Chapter 7
Black Rome

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The first protest against racism in Italy did not take place with the rise of Black Lives Matter (BLM) in June 2020, but rather as a consequence of the homicide of Jerry Essan Masslo, a South African man who had escaped from apartheid in 1988. Harvesting tomatoes for €2 an hour in southern Italy, he had found himself trapped in another racist system where he was forced to work in underpaid, harsh conditions. Protesting against this unjust system, he joined unions and organized strikes, and he became popular after he was interviewed on national television.

On the night of August 24, 1989, a group of four young white Italians, who already had criminal records, entered what the media and the politicians referred to as "the ghetto of Villa Literno" (Capua 2020), where immigrants lived in dire conditions. While they were trying to rob Masslo and his friends, they shot and killed him. A large protest in reaction to the murder took place in Rome in October 1989, creating the first such antiracism action in Italy's history.

Since then, other antiracist protests have taken place following similar incidents, but what was special about June 2020 was that it was the first time when demonstrations happened simultaneously in so many cities in Italy. The rise of the BLM movement brought with it anger toward white people who seemed to have never cared about racism, especially those who had always declared themselves "antiracist" but never allowed Black people to speak for themselves and often minimized the negative impact of micro-aggressions, claiming that Italy is not a racist country and that "Italians are

good people"[1] – hence, "they can't be racist." Notions like this seemed to confirm that the USA had a bigger racism problem than Italy.

In fact, when the Malian-born civil rights defender Soumaila Sacko was killed by unknown assailants in southern Italy in 2018, while he was collecting scrap metal from an abandoned factory to build a shack in the tent city of San Ferdinando, only a handful of local newspapers reported on the case and no large protests took place. Yet, when a Black man on the other side of the ocean was brutally killed by the police, people took to the streets in massive numbers. Surely, the pandemic contributed to highlighting that momentum. When Black people in Italy started realizing the potential of this, they became hopeful. The possibility now presented itself to finally start a conversation about racism that was long overdue.

The organizational phase was a challenge, but bringing all the groups together created a meaningful moment. It was important to transform BLM from a US-centered agenda into local, Italian requests. Therefore, after a long discussion, members of Cantiere from Milan and QuestaèRoma from Rome, two historical antiracist organizations, wrote and adopted the following manifesto to support the protests in their respective cities:

> The racist ferocity that we have seen with the killing of George Floyd and the children in the favelas in Brazil is supported by a system of oppression that continually absolves itself, in order to continue acting undisturbed. To oppose it, it is not enough to denounce it, it must be questioned, torn out from its cultural and economic foundations. Racism does not let us breathe.
> #BlackLivesMatter in Italy means tackling Afrophobia.
> #BlackLivesMatter in Italy means to stop identifying the Black body as a foreign body.
> #BlackLivesMatter in Italy means listening and giving a voice to Black and racialized people.
> #BlackLivesMatter in Italy means renouncing one's privileges and questioning a system that allows a few to live on the shoulders of many.
> #BlackLivesMatter in Italy means to stop postponing the reform of the Italian citizenship law.

1 In Italian: "italiani brava gente." This is a very popular motto that has always been used and disseminated, but especially during the colonial wars.

> #BlackLivesMatter in Italy means to remember Abba Abdul Guiebre, Jerry Masslo, Idy Diene, Soumaila Sacko, Emmanuel Chidi Namdi, Becky Moses, Jennifer Otioto, Gideon Azeke, Mahamadou Toure, Wilson Kofi Omagbon, Omar Fadera.
> Racism does not let us breathe. It's like dust in the air. It seems invisible, even when it takes your breath away until you choke. If you let the sun in, on the other hand, you can see it: it is everywhere. As long as we shed light, we will have the ability to eliminate it wherever it is. But we must be vigilant, because it is always in the air.[2]

In June 2020, more than 3,000 people gathered in Piazza del Popolo in Rome and knelt down for more than nine minutes, the same length of time that the policeman stood on George Floyd's neck. That long moment was one of the few occasions when Black Italian people felt acknowledged as human beings by the rest of the Italian population, as citizens of the same country, hopeful for equal human rights. However, this moment was not as impactful or as lasting as many wished. Some of the protests were organized by white-led, mainly communist organizations that left out any Black people who did not embrace their ideology. As a result, many Black people went back home afterwards even more frustrated than they had been before. Therefore, the involvement of people belonging to the groups most exposed to discrimination and racism is often instrumental and unequal.

