

Multilingual Practices of Senegalese Immigrants in Rome: Construction of Identities and Negotiation of Boundaries

Abstract: While African immigrants and Italians of African descent have become more visible in Italian society since the 1980s, Italian culture and identity are still largely understood by majority white Italians in terms of race, nationhood, and family history. Overwhelmingly absent from these national discussions concerning the inclusion of immigrants, foreign residents, and so-called non-Italian citizens in society are the very people at the center of these debates. To give voice to some of these individuals, this article explores how a specific group, the Senegalese community in Rome, conceptualizes and understands identity formation as foreigners and as linguistic, racial and ethnic minorities through the lens of Applied Linguistics. Through analysis of code-switching in qualitative ethnographic data collected in the spring of 2010, I show how multilingual practices illustrate these immigrants' understandings of inclusion/exclusion and how these notions intersect with ideas about blackness. Therefore, this essay calls into question the static, exclusionary narrative on national identity and shows the ways in which the Senegalese community in Rome inserts formulations of blackness in the conversation. By comprehending how immigrants perceive their identities and the sites in which these identities are constructed, we gain a more multifaceted perspective on what it means to be Italian.

Keywords: Applied Linguistics, Code-switching, Senegalese immigration, Italian national identity, Race, Blackness

Introduction

In 2013, Cécile Kyenge, an Italian citizen of Congolese origin, became Italy's first black minister when she accepted Enrico Letta's appointment as Minister of Integration in his coalition government. She is one of a few highly-visible black Italians, joining others — such as footballer

Mario Balotelli, a member of the Italian national team — as a symbol of the changing image of Italian identity. Sports and politics constitute two areas that are heavily linked to national identity formation, and Kyenge recognizes their parts in generating discussion on what it means to be Italian. Kington quotes her as saying, “Balotelli and I are both opening new paths in our fields...and anyone who does that will face huge difficulties” (2013).¹ These trailblazers have been met by a vocal group of white Italians who are unable to reconcile being black with being Italian. From soccer fans harassing Balotelli by chanting “a negro cannot be Italian” to members of Parliament such as Roberto Calderoli calling Kyenge an orangutan, or right-wing supporters throwing bananas at her, the place of African immigrants and black Italians has been called into question on the national stage (Kington, 2013).²

Many argue that these insults are coming from fringe groups, in particular, xenophobic political movements such as Forza Nuova and the Lega Nord. Kyenge, herself, is quick to point out that children in Italy are less likely to see the world in terms of race than their parents’ generation (Kington, 2013). However, as Povoledo notes, “experts who track immigration issues say that more subtle and insidious forms of racism are pervasive in Italy as it struggles to come to terms with its rapidly changing demographics” (2013). In particular, black Italians and African immigrants struggle as much with everyday racism as with acts of overt discrimination. This is why I will focus not on the highly visible and controversial enunciations of groups such as the Northern League but on speech data collected from conversations with and between African immigrants. By approaching this topic through an Applied Linguistics perspective, I will explore how a specific group, the Senegalese community in Rome, conceptualizes and understands identity formation as foreigners and as linguistic, racial and ethnic minorities. In doing so, this article articulates 1) the specificity of blackness as a category and an experience whereby

blackness is a very visible touchstone for debates about Italian identity, 2) the relationship between post-colonial Senegal, Italy, and to a lesser extent, France, 3) the linguistic validity of studying one group who identifies as a community as opposed to immigrants at large, and 4) how the analysis of code-switching data in Italy illustrates understandings of inclusion/exclusion.

Italy: Immigration and National Identity

Italy, historically a country of emigrants, is now transforming into a popular immigrant destination, attracting people from a variety of places. Over half its foreign residents are from EU or other European countries. North and Sub-Saharan Africans make up the next most populous group, followed by individuals from Asia and the Americas.³ As Italy adapts to its relatively new role as immigrant destination, it must come to terms with multiculturalism, as experienced through a number of demographic factors. For instance, immigrants bring a variety of native languages with them, adding to the various languages spoken already in Italy such as standard Italian and regional dialects as well as global languages such as English. Religious diversity is another change in the social landscape. Although Italy traditionally identifies as a Roman Catholic country, immigration is adding a host of other religions, most notably, Islam. It is important to note that only a third of the immigrant population is Muslim (the majority of immigrants are Christian from various denominations).⁴ However, Islam is the religious demographic that bears the brunt of xenophobic discourse and hostilities, and that has most effectively called into question understandings of Italian national identity.⁵ At the same time, probably the most visible feature of the new multiculturalism is ethnic/racial diversity. While discussions of multiculturalism need to recognize these varied types of diversity and their impact on Italian society, I will focus primarily on racial/ethnic identification in general, and the construction of blackness in particular, because conceptualizations of blackness in the Italian

context have emerged as a central theme in the qualitative data conducted among Senegalese immigrants in Rome.⁶ However, before presenting the data and analyses, I must provide some contextualization of blackness in Italian society.

