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**“The Color of the Republic: On Racism and Anti-racism in Post-1945 Italy”**

Abstract

By looking at the reception of Antonio Campobasso's *Nero di Puglia* (1980) - a memoir by the son of an Italian woman and an African-American soldier born right after WWII - and of two films of the 1960s (*Il Nero* by Giovanni Vento and *Faustina* by Luigi Magni), the paper discusses how racism and anti-racism were understood in post-1945 Italy. Campobasso's powerful text, which denounced the hypocrisies of the Republic, received some acknowledgement in the intellectual community, but was almost ignored in the culture at large, even in certain quarters of the institutional left which disliked the radicalism of the author. Giovanni Vento's innovative film, featuring two biracial Italians of Campobasso's generation, was unable to reach the commercial circuit, while the filming of *Faustina*, a movie staging an African-American actress in the role of a biracial Italian of that same generation, was transformed into an opportunity for self-congratulatory statements about the inclusiveness of Italian society.

The paper asks questions about the selectivity of cultural memory. It contends in particular that Campobasso's memoir and Vento's film were unable to have an impact and to generate any debate on Italian racism primarily because they challenged well-rooted cultural taboos about interracial relations involving white women and did not conform to dominant ideas of blackness inherited from colonial and fascist times and still much alive in postcolonial Italy. The postwar Italian left, while ostensibly anti-racist, had its share of responsibility as it tended to limit the meaning of racism by subordinating “race” to class (or to a general critique of the “system”) and by almost exclusively connecting racism to fascism/neo-fascism and to other countries (*in primis* the US). Examining the reproduction of “race” and approaches to racism and anti-racism in the cultures of the postwar Republic is thus crucial if we want to understand the continuing reluctance of today's Italy to confront the racial assumptions underpinning its national identity.