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**Black Babies/White Sovereignities: *Tammurriata nera* as a Perverse Mechanism of US and Italian Colonialisms**

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**ABSTRACT**

In this paper we argue that a full acknowledgment of Italian post-colonial responsibility is only possible once we properly supplant problematic, xenophobic and narrow definitions of a unified Italian identity. As the brief for this special issue proposes, post-WWII and following the fall of Fascism, Italy's colonial heritage practically disappeared from public discourse. Simultaneously, the national myth of 'Italiani brava gente' – the notion that Italians are well-meaning, good people, relieving Italian nationhood from admitting colonial culpability and hence taking post-colonial responsibility (cf. Del Boca 2010-2012) – began to pervade representations in film and song.

We argue that 'Italiani brava gente' can be understood as articulating limited Northern-centric notions of Italianness, tracing back to limited definitions of unified national identity and belonging. We propose that a 'post-Italian' dialogue – which looks beyond received notions of national unity, and instead inquires about the stories that can and must be told from Italy's various internal and external colonial peripheries (cf. Messina 2016) – is a way to move beyond the resilient national myth of 'Italiani brava gente'. In this paper we explore what we argue to be a Southern Italian manifestation of 'Italiani brava gente' – the racist Neapolitan song *Tammurriata nera*. Looking to a recent performance of *Tammurriata nera* in the documentary film *Passione* (2010), we find an example of properly 'post-Italian' dialogue – and of the complex racial problematics involved in imagining an expanded horizon of Italianness.

**White sovereign ontologies of Italian nationhood**

Our approach starts from the notion that Italy has a complex colonial heritage, which post-WWII and the fall of Fascism practically erased from public discourse. By complex colonial heritage, we mean to posit that Italian nationhood must be understood in terms of a doubly articulated colonialism: whilst external (post-)colonies have been configured as *absolute other*, internal Southern Peninsula and Islands can be understood to occupy the internal nation-space

as *incorporable otherness* (Pugliese 2007b). In the post-WWII period, dialogue around Italy's colonial history, and its continuing post-colonial responsibilities, has been sparse. As the other contributions to this special issue note, the notion of 'Italiani brava gente' has dominated cinematic representations; a national myth narrating Italians as well-intentioned, thereby relieving a sense of national culpability. Gabriele Salvatores's *Mediterraneo* (1991), for example, is an internationally award-winning film about a troop of Italian soldiers stranded on a Greek island during WWII: it shows the military mission in terms of a friendly encounter between Italians and Greeks, continuously validated by the motto "*una faccia, una razza*" [same face, same race]. Clarissa Clò argues that *Mediterraneo* "falls short of a real engagement with the Italian war and occupation of Greece" by not proposing "a rigorous reconsideration of the Italian involvement in an unjustified war of occupation" (Clò 2009: 103). Importantly, Clò continues by reflecting on the amorous relationship between Italian soldier Farina and Greek prostitute Vassilissa, and argues that it is narrated in a way to obliterate and efface the Italian army's racio-gendered violence against Greek women.

Recent scholarship (c.f. for example Labanca 2005) has begun to interrogate Italy's imperial past, asking how critical sites of historical remembering can facilitate a coming to terms with the consequences of its imperialist past for its post-colonial present. However, we propose that a proper acknowledgement of Italy's post-colonial responsibilities requires a critical remembering of its multiply elided subjects, by connecting the sovereign ontologies underscoring Italian Unification, colonialism and Fascist imperialism. A full acknowledgment of colonial culpability and post-colonial responsibility must take the form, we propose, of a 'post-Italian' dialogue wherein an acknowledgement of Italy's subjugation of Southern Italianness and global Southernness can take place. In previous work (Messina 2016a; Messina 2016b; Capogreco 2017; Messina 2018a; Messina 2018b), we proposed the identification of a "post-Italian" discursive space. Those involved in the production of post-Italian discourses do not necessarily address a desire to overcome Italian national unity, but rather seek to rethink their own identities and aspirations as the result of a direct engagement with past historical moments that highlight the violent North-centric acts and discourses on which contemporary Italy is built.

Through the notion of post-Italian dialogue, we propose that Italy has a North-centric colonial centre, which can and must be productively re-positioned and re-oriented by an acknowledgement of its multiple southern peripheries.