In reaction to the coverage of BLM on social media, people started to compare the case of George Floyd, and many other Black people before him, with the case of Stefano Cucchi – a poor, young white Italian man from the Roman suburbs who was charged with drug dealing and died in a prison hospital after he was brutally beaten up by guards in 2009. His death contributed to the confusion that often happens in Italy when one tries to address the problem of racism: It is often used as an umbrella term for different forms of discrimination, which often leads to "race" being obscured by "class," as if they were mutually exclusive, instead of two separate entities that intersect. This misunderstanding occurs when the concept of white privilege is addressed; working-class white Italians claim that, since they have been living in poverty, they do not have white privilege. But race is always there, even in the working class, so comparing Floyd with Cucchi misses the point.

2 Translated from Italian.

Tracing Colonial History

For many young Italians of Color Roma Termini was the main meeting point between 2007 and 2010. Even when the station was not their final destination, they would still pass by to see if there was anything interesting happening. Nowadays, it is no longer a point of reference for youth, but it is still a central location for the African diaspora, tourists, and immigrants from the entire world. In the area surrounding the station, which includes Piazza dei Cinquecento and Piazza Vittorio, one can find currency exchange shops, international restaurants, African hair stylists, and shops that sell international foods. Many people, however, are unaware of the history behind the name "Piazza dei Cinquecento," where the Dogali obelisk, a significant memorial to Italian colonialism and anti-Blackness, once stood. "Cinquecento" (Five Hundred) symbolically referred to the number of Italian soldiers who died in the battle of Dogali, a small city in Eritrea, where the first major Italian defeat on the African continent took place on January 26, 1887, during the first phase of Italian expansion into Eritrea.

Erected to commemorate the Italians who lost their lives on this occasion, the monument is composed of an ancient obelisk that was commissioned by Pharaoh Ramses II and later brought to Rome by Emperor Domitian, who placed it next to other obelisks in the temple of Campo Marzio (in Rome, there are ten obelisks in total). Centuries later, the obelisk was found during archeological research by Rodolfo Lanciani in the area of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. In 1887, a few months after the defeat of Dogali, the architect Francesco Azzurri was commissioned by the government to build a base for it to make a monument and place it in the center of the square. However, his work was heavily criticized, not because it was commemorating colonialism, but because it did not provide the majesty and grandeur that the government had wished for the fallen soldiers. In 1924, the mayor decided to renovate parts of the central station, so the monument was moved to Via delle Terme, where it still stands today, almost hidden and disregarded.

According to historians, the Italian defeat was due to strategic mistakes, an underrated evaluation of the Abyssinian army, and a lack of military preparation.[3] Colonial Lieutenant Colonel Tommaso De Cristoforis

3 "Dogali, Dizionario di Storia," *Treccani,* 2010 (https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/dogali_%28Dizionario-di-Storia%29/)

in particular minimized the risk of being brutally beaten by an African army, probably due to a sense of race superiority that was at the core of the entire colonial campaign. However, it was not uncommon to find intellectuals sharing skeptical expectations with regard to the decision to start colonial expansion. They knew that the Italian army would not be ready: They had just reunified the nation and they did not have enough motivation or resources to undertake such a mission. And for this reason the government decided to commemorate the death of Italian soldiers in a heroic way to somehow convince the population of the rightness of the Fascists' desire to go to war to build the Italian Empire. Thus, officials ordered the monument to the battle of Dogali to be erected. Some left-wing politicians voiced their opposition, but the general patriotic feeling that was triggered did not allow for the necessary evaluation of the loss and possible abandonment of the colonial mission. Moreover, the Ascari, Eritrean mercenaries who fought for the Italian army and also died in the battle, are not remembered. Many deserted because of the abuses they suffered at the hands of the Italians.

