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Italians with veils and Afros: gender, beauty, and the everyday anti-racism of the daughters of immigrants in Italy

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the everyday anti-racist practices of the female children of immigrants in Italy. We analyse two case studies: first, a group of Muslim young women in Italy who have publicly re-appropriated what is popularly known as 'Islamic fashion'; and second, a group of young Afro-Italian women who meet both online and offline to share resources about the care of 'natural' Afro-textured hair. We argue that transnational feminist analysis can shed light on the complex ways that aesthetics and the female body are implicated in struggles for social and legal recognition in Italy among the so-called second generation.

Introduction

The children of immigrants in Italy currently comprise approximately 15% of births in Italy (Papavero 2015), or 10% of the total youth population of Italy (Tailmoun, Valeri, and Tesfaye 2014). Yet, due to a national citizenship law that confers Italian citizenship on the basis of the principle of *jus sanguinis* (right of blood), the children of immigrants who are born in Italy are not automatically granted Italian citizenship at birth. Instead, according to Law No. 91 of 1992, the children of immigrants must wait until their 18th birthday to apply for Italian citizenship, at which point they have a one-year window in which they must assemble documentary proof of continuous residence in Italy from birth (Marchetti 2010; Zincone 2006).[1] Activist associations such as the Rete G2, which was founded in 2005 and is made up of children of immigrants born or raised in Italy, have played a pivotal role in advancing citizenship reform proposals to the Italian legislature (Andall 2010; Zinn 2011). A new law that would move Italian citizenship law in the direction of moderate *jus soli* was approved by the lower house of the legislature in October of 2015, but its approval in the Senate has been delayed for almost two years.

The so-called *seconda generazione* has been the subject of much recent scholarly research due to its growing visibility as a symbol of Italy's changing social and demographic landscape (Marinaro and Walston 2010; Sospiro 2010). These studies have addressed mobilizations for citizenship rights (Frisina 2006; Marchetti 2010; Zinn 2010); forms of collective identification (Colombo, Leonini, and Rebughini 2009; Daher 2012; Thomassen 2010); patterns of integration or assimilation (Ambrosini and Molina

2004; Gabrielli, Paterno, and Dalla-Zuanna 2013); broader reconfigurations of national identity (Berrocal 2010; Braccini 2000; Pföstl and Bisi 2013); experiences of racism and racialisation (Andall 2002; Frisina 2010b); the demands of more religious pluralism (and less Catholic hegemony) in public high schools (Frisina 2011); and educational attainment (Casacchia et al. 2008; Mussino and Strozza 2012; Palmas 2006).

Building on this research, in this paper we reflect on the processes of subjectivation that are taking place in Italy today among young women who, through their own everyday aesthetic practices, are challenging dominant Western and Italian standards of beauty. Our (offline and online) ethnographic research included 20 interviews and 2 focus groups with 20 Muslim and Afro-Italian young women, and lasted two and a half years (January of 2014–June of 2016). By focusing on women and gendered bodily practices as forms of everyday collective resistance, we build on the groundbreaking work of sociologist Philomena Essed (1991), who has analysed 'gendered racism' as a modality of national-level patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

The women in our study are daughters of migration, who have tired of viewing themselves through the eyes of others and no longer wish to be regarded as foreign to the Italian nation. Instead, they claim that they are de facto Italians even if, legally speaking, they are not Italian citizens.[2] Through their decisions to adopt a 'fashionable' Islamic veil or a 'natural' or Afro hairstyle, they are subtly contesting the racialisation and degradation that targets their bodies and lives. We thus employ the concept of 'everyday anti-racism' to describe the quotidian, embodied practices by which young women respond to Eurocentric beauty standards and the equation of Italianness with gendered markers of whiteness.

This relationship between beauty standards and everyday experiences of exclusion in Italy emerged during a focus group of young Afro-Italian women between 16 and 18 years old, which was held in the city of Padua during the fall of 2014.[3] During the discussion, the women in attendance raised the topic of skin lightening creams:

> Apouk: There are a lot of people who use them […] especially minors […] You get a sense of why they use them, honestly, the people who use them do not accept, cannot accept the colour of their skin, they have probably experienced racism … And then these are also things that go back in history. You make your connections […] There are those people who have the image of beautiful Barbie, with her straight hair, and think 'If I am a little bit lighter, I will be beautiful.'

> Nicole: But the image of the lighter woman has always been attractive. My [Ghanaian] mother told me that it's like that even in Africa … You see a light-skinned woman and a dark-skinned woman, and your eye focuses on the light one. I think that it's the judgment of men that influences women, and then women say, 'That light-skinned woman is more popular, I'll lighten myself as well' […]

> Benedetta: […] I was also attracted to this stuff, but then …

Benedetta, like many other young Afro-Italian women, has suffered from the fact that her own body does not conform to the dominant 'Italic'[4] standards of racialised beauty. She was able to express what she felt only by meeting with other young women who have experienced this first-hand or who have had similar experiences. Over the course of this conversation among peers, there was a great deal of emotional involvement and it was possible to observe the gradual placement of the participants in relation to what they

observed to be the hegemonic white Italian culture. This focus group allowed us to study the social dimensions of an emerging *agency* of girls (Harris and Shields Dobson 2015), who are creating models of postcolonial beauty and transforming their own sense of inadequacy through the advancement of alternative claims.