A way of moving past the post-WWII national myth of 'Italiani brava gente', we contend, is by interrogating Italy's colonial zero-point through the prism of what cultural theorists Franco Cassano and Paola Zaccaria respectively call "Southern thought" (Cassano 2011) and "Southern critical thinking" (Zaccaria 2015).

It is precisely in taking a post-Italian approach that we can interrogate the broader histories of racism and racialisation undergirding both Unified Italian identity and Italian colonialisms. The national myth of 'Italiani brava gente' can be located with respect to Italy and Europe's North/South geopolitical axis of whiteness. The Unification of Italy in 1861 involved the violent and assimilative annexation of the Southern Peninsula and Sicily. Around this time, notions of distinct Nordic (northern European), Alpine (central European) and Mediterranean (southern European) races were salient across Europe (cf. Pugliese 2002: 154). Importantly, according to Joseph Pugliese (2007a; 2007b), Europe's North/South racialising

axis has assumed profound weight in Italy: to be *Northern Italian* was (and is) to be considered a white European modern citizen (Schneider 1998; Guglielmo 2003). Pugliese shows that the formation of a dominant (northern) Italian identity was therefore predicated on a “white historicide” (Pugliese 2007a) – involving cultural and linguistic erasure, penal internment, and scientifically racist discourses of criminal southern temperament and physiognomy – of the South as African and Arab, marking Southerners as Italy’s *noi altri* [we others] (Pugliese 2007b). In this context, it is worth interrogating how the post-WWII national myth of ‘Italiani brava gente’ – foreclosing an acknowledgement of Italy’s colonial past – functions through representations, films and songs from Southern Italy.

In this paper, drawing upon the work of Messina and Di Somma (2017), we compare the violent annexation of the South during Italian Unification with the Allied occupation of Southern Italy during the final stages of WWII. By doing this, we are not attempting to minimise European colonial intervention in Africa. Rather, we reflect on common “histories of racialised sexual violence against Southern Italian women” (Messina and Di Somma 2017: 2) to the extent that connections can be seen between the Allied occupation and colonial invasion. In this context, Messina and Di Somma, drawing upon Gribaudi (2005) have also reflected on the exclusive blaming of racialised Moroccan troops for the rapes in Southern Italy, popularly known as *marocchinate*.

### ***Tammurriata nera*: constructing Southern Italy’s post-WWII ‘black baby problem’**

During the post-WWII period and following the fall of Fascism, as modes of representing the myth of ‘Italiani brava gente’ were emerging, the Neapolitan song *Tammurriata nera* (1944) gained broad popularity across Italy. The lyrics of *Tammurriata nera* were written in 1944 – after the 1943 Armistice of Cassibile and the subsequent occupation of Southern Italy by Allied troops – by Eduardo Nicolardi, a hospital administrator. The music was composed by E. A. Mario (a pseudonym for Ermete Giovanni Gaeta) who was a well-known Neapolitan composer and songwriter (Greene 2007: 42; Perilli 2015: 126). The song’s lyrics – now well-known and critiqued for their racist remarks – saw the song quickly rise to broader popularity on a national level.

Io nun capisco, ê vvote, che succede...	Sometimes I don’t understand what’s going
E chello ca se vede,	on...
Nun se crede! nun se crede!	and what we see
E' nato nu criaturo niro, niro...	is hard to believe! It’s hard to believe!
E 'a mamma 'o chiamma Giro,	A little child has been born, black, black,
Sissignore, 'o chiamma Giro...	and his mamma calls him Giro:
Séh! gira e vota, séh...	yessir she calls him Giro!
Séh! vota e gira, séh...	Yeah! twist and turn however you like, yeah!
Ca tu 'o chiamme Ciccio o 'Ntuono,	Yeah! twist and turn however you like, yeah!
Ca tu 'o chiamme Peppe o Giro,	Whether you call him Ciccio or Ntuono,
Chillo, o fatto, è niro, niro,	Whether you call him Peppe or Giro,
Niro, niro comm'a che!...	That boy in reality is black black,