Understanding Blackness in Light of Italian National Identity

While often seen as a relatively recent phenomenon, the concept of race in Italy, and understandings of blackness and whiteness, firmly took root during the colonial period.⁷ As Ben-Ghiat and Fuller contend, “although Italian colonialism was more restricted in geographical scope and duration than the French and British empires, it had no less an impact on the development of metropolitan conceptions of race, national identity, and geopolitical imaginaries” (2008: 2).⁸ The colonial policy and the post-colonial aftermath in Italy attempted to create a national identity reinforced by imperialism and racism in order to combat the country’s fragmentation, seen most clearly through a North-South divide.

Italy’s North-South divide, also known as the Southern Question, is the historical and contemporary phenomenon in which the Northern provinces have economically dominated the South, causing mass migration from the South to the North and engendering feelings of cultural superiority in Northern residents. The existence of this North-South divide emerged most clearly during Italian Unification. According to some in the North, Italy’s Southerners were not superior to the African continent. For instance, Moe argues that in the Northern imaginary, the South represented “both ‘Africa’ and *terra vergine*, a reservoir of feudal residues, sloth, and squalor on the one hand and of quaint peasants, rustic traditions, and exotica on the other” (2002: 3). It was this rhetoric that helped justify what Verdicchio calls the first phase of colonialism: “the ‘liberation’ of the south” (1997: 28).⁹ In order to create a uniform, national identity that effaced the understood differences between the North and South, Mussolini had to demonstrate the

commonalities of all Italians while eliminating any notion that southerners were in any way related to Africans. As Gillette writes:

Racism would be used as a tool to accomplish this transformation. Mussolini thought it would strengthen the consciousness of the Italian identity, remind them of the imperial might of their ancestors, and foster the ardent desire to conquer new territories. Racism would become the driving force behind the creation of the new fascist man, the *uomo fascista*. (2002: 53)

While Italy is still seen as a fragmented country in many ways, from the rich linguistic plurality that continues to exist to the pervasive stereotypes concerning southerners and northerners, Mussolini's attempts at creating a national identity were somewhat successful in highlighting commonalities across the nation-state.¹⁰ For example, referring to current "xenophobic discourses and practices," Bouchard contends that "the revival of a mythology of Italian national identity based on imaginary notions of shared civic values, a territory linked to a common culture, and, at times, even a genealogical descent, testify to this" (2010: 105).¹¹

Racialized rhetoric is seen still in a variety of present-day contexts such as through the xenophobia expressed by Umberto Bossi's Northern League. Ward has amply traced the evolution of contemporary racist arguments concerning immigration and shown the persistence of anti-immigrant discourse, for example through graffiti found around Rome (1997: 91). Despite the distinction made by scholars such as Sartori between xenophobia and racism,¹² those actually subjugated to prejudicial discourses clearly understand their exclusion in terms of race.

In any case, what follows will demonstrate how Senegalese immigrants use code-switching and other discursive features to construct notions of blackness in a country where whiteness is the norm. In addition, it will explore how these constructs reinforce boundaries of

inclusion and exclusion erected by the dominant culture, which often lead to sustained marginalization and complex reactions to this marginalization.

Research Site and Immigrant Community

Rome has historically been an important destination for both southern migration and foreign immigration. Presently, 10% of Rome's population is comprised of foreigners, which is considerably higher than the 7.5% foreign population in Italy at large.¹³ The Senegalese population in Rome is small, approximately 1000 inhabitants, but Senegalese immigrants are quite visible, particularly due to their propensity to be street vendors in high traffic areas such as the central train station, Roma Termini.

Senegal, a predominantly Muslim country of over 13.5 million people, is a former French colony and a historically important host country for intraregional migration within West Africa. However, it has recently gained notoriety as a country of transition and as a source country for mass West African migrations to Europe. France was the historical destination for Senegalese immigrants, but the economic downturn in the 1980s restricted migration there mainly to family reunification while transforming other parts of Europe (particularly Spain and Italy), as well as the USA, into receiving countries (Riccio 2008: 219). With Italy currently fourth among European countries with regard to foreign-born populations in general, the most recent data show that over 87,000 Senegalese residents currently live in Italy, a number that does not include illegal immigrants.¹⁴ In sum, Italy is on par with France as a major Senegalese migrant destination.¹⁵

Meanwhile, Senegal's multilingual environment and the complexity of language attitudes are important for understanding the linguistic profiles of the Senegalese immigrants in Italy. Although Senegal's official language is French, as little as 25% of the population speaks

the former colonizing language, and only 10% of the entire population speaks French as a primary language.¹⁶ French allows for Senegal to interact with France and other Francophone countries. However, as O'Brien notes, Senegal's economic decline has resulted in less governmental hiring, providing little incentive for people to cultivate their French, which is seen by many as "the language of inaccessible officialdom" (1998: 31), paving the way for an increase in usage of other languages in a variety of domains.