Figure 7.1: The Dogali obelisk was a site of protest, denouncing state violence and proclaiming "Black Lives Matter." Photograph: Kwanza Musi Dos Santos

In addition, in 1936, after the conquest of Addis Ababa, a golden lion was stolen from the emperor, brought to Rome, and placed next to the Dogali obelisk, in order to commemorate the possessions and territories that officially represented the Italian Empire. Today, the lion is no longer there. Thanks to diplomatic negotiations it was finally returned to Haile Selassie, following his first visit to Rome in 1970, after more than 30 years. Despite the

presence of these monuments, most Italians ignore the history of colonialism, and those few who do know about it often think that Mussolini initiated the colonial campaign in the Horn of Africa around 1925. In fact, colonialism started decades before, shortly after Italy had become a nation state in 1861.

After Francesco Crispi became minister of the interior in 1877, Italian colonial expansion made a decisive leap. According to the statesman, the bases in Eritrea were the starting points for the creation of a vast dominion over East Africa, where, however, Italy faced not only the resistance of governments and local populations, but also European competition from Great Britain and France. This history has been made increasingly visible in recent years. On June 2, 2020, during the national holiday to celebrate the birth of the Italian Republic in 1946, Rete Donne Migranti e Figlie (Network of Migrant Women and Daughters) organized a flash mob to protest against the idea of a "colonial republic" founded on institutional racism and systemic discrimination. They took impactful pictures in front of the monument to Dogali, holding signs denouncing state violence, while some stood topless with the words "Black Lives Matter" written on their backs. The aim was to shine a spotlight on the symbolic presence and significance of the monument, and also to show how colonial history is still present in Italian society, although the country's colonial past is often denied or disregarded. They also wanted to underline the hypocrisy of celebrating the democracy of a so-called republic while leaving commemorative monuments to colonialism throughout the city.

The following year, on February 6, 2021, Collettivo Tezeta, an interdisciplinary collective that carries out research, cultural, and didactic dissemination activities on Italian colonialism and contemporary immigration, inaugurated its first urban trekking route within Rome's African Quarter. "*Tezeta*" is a word in Tigrinya and Amharic that means memory, or memories that could be nostalgic and melancholy. The "narrative walks," called "Trekking UrbaAfricani," comprise long promenades in the company of Eritrean people, with recorded conversations that offer new names that refer to contemporary Eritrea (Via Agordat, Via Asmara, Via Assab, Via Cheren, Via Dancalia, Via Massaua, Via Senafè, Viale Eritrea). The recollections from past and present Eritrean residents who have chosen to share their stories and their experiences focus on Eritrean history and the ties, legacies, and wounds that have resulted from Italian colonialism. The collection of the first oral testi-

monies, which were intertwined with historical studies, took place in October, November, and December 2020.

Renaming these streets gives them a new and different meaning, a spokesperson of the organization said in an interview (Peretti 2021). A selection of the collected audio testimonies has subsequently become an integral and fundamental part of the tour, connecting the stages of the route and opening up or resuming historical themes, including colonial urbanism, town planning, and the first peasant revolts in Eritrea. The landscape of Rome's African Quarter serves as an impetus for the witnesses, who, together with the collective and the walkers, draw a map of the neighborhood from these counternarratives.

Supported by ARCS Culture Solidali and Archivio Memorie Migranti as part of the Pinocchio–Culture, Sport, Participation project, a civic and social network working against discrimination and for greater social inclusion, the tours have been popular since their inception, selling out in January and February 2021. The first 13 urban treks brought between 200 and 250 people to the neighborhood. One year later, the collective felt the need to go back to the drawing board to create route number two, which is currently being planned. The aim of the tours is to promote knowledge, (re)discover the connection between Italy and Eritrea, encourage public debate, and discuss the dominant themes in education, which are characterized by languages and attitudes that need to be decolonized.[4]

However, the stories reach beyond colonialism. Some of the interviewees are young immigrants who extend these common accounts well beyond 1947 (the year of the official end of Italian colonial dominance in Eritrea):

> The stories are not all focused on colonialism; we still try to talk about it to touch on this topic, but their stories cannot be limited only to this aspect because otherwise we silence them again, creating a relationship of subordination.[5]

In addition to being able to continue the guided tours, the collective also plans to bring its work to schools, as Italian schoolchildren are taught that

4 Website of Collettivo Tezeta at https://resistenzeincirenaica.com/collettivo-tezeta/

5 "Trekking UrbAfricano: un percorso lungo un anno", Febuary 6, 2022 https://resistenzeincirenaica.com/2022/02/06/trekking-urbafricano-un-percorso-lungo-un-anno/

Italy never had colonies and that only England and France did. Meanwhile, ongoing coloniality is experienced in everyday life.