	Black black and how!
'O contano 'e ccummare chist'affare:	
"Sti fatte nun só' rare,	The neighborhood women talk about this
Se ne contano a migliara!	business:
A 'e vvote basta sulo na guardata,	'These things are not rare,
E 'a femmena è restata,	you come across thousands of them!
Sotta botta, 'mpressiunata..."	Sometimes a glance is all it takes,
Séh! na guardata, séh...	And the woman ends up
Séh! na 'mpressione, séh...	Impressed by the force of it...
Va' truvanno mo chi è stato	Yeah! A glance, yeah!
Ch'ha cugliuto buono 'o tiro:	Yeah! an impression, yeah!
Chillo, 'o fatto, è niro, niro,	Go ahead and find the one who did it,
Niro, niro comm'a che!...	the one whose aim was on target:
	That boy in reality is black black
	black black and how!
Ha ditto 'o parulano: "Embè parlammo,	
Pecché, si raggiunammo,	The greengrocer said: 'So, let's talk:
Chistu fatto nce 'o spiegammo!	because if we think about it
Addó' pastíne 'o ggrano, 'o ggrano cresce...	we won't find an explanation for this fact!
Riesce o nun riesce,	Where you sow wheat, you get wheat:
Sempe è grano chello ch'esce!"	whether it thrives or not,
Mé', dillo a mamma, mé'...	wheat is always what comes up!'
Mé', dillo pure a me...	Sure, tell it to mamma, sure!
Ca tu 'o chiamme Ciccio o 'Ntuono,	Sure, tell it to me too!
Ca tu 'o chiamme Peppe o Giro,	Whether you call him Ciccio or Ntuono,
Chillo...'o ninno, è niro, niro,	whether you call him Peppe or Giro,
Niro, niro comm'a che!	That baby boy is black black,
	Black black and how!

*Tammurriata nera* therefore saw national circulation as a racist song praising Neapolitans' ability to manage and make sense of instances of young women giving birth to babies fathered by black soldiers. Neapolitan jazz musician, James Senese, the son of a Neapolitan woman and an African-American soldier, explains the racism of the song as follows:

[*Tammurriata nera*] is a racist song, be careful, do not just listen to the music, hear the words: they condemn a white woman who has a child with a black man. The bottom line is that "*'o guaglione è 'nu figlie 'e zoccola*" [the child's mother is a whore]. If I told you that it was easy I would be lying: you have to learn it by force. I looked at myself and saw that I was not like the others. Just imagine the others: "*Si' nnire*", you're black, that was it (Senese cit. Quagliata 2016).<sup>1</sup>

*Tammurriata nera* – and its racist articulation of the ‘black baby’ as a problem to be overcome – has become popular throughout Italy precisely in its open acknowledging of “the presence of the mulatto children in southern Italy”, and in its “construction as a ‘problem’” (Greene 2007: 45).

As a ‘classic’ *Tammurriata nera* became a popular vessel through which ‘Italiani brava gente’ was articulated in terms of imagery that linked the ‘black baby’ to the ‘Moroccan rapist’ (we will clarify this last concept below). For instance, Italian journalist Max Vajro, in his 1984 study of E. A. Mario, interpreted *Tammurriata nera* as an articulation of Neapolitan innocence and victimhood:

Then in 1944, the ultimate project: *Tammurriata nera*. Moroccan rapists had gone through Naples, the people were emerging, wide-eyed, from the debris, [and] the first babies of color were born. Among the comments that seemed ironic – and not all of them were, since the disgrace was common – the neighbours smiled at those women who were mother to a dark-skinned baby, in vain christened *Ciro*. There was no mockery, but immense pity and bonding and resignation. It was 1943. Eduardo Nicolardi – the administrative manager of the Loreto hospital – was alerted by the mayhem in the maternity ward by an extraordinary event. A girl gave birth to a baby with dark skin. That evening, at Mario’s house (the two poets were friends), these two immediately said “Eduà, let’s write a song” (...) If they plant the seed, the seed will grow, there is nothing to do; we want to believe instead that the miracle ought to be through an emotion of the pregnant mother, by a vision, by a scare during the pregnancy? We believe it thus, but it is inescapable that little *Ciro* is ‘black’ (...) (cit. Greene 2007: 57-58).

