analysis; semi-structured and unstructured interviews; and participant observation. I discuss each of these elements in greater detail below.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

While I am not trained as an historian, during my fieldwork I repeatedly encountered moments of “pushback” from some of my white Italian interlocutors, who fervently asserted to me that Italy did not have a history of racism on the scale of the United States, and that to talk about racism as such was to impose a distinctly “American” problem onto the Italian context. As such, I became invested in developing my own deeper understanding of the specific histories of race-making within Italy, and especially how notions of Mediterraneanism were mobilized in the past and still continue to resurface today in contemporary Italy as a way of explaining “difference.”

My first stop was the Archivio Lombroso at the University of Turin’s Archivio del Museo di Antropologia Criminale “Cesare Lombroso.” Archivist Cristina Cilli provided incredible guidance and direction as we collectively read “between the lines” of the files and folders in the archive to identify reports, articles, letters, and notes pertaining specifically to Lombroso’s racial theorization and their national (and even global) influence. Giacomo Giacobini, scientific director of the neighboring Archivio del Museo di Anatomia Umana “Luigi Rolando” also provided invaluable historical context for Lombroso’s ideas by situating him in relationship to many of his contemporary scientists (like Carlo Giacomini). Drs.
Cilli and Giacobini subsequently connected me to Dr. Gianluigi Mangiapane at the Archivio del Museo di Antropologia ed Etnografia at the University of Turin, who had been collecting and organizing the papers of the museum’s founder, Fascist-era anthropologist Giovanni Marro. The researchers in Turin also put me in touch with Giorgio Manzi of the Italian Institute of Anthropology (founded by Giuseppe Sergi, as I mentioned in chapter 3), where I received a private tour of Sergi’s scientific collections, borrowed an original copy of *The Mediterranean Race*, and interviewed Dr. Giovanni Destro Bisol about the institute’s ongoing research into human genetic diversity.

In addition to this archival research, I also spent time at a number of specialized Italian libraries with resources specifically dedicated to the topic of immigration and cultural diversity in Italy, including the Centro Studi Emigrazione—Roma (CSER), the Fondazione Iniziative e Studi sulla Multietnicità (ISMU), and the Biblioteca della Camera dei Deputati.

**MEDIA AND POLICY ANALYSIS**

From 2012 to 2019, I collected mainstream newspaper and magazine articles, blog posts, public social media posts, YouTube videos, and other cultural artifacts to track the growing prominence of “Black Italian” or “Afro-Italian” identity. I used discourse analysis to analyze the multiple ways that Black Italianness was being narrated in relation to a range of contentious subjects—Italian national identity, Mediterraneanism, immigration, racism, colonialism, and the United States (and other sites of the global Black diaspora). I also maintained a collection of novels, memoirs, and documentary films by Black Italian artists. Similarly, I conducted document analysis of Italian immigration and citizenship laws from the 1990 Legge Martelli to the present, with a focus on how the conditions for immigration and naturalization have shifted over time in relation to notions of race, gender, birthplace, descent, cultural competency, and economic productivity.

**INTERVIEWS**

I conducted semistructured interviews with a range of different interlocutors. These were audio recorded (with consent); however, I also took copious notes in my notebook or on my iPhone. These notes served as backup in case my recording device failed, but I also used them to capture forms of nonverbal communication (a furrow of the brow, a dramatic drag on a cigarette, an explosive laugh) as well as the broader situational contexts of the interviews. Six of the interviews took place over Skype—these were typically instances when, for whatever reason, I was unable to meet an interlocutor in person.
I arranged interviews with three key groups of interlocutors. The first was Black Italians who were born or raised in Italy. This group included people who have two Black parents (immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America) and people from mixed backgrounds with one white Italian parent or one Black American parent. Because I was interested in the mobilization of the category “Black” or “Afro-Italian,” I focused on interviewing people who were active in the spheres of political activism, entrepreneurship, cultural production, and mutual aid. This inevitably meant that my interlocutors tended to be of a relatively higher class or educational background—in other words, their experiences cannot be generalized or used to stand in for all Black Italians. I met my first interlocutors in 2013 and 2014 through mutual friends and colleagues (including my adviser Annalisa Frisina at the University of Padua); others I contacted directly after seeing their posts on social media sites like Facebook. From there, my group of interlocutors rapidly snowballed as people began to introduce me to their friends, colleagues, and comrades. In interviews, I followed an open-ended protocol, asking questions about my interlocutors’ life histories, their modes of identification, their sources of inspiration, how they became involved in political or cultural work, and what they saw as the biggest challenges facing Black people in Italy.