With over 25 indigenous languages in Senegal, Wolof, which is spoken by over 80% of the population (although the ethnic group represents 43% of the national population), is a vehicular language used by different ethnic groups to communicate.¹⁷ However, other languages such as Pulaar and Sereer are spoken by large portions of the population, and in any given conversation it is common to hear multiple languages regardless of ethnic affiliation.

In addition to national languages, global languages are influencing language attitudes in Senegal. While little has been written about the learning of foreign languages there, those interviewed for this study noted the increased access to English language classes, as a means to enter into a global linguistic community.¹⁸ Informants also revealed a new-found interest in learning Chinese because of growing business relations between the two countries.¹⁹ Thus, the linguistic landscape in Senegal is extremely varied and complex and the negotiation of linguistic spaces seen in Senegal transfers to migrant destinations such as Italy, where code-switching and other multilingual features continue to flourish, something the data in this study will show.²⁰

Methodological Considerations

In a three-month period from February to May of 2010, I conducted an ethnographic study of 25 Senegalese immigrants to Rome (17 male, 8 female, all between the ages of 23 and 42), collecting field notes, participant observations, and recordings of natural conversations and

interviews. The participants in the study had diverse profiles. Some had only been living in Italy for six months, others for over ten years. Some had only a primary school education, others had earned bachelor's or even master's degrees. The vast majority spoke Wolof as a mother tongue, while the rest of the informants, save one, were fluent in Wolof. Other maternal languages included Pulaar, Sereer, and Diola. There was also a variety of second languages represented, in addition to Italian, such as French, English, and Spanish.²¹

The majority of interactions with informants consisted of a semi-structured interview in an open-ended format that ranged from one to two hours. These interviews not only conveyed attitudes about language use, concrete experiences of language use and acquisition over the lifetime of the informant, or the goals and dreams that these informants have concerning language use in their new countries of residence; they also displayed language in action. Of the 25 informants interviewed, I followed a few of them, the principal informants, throughout the three-month period, engaging in regular discussions about language use and recoding natural conversations they had with other Senegalese as well as with Italians. The goal was to compare their interview responses with natural data, both in terms of content (how the way they use language reflects how they spoke about the way they use language) and function (how the way they use language in the natural setting compares to the way they use language in the more structured environment of the interview). With the data collection primarily focused on immigrant language ideologies concerning attitudes on the Italian national language and on multilingual usage, this ethnographic fieldwork, analyzed through the lens of Applied Linguistics, shows how Senegalese immigrants in Rome conceptualize and perform their identities through multilingual practices. From this perspective, it is not only *what* they say that conveys certain understandings of self and environment. It is also *how* they speak — the ways in

which they switch between languages and structure their discourse — that contributes to their means of making identity claims.²²

In light of racialized and nationalistic discourses that have pervaded discussions on both immigration and Italian national identity as well as displays of intolerance seen at the local level, I explore how Senegalese immigrants learn to understand their own identities in a new environment by, primarily, concentrating on their desire to be included into Italian society, which emerges from historical, social and linguistic factors. Following Rampton (1995), I consider the participants' social knowledge about ethnic groups and their interrelationships (15), giving voice through interview data to communities silenced in debates on Italian culture. While immigrants in general have few fora to share their experiences and express their opinions, interview data allow access to these varied thoughts and emotions. Conducting ethnography through the lens of Applied Linguistics highlights the centrality of language use in the immigrant experience and shows how deeply connected linguistic identity is to national, racial and ethnic identity. Furthermore, analysis of linguistic histories gleaned from interviews serves to contextualize individual narratives in a larger historical, political, and social framework, shedding light on language ideologies and on feelings of inclusion and exclusion.

Conceptualizing Boundaries, Constructing Identities

Concepts such as home and third space, which are constantly negotiated and changing according to context, can be used to discuss understandings of immigrants' position in the host country.²³

The following excerpt underlines the importance of home and of positioning for two Senegalese immigrants as Biondo (B) and his friend (F) discuss a return to Senegal.²⁴ This excerpt displays nationality as a highlighted identity marker:

M: ...Pensate di tornare in Senegal?²⁵

B: Ooooooh, hai mai visto un senegalese che non vuole tornare [laughs]?