Importantly, then, in national circulation and popular interpretation such as Vajro’s, *Tammurriata nera* came to underscore Italy’s whiteness by imagining two rather different, parallel histories as unified under the exclusive attention to the colour of the newborn as ‘a problem’, and in fact ‘the only problem’. The consensual relationships between Southern Italian women and occupying soldiers are in fact conflated with the mass rapes of Southern Italian women committed by soldiers of various nationalities through the exclusive perspective of race. Regardless of consent, the bodies of Southern Italian women are thus represented in terms of being ‘polluted’ – or not – by the semen of the racial Other, the racial enemy (cf. Fisher 1996). The mass rapes were commonly referred to as *marocchine* [Moroccan deeds], thus suggesting the exclusive involvement in the rapes carried out by the Maghrebi troops of the French Expeditionary Corps. Drawing upon Gabriella Gribaudi’s volume *Guerra totale* (2005), Messina and Di Somma reflect on the fact that white European soldiers participated equally in the rapes, and expose the politics of selective visibility that absolves European subjects while, at the same time, assigns exclusive responsibilities to racialised North Africans (Messina and Di Somma 2017: 11-13).

In terms of *Tammurriata nera*, a certain amount of ambivalence clearly underscores the function of this Neapolitan song as a ‘national anecdote’ articulating ‘Italiani brava gente’. Whilst the song articulates Italian racism, Fascism and colonialism, it stages a deliberation on the origins of race and paternity. Vincenza Perilli notes how the song reveals a nationalist imagery that produces an “identification/superimposition of the female body and the body of the nation” (Perilli 2015: 127).<sup>2</sup> According to Shelleen Greene, popular writings such as Vajro’s, have interpreted *Tammurriata nera* as a national anecdote of Neapolitan victimhood

in the face of the ‘Moroccan rapist’. Such interpretations, according to Greene, “serve to remove the culpability from Italy for its own history of fascism, brutal colonialism and allegiance to Nazi Germany” (2007: 46).

However, the recurring motif in *Tammurriata nera* is the *tammurriata*, which is a form of music and dance of southern Italian peasant culture, performed in relation to harvest rituals. The *tammurriata* is a demonised practice, constantly held as a metonym of the ‘exotic rituals’ and the ‘strange behaviours’ of racialised southerners.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, in its operating in relation to dominant discourses such as ‘Italiani brava gente’, the *tammurriata* still remains incapable of completely aligning itself with North-centric narratives. Rather than simply narrating the ‘Moroccan rapist’, the song in fact gives ‘ironic play’ to the paternity mystery of Southern Italy’s ‘black baby problem’ – asking “where does race begin and how does one become a raced subject” (Greene 2007: 44).

The first verse introduces us to the ‘phenomenon’ of a child who is born black. In the second verse, the ‘women’ assume the role of narrator and in defense of the mother they reason that she sees “something that gives such a fright that the fear affects her womb and transforms the gestating baby’s skin color” (Greene 2007: 44). The verb they use, *impressionare*, can equally mean to ‘make an impression’, ‘to affect’, ‘to strike or hit’ (figuratively) ‘to frighten’, and ‘to upset’. As Greene notes, this explanation “resonates” with local folk beliefs, in particular the evil eye (Greene 2007). And further, *A 'e vvote basta sulo na guardata* does not specify who is casting the look and performs a slippage between the passivity of being looked at and actively looking upon. Through *Tammurriata nera* the “child’s skin color” does not serve as an “uncontested truth” of an interracial sex act – but is rather the “fetish object” that stages both an acknowledgment and disavowal of desire and the sex act (Greene 2007: 46). Even in its articulation of ‘Italiani brava gente’, – “with its contrivance of the racialising gaze” *Tammurriata nera* can be seen to more complexly attempt to “confront and reconcile the fact of racial difference” (Greene 2007: 46). It is this space of internal ambivalence, and ironic contrivance of the racialising gaze, which leaves a space for what we argue is a recent post-Italian and post-colonial performance of the song.