To understand how gendered aesthetic practices can become a tool in wider struggles for recognition and representation, this paper first introduces the international feminist debate on beauty and racism. These theoretical interventions are then linked back to the urgent questions of citizenship and belonging facing so-called second-generation youth in contemporary Italy. After introducing our methodology, we then analyse two case studies selected for empirical research: first, a group of Muslim young women in Italy who have publicly re-appropriated what is popularly known as 'Islamic fashion'; and second, a group of Afro-descendant young women who meet both online and offline to share resources about the care of 'natural' (un-chemically straightened) Afro-textured hair. Finally, our conclusion considers the more controversial or ambiguous aspects of these groups, which merit further research and reflection.

Theoretical frameworks

Anita Harris (2009, 189) calls for the adoption of an 'everyday multiculturalism' perspective to study young people. This strategy, she argues, challenges the idea that diversity is something (problematic) that (white, autochthonous) adults have to manage, and also undermines assimilationist assumptions that see the nation as a pre-existent and well-defined reality into which these young people should 'integrate'. Everyday multiculturalism is a question of bringing to light the daily micro-practices of producing difference and contesting dominant representations of 'us' in a society that is marked by deep sociocultural transformations. If we consider the children of immigration from a generational perspective, then we can begin to place less of an emphasis on national origins and we can more easily grasp the relevance of the more general cultural context in which they live – a context characterised by processes of globalisation that make migratory experiences themselves more transnational and cosmopolitan.

Moreover, feminist and race-critical analyses provide important theoretical tools for understanding the political significance of self-care practices, modes of self-presentation, beauty, and fashion among the female children of immigrants in Italy. Indeed, transnational and intersectional feminist theorists have long emphasised the significance of visuality and the codification of beauty as instruments for differentially excluding or including certain bodies through the rubric of citizenship (Ford 2015; Giuliani 2015; hooks 1992). Generally, these theorists suggest that dominant groups are represented as ideal types of beauty and morality in relation to subaltern groups, who are alternatively portrayed in hegemonic discourses as ugly and immoral.

In this sense, race and gender are also visual constructs that are made legible through power-laden regimes of representation. As Butler (1993, 17) argues in her essay about the Rodney King trial in the United States,[5] 'the field of the visual is a racially contested terrain'. In other words, visuality is not a neutral medium by which objective information about race is transmitted; indeed, there is no such thing as a racially neutral image. Instead, the way we see the world is itself already a 'racial formation' (17) that circumscribes bodies within particular regimes of truth – guilt and innocence, beauty and ugliness, citizen and

outsider, risky and safe. Yet 'race' as a visual construct also goes beyond the assignation of negative characteristics to particular skin colours.

Building on the critique of biometric border control (Amoore and de Goede 2008; Browne 2015; Magnet 2011), we argue that race is being constantly (re)made at macro and micro scales through the 'reading' of characteristics such as hair, weight, body shape, physical comportment, the way that one moves through space, and whether one wears particular types of garments and coverings (Craig 2012, 329). When these features are naturalised according to hegemonic grids of intelligibility and interpreted as immutable characteristics, they work to reproduce racialised relations of power.[6]

Methodology

Our (online and offline) ethnographic research with Muslim and Afro-Italian young women (all daughters of migration, born or raised in Italy since childhood) was focused specifically on the ways that hair (i.e. 'going natural') and a specific garment (i.e. the Islamic veil) are entangled in the everyday encounters between racist incidents and anti-racist resistance. In short, our study examined how hair, dress, and other practices of self-presentation take on racialised significance in Italy and how they are used to reproduce or alternatively to contest the structural privilege of white, Catholic Italians.

To do this, the empirical research for this study focused on two Facebook pages through which young women share their everyday experiences of racism and sexism and contest them through specific aesthetic practices – the choice of the veil and particular styles of wearing it in the case of the *Hijab Elegante* page, and the care and valorisation of Afro-textured hair in the case of the *Nappytalia* page. The anti-racism we reference concerns the micro-politics of everyday resistance by young, racialised Italian women who are developing alternative forms of identification to counter the degrading ones that the dominant culture has assigned to them.

The virtual ethnography (Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010; Bernal 2014; Boellstorff et al. 2012; Burrell 2009; Reips and Buffardi 2012) comprised the analysis of photos and videos shared by administrators and followers of the pages under investigation, as well as discursive analysis of posts, conversations, and debates. Following Luc Pauwels (2015), our analysis of Facebook pages also took into consideration the design of image-based posts created by administrators (i.e. what sorts of colours and iconography were used, or how audiences were hailed). Not only did we consider what sorts of information was shared and debated on these pages (i.e. political topics, international holidays, or calls to action), but we also noted 'what is systematically not shown or talked about' (213). Our long-term observation of the Hijab Elegante and Nappytalia pages, along with in-depth interviews with the pages' founders and administrators, allowed us to understand how the goals, visual and textual communication strategies, and priorities of each community developed and changed over time.