In April 2021, Collettivo Tezeta, TrekUrbano, and QuestaèRoma collaborated to create an anticolonial tour that passed in front of the Dogali monument and finished at the Cinema Impero (Empire), located in the multicultural neighborhood of Torpignattara. Identical cinemas were built in Rome and Asmara in 1937 during the Italian occupation. The name clearly recalls the superiority that the Italian Fascist government sought to suggest to their colonial campaign. The tour also passed the Pilo Albertelli school, located behind Termini station, which Isabella and Giorgio Marincola (to be discussed below) used to attend. The name commemorates the anti-fascist professor who was the head of Partito d'Azione (an anti-fascist resistance party) and who encouraged Marincola to become a member.

Not far from Termini station is the Di Donato school, which is known to be one of the most multicultural schools in Rome. There are more than 15 different nationalities in each class, and, initially, some white Italian parents asked that their children be placed somewhere else, because they thought that such a large number of children with foreign backgrounds might be damaging for them.[6] Moreover, representatives of educational institutions stated that, if classes had such a high percentage of pupils with different mother tongues, it would be more difficult for them to learn Italian. Fortunately, a group of parents, mostly white Italians, created a committee and rejected the allegations. Instead, they started organizing events aimed at valuing cultural diversity. Since then, the school has become a model for many parts of society and for various institutions and now has a waiting list.

Decoding Public Memory

Black knowledge is essential to decoding symbols, memory, and celebratory monuments, which is otherwise a difficult process. On the one hand, there are streets and buildings named after Black historical figures from other countries. Many are in honor of the South African leader Nelson Mandela,

6 "SCUOLA/ La lettera: troppi stranieri, ecco perché ho ritirato mio figlio", September 20, 2013 (https://www.ilsussidiario.net/news/educazione/2013/9/20/scuola-la-lettera-troppi-stranieri-ecco-perche-ho-ritirato-mio-figlio/428513/)

such as a library in Rome. On the other hand, there are hardly any streets or markers dedicated to any of the Black Italians who have played a significant role in history. Such figures include: Domenico Mondelli, born Wolde Selassie in Asmara, Eritrea in 1886. He was adopted by an Italian general, hence his name, who brought him to Italy where he attended the military academy. He became a captain, then a highly decorated general during World War One, and he is considered the first Black pilot in European and Italian history. Then there is Alessandro Sinigaglia, the son of a white Italian Jew and Cynthia White, an African American woman who came to Italy and worked as a waitress for a family from Saint Louis. Sinigaglia joined the Communist Party in 1926, which was considered an illegal organization at the time. He went to Spain to participate in the anti-fascist resistance against the dictator Francisco Franco, but was eventually exiled in France. He came back to Italy to help the resistance movement, but in 1944 he was killed by Fascists in an ambush.[7] There is a plaque at the site of his execution in Florence, but no other recognition of his contribution.

Even before 1900, there is evidence of the presence of Black Italians such as St. Benedict, who is considered the protector of the city of Palermo, Sicily. St. Benedict was born in 1524 in San Fratello, a small town west of Messina, and although he was the son of two enslaved Africans, he was granted freedom from birth. However, he still had to provide for himself, so he became a cow breeder. When he was 20 he met a hermit and decided to retire to a friary and lead a humble life, entirely dedicated to prayers and charity. He is remembered as a very good advisor: People would come from all parts of Italy to ask for his help and moral support. After his death, his legend spread even beyond Italian borders; in 1807, he was officially proclaimed a saint by the Holy See, becoming the first Black saint in history.