### ***Tammurriata nera/Pistol Packin’ Mama* in John Turturro’s *Passione: un’avventura musicale* (2010)**

We now wish to focus on a recent performance of *Tammurriata nera* in John Turturro’s film *Passione* (2010a). *Passione* is a documentary film which draws on, as it narrates the story of, a broad assemblage of Neapolitan music and theatricalities. Rather than interviews and dialogues, the film concentrates on the *mise-en-scène* of various musical pieces that are somewhat held as representative of the Neapolitan song tradition. In introducing his film, director John Turturro declared that Neapolitans “have their own language and, most importantly, the people are unbelievably musical” (Turturro 2010b):

That’s why I wanted to make a film about the city and its music. The kind of crime world we’ve all seen in *Gomorrah* is part of the culture in Naples, but music is vital. They co-exist. Besides basic things such as shelter and food and family, music is what matters. If you sing a song on the streets, people will pick right up on it and sing along, whether you’re a good singer or not. If you want to, you can

go out on the street and get somebody to dance with you; it's really not that hard (...) We started out shooting a straight documentary but, as we went along, we realised we were making a musical adventure (Turturro 2010b).

The above statement by Turturro, whose own family “is originally from Sicily” (Turturro, 2010b), is troubled by toxic narratives on crime, violence, and by essentialist representations of Neapolitans as *lazzari felici* [happy vagrants] (cf. Plastino 2007) who keep singing regardless of any external difficulty. Keeping this in mind, we are interested here in Turturro's perception that the music featured in *Passione* is essentially representative of Neapolitaness.

This obviously includes *Tammurriata nera*, which in the film is performed by Neapolitan actor and folk singer Peppe Barra, accompanied by Arabic crossovers from Tunisian performer M'Barka Ben Taleb and a *Pistol Packin' Mama* thread from Italian-American actor Max Casella. The association between *Tammurriata nera* and *Pistol Packin' Mama* derives from the Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare's (NCCP) version of the song, *Tammurriata nera* which cites/adapts/mispronounces/Neapolitanises *Pistol Packin' Mama* in the following lines:

E levate 'a pistuldà	Take off yer knickers
uhbé e levate 'a pistuldà,	Oh yeah, take off yer knickers
e pisti pakin mama	Pistol packin' mama
e levate 'a pistuldà	Take off yer knickers

(NCCP album, Li Sarracini adorano lu sole, 1974).

In *Passione*, Peppe Barra sings these lines towards the end of the performance. The choice of the three performers (Barra-Casella-Ben Taleb) is, we argue, post-Italian, as it involves three racialised, othered identities (namely, the North-African immigrant, the Southern Italian and the diasporic Southern Italian), all of which deny the construction of the Italian white nation, embodied by the dominant Aryan and European Northern Italian subject, and proposes horizons that transcend received notions of national unity.

Before qualifying this statement, we will now describe the *Pistol Packin' Mama/Tammurriata nera* scene in some detail. Leaning against a *Quartieri Spagnoli* wall (Spanish Quarters, a low-income suburb which is part of Naples Old Town), Neapolitan hip-hop musician Raiz reflects:

Belonging to this place means belonging to anywhere, because this place, that is the result of different invasions, Naples, has been invaded by Arabs, Normans, French, Spanish and, and (...) and, and (...) the Americans after WWII. So growing up here means being all these things mixed together, everybody and nobody at the same time. It's a strange feeling (cit. Turturro 2010a).

Now in the internal space of a recording studio, the camera focalises the Neapolitan musician James Senese, who is the child of a WWII African American G.I. and a Neapolitan woman. He tells us: “my father would bring my mother jazz records and she would play them, so I learnt jazz through her”. As an illegitimate ‘mulatto’ child, he explains “other children would call me things (...) it hurts”. He sings, then plays, the eponymous song *Passione* (Valente, Bovio and



Tagliaferri 1934) on saxophone. Next, *Pistol Packin' Mama*, a song popular amongst WWII American soldiers, plays to archival footage of Mount Vesuvius erupting and bomber planes destroying neighbourhoods:

Oh, drinking beer in a cabaret  
Was I having fun  
Until one night she caught me right. And now I'm on the run  
Oh, lay that pistol down, Babe  
Lay that pistol down  
Pistol packing mama  
Lay that pistol down (cit. Turturro 2010a).

Returning to the internal studio space, the Sicilian *Marranzanu* (Jew's harp, a mouth instrument also found in Eastern Europe and Turkey) generates an eerily low and trembling percussive sound.

