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Caponetto, Rosetta Giuliani. *Fascist Hybridities: Representations of Racial Mixing and Diaspora Cultures under Mussolini*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. 199. ISBN 9781137481863. (hardcover). \$90.00.

Foregrounding the figure of the *meticcio*, Rosetta Giuliani Caponetto conducts a wide-ranging investigation of literary and cinematic representations of racial mixing from the Fascist *ventennio* through the postwar period. In the cultural artifacts she examines, Caponetto identifies *meticci* (mixed-race subjects) and Levantines as existing in the in-between spaces of these racial distinctions and thus mobilizing a range of ambiguous responses to their presence both during and immediately after Fascism.

For Caponetto, *meticci* emerge as figures who disrupt the nation's view of itself as homogenous and white. Caponetto therefore chooses the term *meticcio* precisely because of the way in which its derogatory connotations reveal a generalized anxiety about individuals of mixed Italian and African descent. In addition to mixed-race subjects, the author analyzes Levantines. This population—comprises Italian citizens who had emigrated to Alexandria, Egypt—freely mingled in a cosmopolitan, multicultural environment, thereby conveying a willingness to adopt the foreign customs that purportedly threatened the integrity of the national identity that Mussolini was determined to forge. The Fascist desire to enforce discrete binary racial categories resulted, to a considerable extent, from the need to unify a nation that was internally divided by the northern view of southern Italians as “other,” darker, and inferior. The colonial enterprise allowed for the distinction of “white” Italy contrasted with the native inhabitants of Italian overseas territories.

Fascist Hybridities provides historical and theoretical frameworks to accompany close readings, resulting in a discussion that reflects the strengths of both critical textual dialogues. For her analysis of the colonial and postcolonial position, Caponetto draws on a wide range of critics and theorists, both Anglo-American and Italian. Furthermore, she intersperses her observations with supporting accounts of Fascist regulations and policies both domestic and international. The laws governing citizenship are of particular importance since the right to Italian nationality was denied to children of mixed Italian and African heritage in 1940 and reinstated in 1947. Regarding her primary sources, Caponetto observes that the texts in analysis do not necessarily convey the messages intended by their authors. Accordingly, she approaches her case studies of filmic and literary texts with the objective of unpacking the messages concerning the presence of black or mixed characters in Italian society that are inadvertently communicated through these texts.

The first chapter, “Art of Darkness: The Aestheticization of Black People in Fascist Colonial Novels,” describes how novels that aimed to create clear racial boundaries through narratives where the white rulers represented a heroic and prestigious Italian national identity inevitably failed to achieve this goal. The chapter considers a constellation of key Fascist works that were meant to serve as propaganda for the regime: Rosolino Gabrielli's *Il piccolo Brassa/ The Little Brassa* (1928) and Arnaldo Cipolla's *Balilla regale/ Royal Balilla* (1935) and *Melograno d'oro. Regina d'Etiopia/ Golden Pomegranate: Queen of Ethiopia* (1936). Colonial representations of black or *meticcio* characters involved the challenge of narrating subjects such as the *askaris*, or native soldiers, in *Il piccolo Brassa*—subjects whose positive qualities of discipline and obedience allowed them to approach whiteness, while still remaining definitively separate from their white Italian masters. Against the background of Cipolla's novels, Caponetto shows how the representation of women was also in question as the Fascist government moved away from the formerly prevailing image of the Black Venus and the general eroticization of black women to favor narratives that discouraged relationships with women in the colonies. At the same time as this narrative change was occurring, the racial laws were being drawn

up on Italian soil and the question of biracial children complicated biological definitions of race. Within this context, the novels convey the difficulty of representing at once the nobility of the colonial mission and the unappealing nature of the colonial subjects. In fact, Caponetto argues that the texts reveal a desire for the black female protagonist that remains an integral feature of this genre of exoticizing literature. Nevertheless, the authors of the novels prove incapable of effectively distancing or containing the *meticcio* or native subject whose dedication is championed in the narrative.