Beyond this core group of interlocutors, I also conducted interviews with first-generation African or Afro-Latinx immigrants to Italy. These interviews provided me with valuable historical context about an earlier generation of Black activism in Italy. Our conversations also helped me to parse out the various ways that the terrain and terms of Black struggle in Italy had shifted over the previous two decades. Finally, I interviewed social workers, NGO workers, and others (usually white Italians, though not exclusively) who work with immigrants in Italy. These interlocutors shared helpful institutional context for understanding the immigration and citizenship bureaucracy in Italy, and they also provided me with a window onto mainstream liberal approaches to managing “difference” in contemporary Italy.

In addition to these more formal, semi-structured interviews, I also carried out a large number of informal, unstructured interviews. These typically took the form of shorter conversations after leaving an event, on the sidelines at demonstrations, or while riding public transportation on the way to a meeting. The notes I kept from these interactions provided context and ethnographic texture for the events and debates I had observed that day. Altogether, I conducted over one hundred semi-structured and unstructured interviews for this project.

**PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

The most significant part of the research for this book took the form of participant observation. Participant observation gave me insight into the everyday ways
that Black Italianness is constructed, enacted, and contested in Italy today. Sites of participant observation included activist meetings; protests and demonstrations; public forums about immigration law, citizenship reform, and refugee rights; Black hair care workshops; and cultural festivals. Because the networks of Black Italian organizing are so dense and interconnected, I quickly became a reliable fixture at these types of meetings and public events, to the extent that my friends would joke that if there was an event about race and Blackness somewhere in Italy, I could be counted on to be there. In addition, I have extensive family networks across Italy. As such, my experiences listening to a typical middle-class white Italian family talk openly about the political issues of the day yielded insights that also informed the background of this project. When conducting participant observation, I took copious and detailed notes. At the same time, in writing, I was very judicious about what sorts of details to include and which to exclude, as I was often privy to sensitive conversations and interpersonal disagreements about ongoing political struggles.2

Reflections on Diaspora, Power, and Research Praxis

The multiple ways that I was entangled with my research subject raise not only methodological questions, but also theoretical, ethical, and political ones. A short anecdote—a snapshot in time, if you will—illustrates precisely this inseparability of research and the personal.

On March 25, 2016, I was preparing to fly back to California from Milan for a short break from my dissertation fieldwork. I was on my way to attend a conference in San Francisco and then spend Easter with my parents and my now-husband. Just three days earlier, a series of coordinated suicide bombings had been carried out at Brussels Airport in Zaventem and the Maalbeek metro station in Brussels city center. As I walked to the American Airlines check-in counter with my overstuffed suitcase in tow, bleary-eyed and squinting in the harsh fluorescent airport lights, I noticed a larger-than-usual police presence in the terminal. When it was finally my turn to check in for the flight, I slid my Italian / EU passport across the counter to a perfectly starched and coiffed Italian gate agent. She opened the passport, glanced at the photo page, and then looked up at me. She looked back down at the passport and again at me, searching the features of my face, her quizzical expression hardening into a look of stern suspicion:

- Are you a resident of Italy?
- I’m a resident of California, but I am living in Italy for the year.
Then why do you have an Italian passport?
Because I am an Italian citizen.
Well, were you born here or there?
I was born in California.
Well excuse me, then why do you have Italian citizenship?
My mother is Italian, so I am an Italian citizen.
Ah! So there is a reason why you have Italian citizenship.
Well, yes, it’s quite simple. My mother is Italian, so I have Italian citizenship.
Ma’am, that may be true but I can ask you whatever questions I deem necessary for reasons of security.

Still unsatisfied with my responses, the agent proceeded to ask me what I was doing in Italy, and whether I planned to return. After several more minutes of tense question-and-answer in rapid-fire Italian, she finally relented and handed me my boarding pass with a dramatic huff.

The motive behind this intrusive line of questioning was quite simple, I realized. To the woman behind the counter, I did not look sufficiently “Italian”—there was a disconnect between my brown skin and my burgundy passport. And at a moment when panicked reports were circulating about terrorists obtaining fraudulent EU passports, and about “second-generation” immigrants automatically obtaining European citizenship and then pledging allegiance to ISIL, this supposed incongruity made me a potential security risk. Of course, my story of disrupted conference travel did not compare to the forms of outright border violence endured by migrants seeking to cross the threshold of Fortress Europe. After all, I always had the option of unsheathing my US passport as a way of solidifying my security “credentials.” Nonetheless, the way that I had been momentarily ensnared in a broader web of racial profiling at the border showed that for all hopes of a postracial Europe, Italian citizenship was still normatively being conflated with whiteness. And in fact, once I posted about this incident on Facebook, it spread like wildfire across the social media pages of citizenship reform groups and Black Italian activists, who, knowing me personally, pointed to my story as evidence that even an Italian citizen “by blood” can be denied recognition on the basis of skin color.