M: Sì, esatto.

B: No esiste proprio. Dovunque sia. Australia, America, Europa.

M: Sempre, casa è casa. B: Casa. Casa è casa. Basta. **Bëggoo dellu Senegal?**

[You don't want to return to Senegal?]

F: Eh?

B: Bëggoo dellu Senegal? [You don't want to return to Senegal?]

F: Sì, chiaro.

B: No esiste un senegalese che no vuole tornare a casa.

F: Senegal è il paese più bello del mondo. (Biondo, 10 April, 2010)

Here we see the boundaries that Biondo erects around his conceptualization of home. He is far away from his home country, Senegal, and this boundary exists not because of what Italy is, but for what it is not. By mentioning other places (Australia, America, Europe), he creates a dichotomy that juxtaposes Senegal against the rest of the world.

The content of this conversation indicates a notion of displacement, of being far from home. But an analysis of the actual language use also demonstrates the existence of boundaries. While the language of the conversation is Italian, Biondo chooses to direct a question in Wolof at his friend. One possible, pragmatic, explanation (which is substantiated by code-switching literature and falls under the rubric of situational code-switching) is that Biondo switches to Wolof to indicate a different interlocutor. Such conjecture is justified by the fact that, in this instance, Biondo turns his attention from me, the interviewer, to his Senegalese friend. Switching languages helps to signal this change. However, one can use other perspectives to explain the switch to Wolof, such as Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, which details social motivations

for code-switching. Myers-Scotton contends that code-switching can be used in the negotiation of interpersonal relationships and the signaling of group membership (1993: 478). Employing this latter interpretation, it can be argued that Biondo switches languages to create a collective sense by highlighting the linguistic connection between himself and his friend. The Italian language bestows a particular identity on the country in which he now lives that contrasts with his identity as a Wolof speaker. By speaking in Wolof, he further emphasizes an identity that is not Italian, but Senegalese. This decision reinforces the boundary between him and his environment and the link between himself and other Wolof-speaking Senegalese people.

Gardner-Chloros applies the Markedness Model to the conceptualization of home. She proposes that

in any given social circumstances, a particular variety is the expected or “unmarked” – i.e. the unremarkable – one. So, for example, switching to the local vernacular to talk about home/family is “unmarked”, whereas switching to the local vernacular in a public speech is a “marked” choice. (2009: 69)

In any event, what I find particularly interesting is that when Biondo code-switches into Wolof, after having ruminated on the idea of home in the line “Casa è casa,” he does not use the Wolof word for home. It may be that the very action of uttering this question in Wolof means that home is implied in the word “Senegal.” Furthermore, Biondo uses a negative construction in Wolof when he asks his friend about his desire to return to Senegal. Tannen, whose research looks at expectation in discourse, claims that “in general, a negative statement is made only when its affirmative was expected” (1993: 44). Indeed, Biondo’s interrogative statement receives an adamantly affirmative response from his friend, and Biondo reiterates the importance and the

expectations placed on home by continuing the negative articulation in Italian when remarking that there does not exist a Senegalese who does not want to return home.

In this statement about returning home, Biondo speaks in absolutes as he channels the voice of a whole people. Biondo, therefore, further accentuates the us/them schism by taking isolated instances and attributing a generalization to them. In the next example, Professore (P) uses a different tactic to express desire for his homeland. He utilizes intertextuality to answer the question of whether he thinks he will return to Senegal one day:

P: *C'est mon souhait, quoi.* [*It's my dream, you know.*]

N: **Inch'allah.** [**God willing.**]

P: E il mio sogno. I have a dream. [smiles]

M: [laugh] OK.

P: That's my dream." (Professore, 24 April, 2010)

While the full conversation is in Italian, French, and English, at the point of this citation, French has been spoken for a while. In the first turn Professore speaks in French. After Ndiaga inserts the Wolof/Arabic phrase "God willing," Professore repeats his original thought in Italian. He then quotes Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. By intertextualizing King's words, Professore infuses the conversation with a hint of gravitas under the guise of humor (he smiled when he said it, eliciting a laugh from me). By citing a well-known civil rights leader, Professore aptly conveys just how much he yearns to return to Senegal, the effects of his sustained exodus from his homeland, and the alienation he feels in a new land. In addition, by moving between the indefinite article in "I have a dream" and the personal pronouns "mon," "mio" and "my", he shows both the collective desire of Senegalese migrants to return home and his proprietary claim on this particular dream.