Chapter 2, “The Dissident Literature of Enrico Pea and Fausta Cialente,” centers on the Levantine experience which tended to complicate or subvert the dichotomies of race, class, and national belonging that were simultaneously proposed by the Fascist regime. Italians who chose to live in Alexandria inhabited a cosmopolitan, diverse space that tended to draw the focus away from national, racial, or ethnic identities. The Italian protagonists of these novels exist in a foreign or “oriental” context yet do not enjoy the privileges of the colonizer as in the case of those who participated in the Italian colonial enterprise. Indeed, as Caponetto maintain, they often face hardships that reflect the authentic experiences of Italians who sought more favorable circumstances in the colonies. These narratives represent the realities of cross-cultural exchanges and hybridity that are inherent in Italian life and culture and question the Fascist insistence on a homogenous and distinguishable racial and national identity; in the words of Caponetto: “[they] ultimately reveal biracial offspring and Levantines as interchangeable characters who, in the historical scenario under which Mussolini’s Fascist regime operated, present unique and specific threats to notions of Italian racial and cultural purity” (4).

Chapter 3 signals a shift towards an analysis of cinema of this period. The films in question are Fascist propaganda productions that aim to solidify the distinctions between white Italians and black or *meticcio* characters. Caponetto highlights the regime’s intention to discipline and control Italians at home through the narration of the civilizing process underway in Africa. In a section on Augusto Genina’s *Lo squadrone bianco/ White Squadron* (1936) and Guido Brignone’s *Sotto la croce del sud/ Under the Southern Cross* (1938), she demonstrates how these films set out to create a coherent expression of gender and class structures in a colonial context. In actuality, however, Caponetto sheds light on the directors’ fail to control the racial and sexual identities of their black or *meticcio* protagonists, whose roles in the film expose the fluidity of boundaries and desires. The combination of cinematic and literary texts provides a thorough and insightful examination of the diverse cultural production exploring racial and national identities.

The fourth chapter, “Levantines and Biracial Offspring in Postwar Italy,” concentrates on the legacy of colonialism and the absence of a public reckoning with the effects of Italy’s actions as a colonial power. The ethnic blending that occurred both in Italy and abroad through wartime unions between African-American soldiers and Italian women resulted in the birth of a number of mixed-race children whose presence in Italian society was troubling, yet not addressed politically or socially. Ennio Flaiano’s novel, *Tempo di uccidere/ A Time to Kill* (1947), and Francesco De Robertis’s film, *Il mulatto/ Angelo* (1949), prove to be cogent texts for Caponetto’s examination of how Italian society obliquely attempted to confront its colonial involvement and associated guilt. Colonial nostalgia, with both positive and negative associations, exacerbates the white Italian protagonists’ inability to maintain an uncomplicated relationship with the black or *meticcio* character from whom they must liberate themselves. Far from signaling a possible integration of non-white individuals into postwar Italian life, these works reveal the way in which the characters in the films disrupt the present by reminding society of its colonial past.

This study contributes substantially to critical texts on Italian colonialism, Fascism, and postcolonial Italy, and to studies of racial identity in Italy by considering the role of hybrid

individuals and the way in which they directly challenged predominant political, social, and racial narratives. In a broader context, the book has relevance for diaspora and migration studies, Mediterranean studies, ethnic studies, and cultural studies with a particular interest in the topics of race, gender, and ethnicity. Crucially, Caponetto brings into focus the central importance of recognizing hybrid experiences in the context of a national narrative and critical tradition that often emphasizes dichotomies of Italian/Other, colonizer/colonized, black/white. More precisely, this historical analysis is especially informative as Italy once again experiences demographic change and, as Caponetto notes, questions of Italian cultural authenticity and belonging become topics of urgent debate. The valuable, and timely, historical lesson contained in this book—particularly in light of the current migration crisis in the Mediterranean—is twofold: Italian national and racial identities are contested and fluid, and borders and boundaries are not fixed.

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