Another important figure who is often disregarded in Italian history is Alessandro de' Medici, known as Il Moro (the Moor), a pejorative name given to Black people at the time as mentioned in previous chapters. In school books, pupils often read about the Medici, one of the most powerful families ruling the Duchy of Florence during the Renaissance; they financially contributed to the first expeditions to South America in the 15th century. However, the story of Alessandro is very rarely told. He is believed to have been

7 "Donne e Uomini della Resistenza. Alessandro Sinigaglia", July 25, 2010 (https://www.anpi.it/donne-e-uomini/723/alessandro-sinigaglia)

the son of Giulio de' Medici, who became pope, and a Black woman who was serving the family. He grew up in the court of Pope Leo X and became the first Duke of Florence and the first Black regent in Europe in 1532. His portrait can be found in the Uffizi Museum in Florence. His story has become more popular, thanks to a short movie produced by the Black Italian director Daphne Di Cinto in 2021 (Tondo 2021).

At first sight, this lack of memorial symbols could be associated with the fact that the presence of Black Italians is not generally known by the public, but on closer examination it becomes clear that this selective amnesia is part of a systemic denial of the Black presence in Italy. This diminishes the impact of their acts, while symbols commemorating the colonization of Africa can be found everywhere in Rome. For example, similar to the case in Berlin, there is a quarter located in the northeast part of the city commonly known as the "African Quarter" because the streets are all named after former Italian colonies: Viale Libia, Viale Etiopia, Viale Somalia (Libya Avenue, Ethiopia Avenue, Somalia Avenue). However, under the signs indicating the name of these streets, no additional description can be found to explain what happened in those territories and why the streets were dedicated to those specific places.

Another marker of the country's colonial past stood in Piazza di Porta Capena for decades. The "*Stele di Axum*" (Axum obelisk) was stolen from Ethiopia and brought to Rome by Benito Mussolini in 1937, during the Italian occupation of the East African nation. Twenty-seven meters high and weighing about 150 tons, the obelisk can be traced back to a period between the 1st and the 4th century AD. Italy erected the stele to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the March on Rome as a glorification of the then "new Roman empire" (Sarnelli 2016). The Italians had located the obelisk in 1935 and transported it to the port of Massawa, 400 kilometers away from its original location, to load it on a ship bound for Naples. It was an unprecedented two-month undertaking. At the end of World War Two, the obelisk became the source of a diplomatic dispute that divided Italy and Ethiopia. Addis Ababa asked for the return of assets stolen by the Fascist regime, and among the priorities of the treaty signed between the two countries was the repatriation of the obelisk. In 1969, the ministry of foreign affairs decided to send it back to the court of Emperor Haile Selassie, but he never managed to retrieve it, probably due to the high shipping cost. Thirty years later, after Selassie had been deposed, Ethiopia again requested its return. The monument was eventually sent back to Ethiopia in 2005 after long and embarrassing negotiations and

has been replaced by a memorial to the victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks (ibid.).

The Fascist tendency to dictate public memory still continues today. In 2018, Virginia Raggi, the first female mayor of Rome, firmly opposed a motion approved by the national parliament to dedicate a street to Giorgio Almirante, one of the main members of the Fascist party. Although Italy has a law that criminalizes acts of Fascist apology or celebration, it is very common for right-wing parties to evoke members of the former Fascist regime, to praise their actions, and to honor their contribution to the nation. Therefore, the approval of this motion should not be so surprising; however, it raised indignation, especially from the Jewish community.

As a consequence, in September 2019, with approval from the council, the mayor renamed three streets that were formerly titled after Fascists: Via Arturo Donaggio became Via Mario Carrara, passing the baton from the biologist who edited the 1938 Fascist "Manifesto of Race" to a pioneer of Italian forensic medicine, who is remembered as one of the very few Italian university professors who refused the oath of allegiance to Fascism. Largo Arturo Donaggio was renamed Largo Nella Mortara, after the only female physicist at the famous Physics Institute in Rome, who was banned from the academic world because she was Jewish. Finally, Via Edoardo Zavattari was changed to Via Enrica Calabresi, in honor of the Italian zoologist and entomologist of Jewish origin who killed herself in order to avoid deportation. However, none of them were subsequently dedicated to Black Italians.