As scholars of migration and 'digital diasporas' have increasingly observed, the Internet and social media play an important role in the circulation of diasporic resources and the political engagement of migrants and their children (Brinkerhoff 2009; Castells 2000; Castro and González 2014; Oiarzabal and Reips 2012; Ong 2003; Rai 1995; Shavit 2009).[7] Numerous studies have confirmed the importance of the Internet to the children of immigrants in Italy, especially in the case of politically engaged associations such as the

aforementioned Rete G2, because it allows young people to find social relations that they may lack in their 'small provincial [towns]' (Frisina 2010b, 567; see also Premazzi 2010; Zinn 2010). Indeed, Ponzanesi and Leurs (2014) suggest that these new 'digital crossings' at a larger scale necessitate a critical rethinking of Europe beyond the bounded categories of 'nation' and 'continent'.

We also conducted 20 interviews (face-to-face and via Skype) with the creators of the aforementioned pages and active members of each group. Our interlocutors were women between the ages of 16 and 30, mainly based in the cities of Milan and Padua. We also held two focus groups in Padua, which allowed us to observe a discussion among one group of Afro-Italian and another group of Muslim high-school girls about what it meant for them to feel 'beautiful' and 'respected'. The political climate of northern Italy, shaped by the rise of xenophobic right-wing regionalist movements and parties such as the Lega Nord (Carter and Merrill 2007), has made the necessity of responding to episodes of everyday racism (Essed 1991) especially urgent for young women of colour in Milan and Padua.

Background: gendered Islamophobia in contemporary Italy

Our analysis of Islamophobia in Italy draws on the work of Lentin and Gavan (2011), who argue that after 9/11 the hegemonic narrative of a 'crisis of multiculturalism' both obscured and reinforced contemporary racisms (62). In Europe, the defence of liberal values has legitimated far-right racisms – recently, this includes the mainstream media's interpretation of the 'Charlie Hebdo' terrorist attack as well as the broader social consequences of this attack. According to these scholars, today the figure of the Muslim has become a metonym for unwanted migrations – for the 'bad diversity' that marks the Other as potentially disloyal toward his or her country of arrival and toward democratic life in general (Frisina 2010a).[8] When confronted with this Other, national security is revealed to be highly racialised, because the element of risk (i.e. the 'risky body') is itself constructed through the naturalization of negative descriptions and stereotypes (Epstein 2008).

At the international level, the debates surrounding what Islamophobia is and whether it is a form of racism are ongoing (Klug 2012; Meer 2013; Fanny and Benjamin 2016). We suggest that hegemonic readings of the figure of the Muslim today draw upon a historically stratified[9] repertoire of rhetoric, ready-made phrases, and linguistic forms that combine the words 'Islam' and 'Muslim' in different ways, but always with the effect of discriminating against groups of people[10] based on their presumed, immutable characteristics.[11]

Sociologist Giuseppe Sciortino (2002) was one of the first scholars to analyse the Italian version of Islamophobic discourse, noting how prominent Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci and her followers have adopted the Huntingtonian rhetoric of the 'clash of civilizations' to 'defend the West' from the invasion of 'Islamic' barbarians *and* from the 'cowards and do-gooders who have forgotten their own [Christian] roots' (106). Also significant in this regard is the work of sociologist Monica Massari (2006), who has argued that Islamophobia is a form of 'new racism' based on an analysis of the increasing number of instances of verbal and physical violence against Muslims in Italy, particularly veiled women.[12]

Hijab Elegante: Islam, fashion, and 'seeing oneself as beautiful'

The Facebook page Hijab Elegante was created in April of 2012 by a 21-year-old Italian-Moroccan woman, K.N.[13]

> They told me that I am too beautiful to be Muslim […] I opened this page after having followed similar ones from different parts of the world; I was missing a similar discussion in Italian […] At the beginning it was very hard, but I think that the people who want you to cover yourself and those who want you to show yourself are two faces of the same extremism […] For us, with Islam, beauty and fashion are compatible.[14]

Hijab Elegante brings together young Muslim women from different national backgrounds who believe that beauty 'pleases God': 'Pursuing modesty does not mean hiding yourself; wearing the veil does not mean being traditional.'[15] K.N. describes the first year of the page as a very difficult period, because she felt as though she was always 'under attack' by non-Muslims who told her to take off the veil, emancipate herself, and 'dress like an Italian' so that she could be property 'integrated', and also by other Muslims who accused her of lacking modesty and setting a bad example for young Muslim women[16] (for example, 'making them believe that high heels are *halal*!'). Despite the charges of betraying Islam and the vehement insults targeted against her, K.N. moved forward thanks to the support of her 'fans' (as she described them) in order to demonstrate that 'God is beauty and loves that which is beautiful' (Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad). To her, being a veiled and elegant Muslim is 'a form of bearing witness' against people who 'are afraid of Muslims'.