The (a)symmetries of my own Black Italianness afforded me a unique opportunity to engage intimately with the spatial politics of Blackness and diaspora. In practice, my research resembled what Tina Campt, in her work on Black Germans, describes as “intercultural address”:

This term describes a series of eruptions / interruptions that I encountered repeatedly in the process of interviewing: as an African-American, I often became the object of “address.” . . . These unexpected exchanges
were moments where I became aware of gaps of translation and moments of interpellation between us, as well as how we actively produced Black identity in our dialogues. My informants repeatedly made strategic use of Black America to articulate their assumptions of our similarities and commonalities as Black people while always emphatically insisting on the specificity of our culturally distinct experiences of race in our respective societies.5

Indeed, the myriad ways that my Black-American-Italianness resonated, clashed, and harmonized with the experiences of my Black Italian interlocutors yielded profound, situated insights about the geographical and historical specificities of Black cultural politics in Italy on the one hand, and the global scale of anti-Black racism and resistance on the other. But while it presented an incredible opening for inquiry, this proximity could often be painful. In one instance, a Black Italian comrade once introduced me to a friend at an event as “Camilla, an American who came to Italy for a year to study Black Italians”—unintentionally invisibilizing my own Black Italianness in just a few words. On a different occasion, another Black Italian friend asked me pointedly over drinks if Black Americans were really part of the African diaspora, since (in his words) we had no real cultural connection to the African continent. On these occasions—when I, as Ashanté Reese writes, “did not meet the expectations that are sometimes affixed to racial solidarity”—I would have to swallow the lump in my throat, take a deep breath, and remind myself to just “save it for the dissertation [or book].”6 While they were challenging, I ultimately came to understand these moments of mis- / de-identification as significant, because they actually revealed the ways that people understood the relationships among race, place, nation, citizenship, and diaspora. They also pointed to the relative privilege of transnational mobility and access that accrued to me by virtue of my Americanness—a reminder to take seriously power differentiations within and across the Black diaspora. These uncomfortable moments surfaced the continued, yet oft-overlooked relevance of citizenship status to Black anti-racist politics; they also shed light on the ways that the nation-state might condition, but can never fully contain, the capacious spatial reach of Black diasporic imaginaries and practices.

But for these same reasons, the boundaries between my personal life (as someone with family and close friends in Italy), my political life (as an anti-racist activist), and my professional life (as an academic researcher) frequently blurred in ways that were simultaneously generative and challenging. As noted above, I actively participated in activist meetings and demonstrations about citizenship reform, helped to organize events and workshops about Black Italianness, and even cofounded a Black Italian meet-up group based in Milan. In any of these
moments, was I participating as an ethnographer? As an activist? As a friend? As a politically engaged citizen? Or some combination of all of the above? In a sense, this degree of entanglement is actually central to my research praxis: I believe that it is my responsibility to make use of my own academic capital by supporting the mobilizations of Black Italians and amplifying their voices wherever possible—also because in many ways their struggles are *mine* as well! But at the same time, this unique level of access comes with a great deal of ethical and political responsibility. For this reason, I sought to ensure throughout that I maintained transparency as a researcher, always explaining to new interlocutors why I was in Italy, the research I was conducting, my study methods, and the forms in which my research would ultimately appear when complete. Like Steven Gregory’s description in *The Devil behind the Mirror* of performing a particular kind of “seriousness” in the field, I sometimes made a point to conspicuously wield my pen and notebook (or the iPhone Notes app) during conversations, meetings, and other gatherings.  

During my research, I also regularly gave public lectures and spoke on panels in Italy and wrote for public-facing audiences (through blogs, books, and more) in Italian—ensuring that my work would not remain siloed in the inaccessible “ivory tower” of American academia, and that I maintained a certain level of accountability to the interlocutors and communities in Italy who had supported my research for so many years. This is a practice that I continue to this day. Indeed, as this manuscript was taking shape, I actually traveled back to Milan to meet with a group of friends, interlocutors, and other stakeholders in the Black Italian community for a chapter-by-chapter discussion of my book project, during which I could preview the ways that my years of research in Italy would finally take shape in the form of an academic monograph.  

It is my sincere intent that this project proves to be as useful for my friends, comrades, and interlocutors in Italy as it has been for me and my lifelong effort to reconcile my own Blackness with my Italianness. I hope that my interlocutors will see their voices and stories reflected faithfully in the narrative of this book, and that my offerings prove to be politically useful for ongoing efforts to challenge the hegemony of the Italian racial state, undo border violence, and support the conditions of possibility for Black livingness and liberation.