Meanwhile, of the few memorials to Black Italians, one important accomplishment for the antiracist and decolonial Italian movement, can be partly attributed to the rise of BLM. The name of the metro station Amba Aradam-Ipponio (which has been under construction since 2013), was initially taken from a nearby street and refers to a small mountain in Ethiopia where, during Italian colonialism, Fascist soldiers killed 20,000 people using mustard gas, a toxic substance that was forbidden by the Geneva convention. Due to this incident, the name of the street had been questioned for many years, but no concrete answer was given. On the night of June 19, 2020, a group of activists called Rete Restiamo Umani, who are mostly white Italians, went to the nearby Via dell'Amba Aradam and substituted the signs, renam-

ing it after George Floyd and Bilal Ben Messaud.[8] The latter was a 28-year-old Tunisian immigrant who died in Porto Empedocle on May 20, 2020 as he desperately swam across the Mediterranean, trying to reach land. He had escaped from forced confinement on a "quarantine ship" where immigrants were kept by government mandate for two weeks after their arrival to stop Covid-19 transmission.[9]

The same group then went to the city center and threw red paint on the bust of Italian colonialist Antonio Baldissera that stands on the Pincio terrace, where many locals and tourists often go to admire the view. According to the activists, throwing red paint on the bust was done to symbolically reject the celebration of colonial history that is considered glorious for one side but undoubtedly tragic for the other, and, most importantly, to interrupt a history that memorializes white supremacy. A panel was added on the wall with the following quote: "No street can have the name of oppression."[10]

With support from both the BLM movement of Rome and the Association NIBI (Neri Italiani/Black Italians), journalist Massimiliano Coccia launched a petition addressed to the mayor, requesting the official renaming of the metro station Amba Aradam-Ipponio and for it to be dedicated to Giorgio Marincola. Marincola was the son of a white Italian man and a Somalian woman, Aschirò Hassan. Although during Fascism white Italian men were discouraged from legitimately recognizing their children with Black women, Marincola's father accepted his son and, without the consent of their mother, brought him and his sister Isabella to Italy. Marincola should be remembered especially for his courage and loyalty to the resistance movement – the *Partigiani* – that fought against the Nazis during World War Two.[11]

Many organizations and intellectuals signed the petition, including Roberto Saviano, a Neapolitan journalist famous for his courage in denouncing the Mafia and other corrupt systems he investigated. Another important

8 "Black Lives Matter a Roma: via Amba Aradam diventa via George Floyd. Vernice rossa su una statua al Pincio," June 19, 2020, (https://www.romatoday.it/cronaca/black-lives-matter-a-roma.html)

9 "Italy anti-racism activists deface statue, alter street name, June 19, 2020 (https://www.reuters.com/article/minneapolis-police-italy-idINKBN23Q274)

10 In the original: "nessuna stazione abbia il nome dell'oppressione."

11 "Italy: Rome to name metro station after ‚black partisan'", August 25, 2020 (https://www.wantedinrome.com/news/italy-rome-to-name-metro-station-after-black-partisan.html)

supporter was the writer Antar Marincola, the son of Isabella and nephew of Giorgio Marincola, who had previously collaborated with Wu Ming to map Italian colonialism.[12] The petition obtained more than 2,000 signatures in only a few days and, although it was initially rejected by the local municipality, the mayor brought the motion to the attention of the city council, which finally approved it on August 4, 2020. Two years earlier, in September 2018, to commemorate his birthday, a plaque dedicated to Giorgio Marincola had been placed in Piazza Enrico Cosenz, in the neighborhood of Casal Bertone, on the building where he used to live in Rome. The celebration was independently organized and promoted by ANPI (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia), not by the local municipality. So far, it is the only visible marker in Rome.

Figure 7.2: Plaque honoring Giorgio Marincola, a hero of the World War Two resistance. Photograph: Kwanza Musi Dos Santos

The month after the council's approval of the station's renaming, and just three months after George Floyd's murder, Willy Monteiro Duarte, aged 21, was killed on September 6, 2020, after intervening when a group of four white youngsters beat up his friend in Colleferro, a small town on the outskirts of Rome. It is interesting to note that, while covering the news of his death, the media failed to recognize Duarte as a Black Italian. Many referred to him as the "Cape Verdean" or

12 Wu Ming is an anonymous collective of Italian journalists. The map can be found at https://umap.openstreetmap.fr/it/map/viva-zerai_519378#6/41.894/7.998

the "foreigner," although he held Italian citizenship and was born in Rome. The family of two of the white aggressors declared: "[H]e was just an immigrant." (Di Benedetto Montaccini 2020). This happens often, suggesting the idea that a Black person cannot be Italian, for Italians are (only) white.