Max Casella, the American son of post-WWII Southern Italian emigrants, sings *Pistol Packin' Mama* in a menacingly aggressive and low register, implicating the song's lyrics in its own disavowed economy of sonic violence. Layering over Casella, Neapolitan musician Peppe Barra sings *Tammurriata nera*. Barra's rendition evokes Arabic vocal microtonal inflections, spliced with repetitive guttural sounds that arouse a baroque-like spectacle (Hammond 1994). Ben Taleb joins in with repetitive, percussive, Arabic verse. The triangulation of voices here, each with unsettling sonic output, links *Tammurriata nera* and *Pistol Packin' Mama*'s complex TransMediterrAtlantic (Zaccaria 2015) economies of violence. Barra reiterates "Auguri!" [celebrations] "our house is gone, the war has come". Casella pesters with "Hey Spaghetti! You got a sister? You got a sister? Oh, no, no, no, no, I gotta see her first!" Ben Taleb announces in Arabic, "Mercy, mercy, a black child is born" accompanied by *Zaghrouta* [yelps of joy] (Bernardi 2015). This represents the first (and only) time Arabic is subtitled in the film. Casella and Ben Taleb closely circle each other without touching – performing the *tammurriata* dance – as each performer screams, building to the jam session's climactic end.

If *Tammurriata nera* has come to articulate the national myth of 'Italiani brava gente', Peppe Barra's interpretation in *Passione* alludes to the indeterminacy underscoring its function as an Italian anecdote. Barra proffers this interpretation:

The irony of a dramatic tragic event. Because during the occupation, some of the children born were black and the people of Naples named them Peppe, Ciro, Antonio, typical local names. Meaning that behind their joyful and amusing mask, these people always hide anger, despair and sadness. E. A. Mario, who knew the region's ethnic background very well, entitled this song *Tammurriata nera*. *Nera* [black] refers to the skin, *Tammurriata* is a folk song that only involves the use of a drum and occasionally a guitar. These songs are exorcisms and ward off bad luck (cit. Turturro 2010a).

Barra evokes Southern Italian evil eye superstitions, which Greene defines as Foucault's "subjugated knowledge": "a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity" (2007: 45). Combined with the indigence of the camera's gaze, *Tammurriata nera/Pistol Packin' Mama*

sees violence of song upon song set the pace for an intense TransMediterrAtlantic (Zaccaria 2015) narrative. Here, *Passione*'s body reaches a critical TransMediterrAtlantic climax, whereby Italy's various racialised others – as gathered around the elided 'black baby' – avow and regard one another within an expanded Italian diasporic space.

Here, to some extent, it seems that James Senese is playing precisely the role of this elided 'black baby', who appears before the performance of *Pistol Packin' Mama/Tammurriata nera* only to be literally effaced by the song. Senese's presence right before the song functions to simultaneously mark, expose and celebrate an undisguisable absence. On the one hand, as seen above, Senese (correctly) considers *Tammurriata nera* a racist song, and it is likely that he would not have agreed to participate in the performance of the song for the film. On the other hand, the film cruelly presents the song right after Senese's performance, in a way to completely neutralise his agency.

### **Multi-directional neocolonialisms: unpacking *Pistol Packin' Mama/Tammurriata nera*'s TransMediterrAtlantic colonial roots/routes**

The post-Italian climatic scene that leads to *Pistol Packin' Mama/Tammurriata nera* transforms the 'black baby' from a mechanism of Italian whiteness to a TransMediterrAtlantic embodied shadow archive. As described earlier, the focalising figure is Senese, a Neapolitan musician with (in)direct roots in African-American jazz. Whilst 'Italiani brava gente' would paint his mother as a 'wide-eyed' victim of the 'Moroccan rapist', Senese describes how his parents shared jazz records. Senese represents a focal return of what we argue is the 'post-Italian' schematic figure of the song. His father is not a 'Moroccan rapist' at all, but an African American soldier. This TransMediterrAtlantic narrative sees consensual and desired relations, structured by the sharing of jazz.

Furthermore, Casella's *Pistol Packin' Mama* disavows Al Dexter's happy-go-lucky voice in the original version of the song (1942). Al Dexter's un-reflexively smooth and calm Anglo-Saxon voice erases the very violence of the lyrics he sings. This is supplanted by the obvious aggression and grain of Casella's rendition. As a supposed, conditional member of the US's Anglophone white interiority, Casella over-performs the white Anglophone violent occupation of transnational (sonic) space. For an English viewing audience, Casella's *Pistol Packin' Mama* mirrors the violent translated words of Barra's *Tammurriata nera* subtitled across the screen:

Sometimes what you see  
Almost can't be believed!  
Like the little black boy  
Named Ciro  
Who was wrongly conceived.  
'Ciro' means Candle  
Tall and white  
But Ciro's just a little boy  
Dark as Night!  
Call him Frank or Tony  
Call him Pete or Joe

Ciro's still all black  
From his head to toe! (cit. Turturro 2010a).