The Hijab Elegante page has experienced a rapid growth in popularity since its founding (192,772 'Likes' as of 10 January 2017), and now it is not just the children of immigrants Italy who follow it. The page's fans now include young people from many different countries who see K.N.'s ideas as especially attractive because they combine the diasporic styles of Islamic fashion with the distinctive appeal of *Made in Italy*.

Wearing a veil (in this case, the elegant hijab) as a political practice has a long history. Colonialism attempted to take the veil away from Muslim women to civilise them,[17] secular postcolonial nationalisms often forbade the veil (Cesari 2014, 112–114; Moors 2011), and anti-colonial resistance also made use of the veil (Ahmed 1992; Salih 1998). In the European and Italian debates, the matrix of colonial rhetoric (specifically, the subordination of women as proof of the supposed inferiority of Muslims) is intertwined with neo-nationalist and 'secular' arguments that see the sexualised exhibition of the female body as proof of loyalty to national values (Moors 2011, 145).

In the Islamophobic climate of the post-9/11 world, the veil is seen as a visible sign of a fanatical, terrorist religion. Thus, the young women who chose to begin wearing the veil during this period did so not only for religious reasons, but also as a form of resistance against these discourses (Frisina 2007). K.N. and the other young women we interviewed shared many different accounts of discrimination, especially related to employment, against veiled women: for instance, in order to participate in an internship, some women were asked to remove their veils as a prerequisite. As women on the Hijab Elegante page described being tired of being pitied for their assumed lack of freedom, there emerged a complex realization that both the veiled body and the unveiled body are entangled in webs of power (Mernissi 2000).

Access to social networks has allowed many young women to experiment with forms of 'collective self-consciousness', provide each other with mutual support in the struggle against discrimination, resist assimilationist pressures, avoid feelings of inferiority, and agitate for the rights of a new generation of Italians (Frisina 2007, 76–96). Indeed, all of the Facebook pages and fashion blogs of young Muslim women we observed drew a connection between personal accounts and generational stories. 'India', a 24-year-old Bangladeshi woman, explained the significance of fashion blogging:

> As a teenager you want to look like the rest of the group, you want to be noticed. And it's hard because beauty in Europe is stereotypically white, blond, blue eyes, tall, thin […] My sister and I are fashion bloggers. The idea of the blog came about because we wanted to show that you can be beautiful without being stereotyped […] You can dress well without uncovering yourself […] I read a lot of fashion blogs and said to myself, 'How annoying! The women are all the same.' I want to change this concept, especially in Italy. In London there are a lot of veil-wearing Muslim fashion bloggers and they are widely followed […][18] We are Italians from other countries, we are Muslim believers even without the veil. This is our story […] Fashion is a social issue; we are in favour of modest styles, in order to show that you can be trendy, you can be beautiful, you can dress in Western styles and you can be Muslim […] We like low cost styles; we mix pieces from Zara, H&M, Pull&Bear, Stradivarius.[19]

From a postcolonial perspective, these practices are counterhegemonic and constitute a challenge to the Italian racial imaginary. Young women like India do not hide their religious or cultural backgrounds, or even their low socioeconomic backgrounds. Rather, on a daily basis they are claiming what has been defined as the 'right to look' of people in a subaltern social position (Mirzoeff 2011) – namely, the right to 'look differently' and to 'see oneself as beautiful'.

K.N. and India are not alone in their conviction that, through everyday practices, they can challenge Islamophobic imaginaries by 'bearing witness' to the fact that it is possible to be both beautiful and Muslim. In the United States,[20] for instance, fashion blogger Sabrina Enayatulla has made it her personal mission to challenge negative stereotypes of Islam through fashion. There are even designers, such as those working under the label of New York-based Eva Khurshid, who seek to attract a diverse customer base without religious distinction because their objective is to make Islamic fashion mainstream and spread the value of modesty. Indeed, the global market in Islamic fashion is rapidly growing (Tarlo 2010), and has pushed major fashion chains to explicitly market to Muslim clients (Moors and Tarlo 2013). For example, H&M and Mango shops in northern Europe now place mannequins of veiled women in their storefront displays. Thus, the Islamic fashion phenomenon spans business ranging from small entrepreneurs to large companies that specialise in this new global trend.[21]

K.N. studies economics and international marketing at her university in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. She noted that her goal is to become a model for Islamic fashions, and then to work in the fashion sector and hopefully start her own business. As her aspirations suggest, she is not concerned by the idea that Islamic fashion could become commercialised. Elsewhere in Europe, individuals working in the Islamic fashion industry affirm that there is no contradiction between publicly claiming the beauty of Islam (to combat Islamophobia) and finding gainful employment.