Two weeks later, protests took place in several Italian cities calling for "Justice for Willy" and reclaiming the BLM motto. For most Black activists, the link with the brutality of George Floyd's murder and racism was undeniable. However, Duarte's family asked that his death not be associated with racism. In a Facebook post, they explained:

> We, the family, would like these demonstrations not to be a political tool to talk about racism, fascism or various parties. As much as we condemn and consider deeply wrong feelings such as racism, Willy was the victim of unwarranted cruelty and ferocity, which has no color or race. And we, the family, think everyone is the same. Nobody has to die like this anymore![13]

In the following months, many initiatives were dedicated to Duarte's memory, including a scholarship at the University of International Studies in Rome for a student from Cape Verde. And, on October 16, 2020, the municipality of Rome accepted a motion presented by many associations to name a little garden after Duarte; this is located in the area of Piazza Vittorio, a neighborhood not far from Roma Termini central railway station.

QuestaèRoma: This Is Rome

Historically, most organizations of immigrants and People of Color in Italy are based on the ethnicity or nationality of their members: for instance, the Association of Cameroonians or the Association of Filipinos, which periodically organize cultural events, parties, and gatherings and sometimes offer support to newcomers from their countries. Unlike France's assimilation system or the UK's multiculturalism, Italy has never had a real integration model that was planned and implemented by the government. Thus, there are no specific areas where populations of color and/or immigrants are deliberately concentrated; however, the industries and commercial hubs of

13 Translated from Italian.

northern Italy have attracted many people. In addition, because the current census does not include either race or ethnicity, it is difficult to calculate how many Black people live in Italy. In fact, once they acquire citizenship, Black Italians all fall under the category of "Italian citizens."

QuestaèRoma (This Is Rome) is an association that was founded in May 2013. Its name draws on the romanticized idea of Ancient Rome, as a crossroads between various worlds and cultures. It represents the heterogeneous plurality of the so-called "second generation"[14] – or, as they prefer to call themselves, "Italians of foreign background." In fact, out of the 5 million immigrants currently residing in Italy, half of them – i.e., more than 2 million – are white (for example, from Romania, Albania, and Ukraine). So not every Person of Color has the status of immigrant and not every immigrant (or their child) is a Person of Color. However, during the last ten years, when the media talk about immigrants or immigration, they mostly use images of Black people, even though they represent a minority demographically.[15]

QuestaèRoma started its activity at a time when it seemed likely the reform of the citizenship law would soon be implemented. The main left-wing party had won the elections and had gained a majority of seats in the Italian parliament. Hence, the organization's primary focus was on the social and political citizenship of young people of "foreign background" in order to secure their active and conscious political participation. The current law claims that a child born and raised in Italy by two foreign parents must stay in the country uninterruptedly for 18 years in order to be eligible to request Italian citizenship. They must make the request within a year and pay for it. If a child was not born in Italy, but came to the country at an early age with their foreign parents, they need to prove uninterrupted residence for ten years and present numerous documents, including a clear criminal record from their parents' country of origin (translated into Italian), in order to apply for citizenship. After each request, the minister of the interior, by law, can take up to 36 months to respond. Requests can also be rejected for trivial reasons, without the fee being reimbursed.

Since 2005, activists had been trying to move beyond this concept of citizenship, which is ambiguous. In fact, although the current citizenship law

14 Website of Rete G2 at https://www.secondegenerazioni.it/about/

15 "Il vero contributo degli immigrati alla crescita del Pil italiano", June 7, 2013 (https://www.agi.it/fact-checking/immigrati_pil_italia-5648357/news/2019-06-13/)

can be considered the main tool of institutional racism, racist policies and attitudes can be found at many other levels of society too. As a consequence, a Person of Color who, for example, was born Italian, inheriting citizenship from one of their parents, would still have to deal with racial profiling and everyday racism. At the same time, children of white immigrants can also encounter legal difficulties and discrimination because they do not have Italian citizenship, or because their name is racialized. The challenge is to consider the diversity of what it means to be Italian.