The menacing power, here, does not belong to 'the Moroccan rapist', but to Mediterranean and Atlantic white hegemonies. Finally, it is in this context in which multiple white violences are avowed, that contemporary Tunisian migrant Ben Taleb announces "a black baby is born". Having danced the *Tammurriata* with the reflexively de- and re-racialised white US soldier, Ben Taleb declares a new black baby to be born: a critical cultural identity rooted in an awareness of geo-corpography (Pugliese 2007c).

### Final remarks

However, alongside expanded post-Italian horizons, *Passione's* parallel 'closing narrative' contains a series of cautionary problematics that we should heed. The first problematic: during *Tammurriata nera/Pistol Packin' Mama*, archive footage depicts Neapolitans greeting triumphal American troops entering Naples, not-so-implicitly suggesting that US military forces liberated the city from Nazi-Fascists. However, in the *Quattro giornate di Napoli* [Four Days of Naples], local grassroots rebellion saw Neapolitans expel German occupying forces. A day later, US troops arrived (Bernardi 2015: 123). While the Germans were certainly aware of the Allied forces' advance, the fact that Naples was liberated by its own population is undeniable. This omission is important as, we argue, it glorifies US intervention while implicitly erasing its responsibilities in the context of Allied violence in Southern Italy. The second problematic: John Turturro, Max Casella and TV personality Fiorello perform Renato Carosone's *Caravan Petrol*. In striking resemblance to Arab-face, though, Fiorello dons a turban. Turturro and Casella both don white cloth on their head (held fast by four knots, one at each corner). By extension, the final problematic is as follows: in contradistinction to *Tammurriata nera/Pistol Packin' Mama*, Turturro's closing address at the end of *Passione* reclaims the primacy of his exclusive authorial voice, in a way to silence the inherent polyphony and the multiple agencies that operate in the film. With particular relation to the exclusion of the *Quattro giornate di Napoli*, this 'closing narrative' fails to implicate the Allied occupation of Southern Italy in its 'post Italian' vision.

In *Passione*, the dialogue accompanying *Tammurriata nera* (primarily from Raiz and Barra) – which only selectively includes James Senese, himself a post-World War II 'black baby' – points to a more or less conscious erasure in operation, whereby both the US and Italy silence this black subject. In *Passione's Pistol Packin' Mama/Tammurriata nera*, Southern Italian women's various disavowed interracial sexual encounters finally become legitimised by the sonically and visually pleasurable interpenetration of various post-Italian voices. This post-Italian diasporic space, however, is still haunted by multiple colonial histories in *Passione* – continuing to articulate the victimhood and innocence of 'Italiani brava gente'.

Looking forward, then, post-Italian dialogue must interrogate broader, intersecting transnational imperial – such as the US military – expansionisms, and as such, a serious deliberation of the intersections of North African, Southern Italian and TransMediterranean Atlantic colonial roots/routes and their relationship to the national myth of 'Italiani brava gente' is required. While *Passione*, and hence the performance of *Tammurriata nera/Pistol Packin' Mama* that is contained in it certainly set the premises for a post-Italian dialogue, they fail in articulating it from a sufficiently broad perspective.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Quella? Quella è una canzone razzista, fai attenzione, non sentire la musica, ascolta le parole: offendono una donna bianca che fa un figlio con un nero. Insomma dice che “‘o guaglione è ‘nu figlie ‘e zoccola”. Ti dicessi che è stato facile direi bugia. Dovevi conquistarti una tua dimensione e quando sei bambino non è automatico, te lo devi imparare a forza. Io mi guardavo e lo vedevo che non ero come gli altri. Figurati gli altri: “Si’ nñire”, sei nero, questo era.

<sup>2</sup> “identificazione/sovrapposizione tra corpo femminile e corpo della nazione”.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eugenio Bennato’s song *Ninco nanco* (2011).

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