Background: black feminism and the politics of female beauty

Feminist scholars have argued that the construction of white womanhood as a standard of beauty was produced through a juxtaposition with the hyper-sexualised 'ugliness' of black women (hooks 1992) on the one hand, and with veiled women who both needed to be saved from patriarchal Muslim clerics and were also voluptuous odalisques of the harem on the other hand (Ahmed 1992; Perilli 2015; Yeğenoğlu 1998, 2008).

It is therefore unsurprising that 'Claims of beauty have … been central to anti-racist resistance' (Craig 2006, 161), as seen in the African-American civil rights movement cry *Black is beautiful!* and in the political use of the veil during the anti-colonial uprisings of the Maghreb (Fanon 1994). In the case of the black body, and especially the black female body, much has changed in the West since the time of the civil rights movement – indeed, until that point, black women were systematically excluded from dominant representations of beauty. Among the most substantial reasons for this shift is the development of an African-American and Black British middle class and its progressive incorporation into the market for mass culture consumption. Today, therefore, it is not surprising that the American magazine *People* named Kenyan documentary filmmaker, Oscar-winning actress, and public opponent of skin lightening creams[22] Lupita Nyong'o as 2014s 'most beautiful woman in the world'.

Generally, in feminist debates, significant attention has been devoted to the critique of beauty standards for oppressing women; however, the ways in which beauty can be part of political resistance has been largely ignored. The writings of Iris Marion Young (1980) and Sandra Lee Bartky (1988) are emblematic in this sense. They argue that the feelings of inadequacy experienced by women in relation to their bodies are everyday manifestations of gender inequality: it is the generalised, heterosexual male gaze that brings them to discipline themselves under the guise of 'beauty'. Yet African-American women in the 1970s who stopped straightening their hair to display their own Afro-textured curls were actually participating in a collective, anti-racist beauty project that was also about rejecting dominant conceptions of female beauty (Banks 2000; Kelley 1997). In other words, the gaze that made them feel beautiful was that of other African-Americans (men *and* women), not the generalised white male gaze.

Historically speaking, hair has special significance in the African diasporic experience. Women's hair – arranged in intricate, often braided styles – carried social and aesthetic significance in pre-colonial African cultures (Byrd and Tharps 2014), and 'hair wore long and bushy' (White and White 1995, 58) was a means by which enslaved people in the United States valorised their difference and defied white racism.

More recent feminist reflections on beauty[23] have devoted significant attention to the agency of women, stressing an important yet frequently overlooked aspect of everyday aesthetic praxis – namely, the *pleasure* that accompanies the quest for a beautiful body. According to Shirley Tate (2009, 153), for instance, women are not merely 'beauty dopes' or 'beauty dupes': on the contrary, through their own agency, they are able to re-define re-signify black beauty as a contextual value whose meaning varies depending on the positionalities of the women invoking it. Thus, the same discourse of 'resistance' that made black beauty equivalent to dark skin and Afro-textured hair was contested by black women with brown skin and straighter hair (in the British context, these are often women who are considered to be 'mixed race'). The aesthetic anti-racist practices of

Black British women, in fact, initially had unintended exclusionary effects: those who did not conform to the new counterhegemonic standards, such as black women with naturally straight hair, sometimes found themselves marginalised in Black British spaces (Tate 2007, 306). Tate therefore invites members of the African diaspora to broaden their conception of black beauty (even using the concept of 'beauty citizenship'), noting that models of black beauty have long been plural and hybrid (2009, 156).

Other recent feminist contributions on the theme of beauty present various limitations: they often adopt an individualistic perspective, they are not adequately intersectional, or they do not capture the complexity of contemporary society. Maxine Leeds Craig (2006) criticises these approaches openly and, underlining the actual pluralisation of beauty standards, invites us to investigate the mechanisms that produce both suffering (due to the sense of inadequacy that beauty standards generate) as well as those that produce pleasure. In other words, Craig encourages scholars to recognise the coexistence of processes of domination *and* resistance. Of particular interest is Leeds' metaphor of *negotiation* to interpret the bodily practices tied to 'making oneself beautiful' (166). If it is true that women do not confront oppressive beauty standards as isolated individuals, and if it is also true that their individual choices alone do not necessarily produce resistance, then the only truly 'resistant' strategy is one that emphasises the collective dimensions of awareness and negotiation in order to reveal and ultimately subvert the racialised, gendered, and class-based character of beauty.

Nappytalia: 'Going natural' as everyday anti-racist resistance

The *Afro-Italian Nappy Girls* Facebook page (now called *Nappytalia*) was founded in January of 2014 by a 28-year-old Italian-Ghanaian woman named Evelyne Afaawua, who immigrated to Italy with her parents from France when she was one-year-old.[24] After following the YouTube channels and blogs of 'natural hair' activists in the United States and France, Evelyne decided to open a Facebook page for Afro-Italian women – the first such space in Italian that would promote the care of Afro-textured hair. Yet Evelyne has emphasised in several recent interviews with the Italian publications *Gioia* (28 November 2015) and *Diversity is the Real Beauty* (8 February 2016) that by creating a space for 'Nappy Girls' in Italy her goal was not simply to copy her counterparts abroad. Rather, her mission – based on a personal journey of self-discovery – is to create a space specifically for Afro-Italian women to learn about self-care, valorise their appearances, and rediscover their African roots.