To tackle these issues, QuestaèRoma was established by seven young Italian activists and artists of color – some with Italian citizenship, some without. Half of the board is composed of People of African Descent (PAD). The members realized that Rome lacked an organization that did not deal with rights in "silos" – for instance, women dealt only with gender equality, LGBTQA+ people with homophobia, Blacks with racism, and so on. Instead, they strongly believe in the principle of intersectionality – namely, that a single person can be the bearer of multiple characteristics and therefore subject to different social and systemic oppressions that occur at the same time. Furthermore, it is not necessary to be part of a socially marginalized group in order to fight against the discrimination that group experiences, as it is important to combat all injustices even if they do not affect you directly.

At the same time, it is key to avoid paternalism, political exploitation, tokenism, and trivialization. Therefore, QuestaèRoma aims to represent the many young people who need to overcome the obstacles that prevent them from participating in decision-making processes. One of the main objectives of the association is to bring politics closer to young people, and young people closer to politics, since they are often disillusioned or disinterested. Its goal is to create new social and safe spaces, preferably in informal contexts – and also to promote arts and culture as tools of interaction that encourage collectivity and the exchange of experiences between those fighting discrimination, despite their differing legal and family situations.

In 2014, one of the first events organized by QuestaèRoma was a public debate that involved youth leaders of all parties. It was designed to enable them to discuss their ideas about youth policies. The meeting provided a rare opportunity for young people of different backgrounds to have a direct experience of politics and to understand that voting is not the only way to be actively involved. A particular commitment is to education; at a programmatic level, QuestaèRoma is working to increase the number of teachers and other pro-

fessionals with a "foreign background" and to change the curriculum so that, for example, the history of Italian colonialism is included and the weekly civic education hour, which is compulsory in all schools, is used to increase dialogue.

Figure 7.3: QuestaèRoma's campaign against racism featured a photoshoot featuring People of Color

One year later, QuestaèRoma organized its first protest in solidarity with BLM, in response to what was happening in Ferguson (USA) and created one of the first campaigns against racism, #ItalianoNonèUnColore (Italian Is Not a Color). It included a public call to participate in a photoshoot in Piazza del Popolo that would then generate a traveling exhibition. The images showed the participants with traces of white paint on their faces, captioned with provocative phrases such as "Can I vote now?" and "Can I be respected now?" More than 100 people attended. They felt empowered by the impact they had on passers-by, who were intrigued by seeing such a large gathering of Italians of Color. For some people, it was the first time they had been portrayed by a Black photographer, Carlos Lora Toma Acosta, who enhanced their traits and gave value to their skin color.

In 2020, the prominence of BLM renewed the fight against systemic and structural racism and Afrophobia and led to the creation of a video series called Fading,[16] which was promoted under the hashtag #prendiamolaparola. QuestaèRoma was involved in the series and supported the collective aim to denounce the effects and causes of structural racism in Italy. The materials are now being used to raise awareness and to create workshops promoting antiracism in schools all over the country. Following this campaign, in April 2021 a group of antiracist organizations and independent activists from

16 "FADING #prendiamolaparola", April 25, 2021 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWV-J1lxuX2g&t=3s)

all over Italy sent a public letter to RAI (the national public broadcasting channel), challenging the media's repeated use of racial slurs and Blackface during several TV shows. Under the name of #cambieRAI they conducted a successful mass mailing to all representatives and employees of public television. In the letter, they firmly condemned recent incidents, calling for more respect toward minorities as well as for more representation (Hughes 2021). The following year, the TV channel's division dedicated to social issues, called Rai per il Sociale, launched a call inviting all organizations dealing with antiracism to create a permanent consulting committee. The negotiations on who will participate are still ongoing.

The recently founded organizations and the activities they are creating are putting pressure on officials to address structural racism; at the same time, they are educating the public about the country's history as well as its current treatment of immigrants and People of Color. It is important to note that the changes taking place are thanks to a resistance that will keep expanding into the future.

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