In just six months after its creation, the Nappytalia Facebook page achieved over 1800 'Likes', and as of January 2017 this number has reached 14,555. Evelyne has also organised offline events, including meet-ups called 'Nappy Hours' (in restaurants and bars) and 'Nappy al Parco' (to include women with small children). In September of 2014, she launched *nappytalia.it*, a portal where she reviews products and shares photos, personal stories, and haircare recommendations; she also operates an Instagram account. Although Nappytalia was born in Milan, the city where Evelyne lives and works, the group's activities have since extended throughout several major Italian cities.

The members of Nappytalia explain their decision to 'go natural' (i.e. to no longer use chemical products to straighten their hair) as a part of a longer process of through which

they overcome their shame of being 'different' and begin to liberate themselves from Euro-centric beauty standards. Evelyne, for instance, explains that:

> Afro-Italian Nappy Girls was born because, after coming to terms with my own identity, I decided to reflect it externally. And for me, hair was a very important thing. With my hair, if I had to quantify everything I have spent up until now, I could have bought a car..![25]

The relationship between one's internal consciousness and external self-presentation is one that is frequently articulated in women's descriptions of what is often described as a 'natural hair journey'. This journey involves a form of return to one's African roots – albeit a return that is routed through complex personal experiences and transatlantic or transmediterranean diasporic entanglements, as Evelyne notes in a post on *nappytalia.it* (2 September 2014). Evelyne, for instance, was raised by an Italian foster family that never straightened her hair when she was a child. It was only when she moved to Ghana for middle school and her first year of high school that she began to use extensions. Another member of Nappytalia noted that her decision to stop straightening her hair came hand in hand with an interest in learning about the African roots of her home country, the Dominican Republic, including the history of the Haitian Revolution.

The Internet has played a crucial role both in the recovery of diasporic connections and in the counterhegemonic, aesthetic politics of visibility advanced by the women of Nappytalia. Specifically, the Internet allows for culturally diverse images and themes to be rapidly circulated and 'remixed' (Everett 2009; Jackson 2013; Nakamura 2007). Indeed, the 'natural hair movement' itself can be understood as an international phenomenon that has gained momentum through the proliferation of online communities across the African diaspora (Byrd and Tharps 2014). According to 'Emily', a 28-year-old member of Nappytalia living in Milan:

> The Internet has helped to show more examples of beauty. In Italy, you are told that only white people are beautiful. On the Internet we can see that beauty is not just straight hair. It has helped us to gain strength, to love what we have without wanting something else.[26]

Nappytalia has cultivated a transatlantic and transmediterranean diasporic perspective that draws heavily upon cultural resources from the United States, Britain, and France – countries with deep histories of black resistance against racism – as well as their parents' countries of origin. The figures they reference are varied and include Barack and Michelle Obama, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr.; Black Power and the organizing strategies of the DREAMers[27] and Black Lives Matter activists in the United States; and pan-Africanist philosophy and anti-colonial leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Thomas Sankara. One member of Nappytalia explained that, since she did know of any famous, aspirational models of black beauty in Italy, she looked up to the African-American singer-songwriters Jill Scott and Erykah Badu because of their tightly curled hair and famously large Afros.

While African-American history is an important symbolic reference point for Nappytalia, their aesthetic struggle incorporates the wider African diaspora. The group's founder has made a concerted effort to include black women with origins from across the global diaspora in Nappytalia's activities. In the design of the website's banner, for example, Evelyne made a point to have the graphic designer include two female figures – one with dark skin and another with lighter skin, the second intended to represent a

woman of mixed or Caribbean ancestry. This design choice, as well as the photos featured on Nappytalia's social media pages, shows that (thanks to the tools of diasporic digital circulation) the women of Nappytalia have learned from earlier debates about black beauty in the United States and Britain about the dangers of equating 'authentic' blackness with specific hair textures and skin colours (Mercer 2000).

Although Nappytalia exists as a mutual support organization, as Evelyne emphasises on the Nappytalia blog (3 September 2014), the group also serves a second purpose: to visibly assert the possibility of an Afro-Italian identity that is beautiful, cosmopolitan, and successful. This represents an affront to tragic narratives of the daughters of migration as tragic figures who are suspended between two worlds, victims who suffer from the lack of a cultural 'home' and are in need of proper integration into Italian society. As Evelyne explained:

> Talking about Afro-Italians, it's a structure for me, in a way that fully represents me. 'Afro,' because Africa represents 20% of me, so 'Africa' is cut into 'Afro.' But 'Italian' is whole. The Italian part of me is 80%; so you see, 80 and 20.[28]

Photography has also emerged as a central part of the group's efforts to re-signify the black female body in Italy. Images of Nappytalia members, taken in public places, demonstrate the importance of occupying the city to contest the idea of the black body as a 'space invader' (Puwar 2005). Group members regularly submit glamorous photos of themselves for display on the group's Facebook and Instagram pages, and every meet-up is documented with colourful, professional-quality photos that are posted to the Internet shortly after. They have also staged 'Nappy Shootings' – street-style photos of women with curly hair that showcase every day, public blackness in Italian cities.

This kind of visibility (up to the point of commercial hypervisibility) has inevitably attracted criticism in Italy. Our interviews with Nappytalia members and observation of the Facebook page *Diaxasso* (a community hub for families with one Italian and one African parent) revealed that some white Italian mothers of mixed-race or adopted African children have expressed discomfort with Nappytalia's philosophy of pride in difference. Instead, they favour assimilation as a 'survival strategy' for their children in the hope that this will shield them from teasing and discrimination. In addition, other Italian anti-racist activists have challenged the idea of 'aesthetic citizenship' as a terrain of struggle and claim that it should be secondary to other issues (for instance, employment discrimination). In reality, however, these sorts of 'formal' politics are also regularly discussed across Nappytalia's online platforms. Nappytalia therefore invites women to engage with complex political questions such as citizenship and discrimination from the starting point of their personal experiences with hair.

Nappytalia's goal of full aesthetic visibility has encouraged young women to experiment with new commercial ventures, through which they can reach wider audiences. For instance, Evelyne (who studied business at the prestigious Bocconi University in Milan but had to withdraw before finishing her degree for financial reasons) opened an online shop where Afro-Italian women can purchase hair care products. This 'Nappy Shop' opened in time for the first anniversary of Nappytalia in January of 2015; it offers not just shampoos and conditioners, but also accessories such as satin caps and Afro picks adorned with black power fists.

The commercialization of alternative aesthetics has long been the subject of critique by black feminist intellectuals (Walker 2001); Angela Davis (1998), for instance, opposed the reduction of her iconic Afro to mere 'revolutionary chic'. At the same time, however, 'total commercialization'[29] (Walker 2001, 254) does not diminish political significance: for many years, in fact, the Afro – as a form of black diasporic resistance against white aesthetic hegemony – also attracted violence on the part of state institutions such as the police. The ambiguous implications of commercialization – along with the diversification of commercial targeting and the limited material and symbolic resources available to of African women of low socioeconomic status – is not one of Nappytalia's immediate concerns, however. Currently, after three and a half years in existence, they have achieved significant cultural and commercial success in Italy: Evelyne has won national and international entrepreneurship awards and has been featured in several major Italian magazines, as well as a short documentary; in addition, she is regularly invited to speak at universities and public events about Nappytalia.

Conclusions

If racial oppression was also an aesthetic project, then so will the process of emancipation from this oppression. This means resignifying many of the symbols of racism: skin, hair, gestures, slang, stereotypes related to sexuality. (Sansone 2014)

In this paper we have shown how two markers of subalternity (Islamic veils and Afro-textured hair) are re-signified by the young 'daughters of migration' in Italy through everyday aesthetic practices. Each form of re-appropriation – increasingly accessible thanks to the Internet – has allowed them to challenge the sentiment of inadequacy stemming from hegemonic aesthetic codes. Our use of the term 're-appropriation' aims to emphasise the *process* by which meanings attached to specific bodily practices are constantly contested and reworked. For instance, fashionable veils and Afros are continuously exposed to the depoliticizing pressures of the market (Maier 2016), and they often become a business for (male, white, non-Muslim) entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the young women in our study demonstrated that their everyday practices can also *re*-politicise veils and Afros in specific in socio-political contexts where their bodies are racialised and marked as 'outsider' or 'inferior'.

In addition, our postcolonial feminist perspective allowed us to grasp similarities in the work that race *does* (rather than what race *is*), following the socio-political interpretation of race described by scholars such as Alana Lentin (2017) and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2009, 2012). As our study has shown, anti-blackness and Islamophobia work *together* to reproduce the notion of non-European inferiority and to exclude 'illegitimate' children from European nations. Further studies could help to elucidate the differences between our two case studies and, in turn, understand the ways in which different forms of (anti-)racism change over time and in different contexts. Finally, further research could clarify the ways in which fashionable veils can challenge both the (white) colour and the (hegemonic/Catholic) religion of the Italian nation.

Notes

1. As Andall (2002) notes, even those who technically fulfill the requirements for naturalization are not necessarily able to successfully acquire Italian citizenship. For instance, she writes that

the children of Eritrean immigrants who arrived to Italy in the 1970s and took up residence in 'occupied' homes due to housing shortages did not always have their births officially registered with local governments. As a result, when they applied for Italian citizenship upon turning eighteen, they found themselves lacking official documentation to prove that they had been resident in the country from birth.

2. On Law No. 91 (1992), which affirmed the principle of *jus sanguinis*, see also Njegosh (2015). To understand the scope of this exclusion, one must remember that minors with non-Italian citizenship number around one million people in Italy (Istat 2013).

3. A. Frisina organized and facilitated the focus group, and doctoral candidate Sandra Kyeremeh participated as observer. The participants were contacted through announcements that were placed around various high schools in Padua.

4. For background the use of this expression, see Giuliani (2015), Patriarca (2015), and Perilli (2015).

5. In 1991, African-American taxi driver Rodney Glen King III was brutally beaten by Los Angeles Police Department officers. Outrage surrounding a jury's acquittal of the three of the four officers involved (they could not agree on charges for the fourth officer) culminated in a mass uprising in Los Angeles in 1992.

6. For a genealogy of the dehumanization of Muslims as 'monsters', see Arjana (2015).

7. For a useful overview of the 'digital diasporas' literature, see the special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 'Migration and the Internet: Social Networking and Diasporas' (2012), edited by Pedro J. Oiarzabal and Ulf-Deitrich Reips.

8. For an example in Italy, see the editorial by political scientist Giovanni Sartori in which he affirms the 'non-integratability of young Muslims', citing the 'third generations' in England and France (who, he argues, are 'more fervent and brutal than ever') in order to justify his arguments against the reform of Italian citizenship law (http://www.corriere.it/editoriali/09_dicembre_20/sartori_2eb47d0c-ed3e-11de-9ea5-00144f02aabc.shtml).

9. For an investigation of the origins of the term 'Islamophobia' at the end of the nineteenth century, see Bravo López (2011).

10. On the racism of European states against Muslims, see Fekete and Sivanandan 2009.

11. On the parallels between this process and anti-Semitic naturalizations, see Klug (2012, 678) and Meer (2013).

12. Recent cases of Islamophobia and outright Islamophobic violence in Italy have been tied to the rise of ISIS (Vergani and Tacchi 2015). See also Frisina (2016) and the second edition of the annual European Islamophobia Report, www.islamophobiaeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Introduction_2016.pdf

13. She preferred to not have her name published and asked that we use her initials instead.

14. Interview with A. Frisina, 7 September 2014, Padua.

15. On the origins and multiple meanings of the veil, see Pepicelli (2012).

16. Through pages like that of K.N., many Muslim women have decided to follow the religious teaching of the veil because it is 'aesthetically beautiful'. Wearing the veil in an elegant fashion becomes a form of bodily discipline (Foucault 1988) that is at once individual and collective, and is learned through countless online hijab tutorials. This form of discipline follows the precept of 'modesty' that, in the Islamic tradition, disciplines the bodies of men but especially those of women, rendering them 'inconspicuous' so that they will not be sexually provocative. Nonetheless, today modesty is a polyvalent value, ambiguous and contested among Muslims – not just in words but also through 'visual debates' about what, how, and when to cover or reveal (Moors 2013).

17. In the colonial imaginary, the fact that veiled women appeared to be 'difficult to reach, unavailable' did not only represent the inferiority of the culture of the colonized, it also unleashed masculine fantasies of lustful women (i.e., the harem) that had to be conquered and made docile (Yeğenoğlu 1998).

18. For the young Muslim women interviewed in our research, the most interesting fashion styles do not come from Great Britain or the United States but rather from designers based in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey.

19. Interview with A. Frisina, 3 December 2014, Padua.
20. For more information about the diffusion of Islamic fashion among African-Americans, see the documentary *Fashioning Faith* (2009), http://www.der.org/films/fashioning-faith.html.
21. On global Islamic fashion, see Sandikci and Ger 2010 and Lewis 2015.
22. For more information, see http://people.com.celebrity.lupita-nyongo-is-peoples-most-beautiful/ and www.huffingtonpost.it/2014/03/24/lupita-nyongo-dencia-creme-sbiancano-pelle_n_5019840.html.
23. See, for instance, the special issue of *Feminist Theory*, 'Beauty, race and feminist theory in Latin America and the Caribbean' (2013), edited by Mónica G. Moreno Figueroa and Megan Rivers Moore.
24. Evelyne was the subject of a 2014 documentary by Massimo Coppola, *Nappy Girls* (http://video.corriere.it/nappy-girls/5291ec12-4416-11e4-bbc2-282fa2f68a02).
25. Interview with C. Hawthorne, 8 July 2014, Milan.
26. Interview with C. Hawthorne via Skype, 25 July 2014.
27. The DREAMers are a movement of young people who arrived, undocumented, to the United States as children traveling with their parents; they are seeking a legalization of their immigration status. The name DREAMer comes from the legislative proposal entitled 'DREAM': Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors.
28. Interview with C. Hawthorne, 8 July 2014, Milan.
29. As Tamara E. Holmes notes in an article for *Black Enterprise,* the U.S. Black hair care industry is worth over 600 million dollars (4 October 2013). Similar figures are not available for Italy.

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