While most people interviewed for this study aspire to one day return home, the need to send remittances and the lack of employment opportunities in Senegal mean that these supposed one- to two-year stints abroad will extend into a decade or more. So, at some point, they must redefine home. And in order to transform Italy into *home*, they must prove themselves as legitimate beings in the space that in fact could one day become home. However, certain barriers, most notably race, often preclude access to legitimacy. Lombardi-Diop and Romeo spell out the restrictions that skin color can impose on black Italians, made evident by Italian writers of color such as Pap Kouma and Igiaba Scego:

Italianità seems unattainable for black Italians precisely because national belonging is generally understood in terms of specific traits (both cultural and biological) that cannot be simply acquired by a perfect mastery of the language and the Italian way of life. (2012: 10)

Khouma articulated this alienation when he wrote the following about certain encounters he has had with police officers or border control:

“Tu possiedi il passaporto italiano ma non sei italiano.” Oppure, con un sorriso: “Tu non hai la nazionalità italiana come noi, hai solo la cittadinanza italiana perché sei extracomunitario.” (2009: 3)

The deictic marker “come noi” ensures that Khouma’s brand of Italianness, one based on citizenship and not nationality, is illegitimate in the eyes of the dominant group. Therefore, Khouma, and those like him, are placed outside of an invisible barrier, regardless of citizenship.

The following excerpts support Khouma’s depiction of a reduced Italianness by highlighting the principles of inclusion and exclusion with regard to the effects of boundaries in the construction of identity. Race and skin color constitute identity markers that contribute to the

establishment and maintenance of boundaries for many Senegalese immigrants in Rome and minimize any chance of them ever really being accepted as part of Italian society. However, the various ways that the informants express pain of rejection indicate a desire to be woven into the societal narrative. For instance, the next excerpt revisits Professore's interview (P). As already mentioned, the interview switches between languages, but at this point in the interview the dominant language is French. This excerpt shares a similar trait to the previous ones in that the use of code-switching conveys a complex sense of identity:

P: *La demande, c'était?* [*The question, it was ?*]

M: *Tes pensées ici en Italie* [*Your thoughts about here in Italy*].

P: *Va be—*

N: *--Tu as, tu as* [*—Have you, have you*] [trails off]

P: *Les—* [*The—*]

N: *Tu as vu, vu le film* [*Have you seen, seen the film*] Co, Col, Color Viola.

M: *Non.* [*No*] Oh, The Color Purple.

N: Color Viola.

M: The Color, Oui. [*Yes*]

N: *Tu l'as vu?* [*You saw it?*]

P: Color Purple.

M: *Oui. Oui. C'est, c'est fort.* [*Yes. Yes. It's, it's powerful*]

N: *Je suis noir, je suis nero, je suis brutto, ma, je suis vivo.* [*I am black, I am black, I am ugly, but, I am alive.*]

M: *Esatto.*

N: *È bellissimo.*²⁶ (Ndiaga from Professore's interview, 24 April, 2010)

Professore demonstrates difficulty in broaching the subject about his thoughts on living in Italy. He asks the interviewer for clarification, effectively stalling. He then pauses after saying “va be”, allowing Ndiaga to interject. His hesitation signifies an attempt to find the right words for what he wants to say. Chafe proposes that “sometimes speakers hesitate while they are

deciding *what* to talk about next, and sometimes they hesitate while they are deciding *how* to talk about what they have chosen” (1985: 79-80). The hesitation allows Ndiaga to steer the conversation toward race, a topic that allows the two to construct together a racialized narrative, in which they cut each other off, speak over each other, and repeat each other, such as when Professore echoes Ndiaga’s “Color Viola” with “Color Purple.”

Ndiaga quotes a line from this iconic film, based on Alice Walker’s book *The Color Purple*, where the abused and battered Celie responds to Albert’s taunt: “I’m poor, black, I might even be ugly, but dear God, I’m here. I’m here.”²⁷ While Ndiaga saw the movie in Italian, he begins the quote in French, the language currently spoken, and yet he inserts Italian for the adjectives. He switches mid-utterance when correcting himself from “je suis noir” to “je suis nero.” He then continues this pattern with “brutto” and “vivo.” It may be the case that the “I am” remains in French because after Wolof, French is the language in which he best expresses himself, thus the language that most closely reflects his identity. Or it might be that the adjectives in Italian simply because he saw the movie in Italian or is it because those are the adjectives that he perceives the Italians would use to describe him.

The exploration of the social motivations for the multilingual exchange may take place using the concept of metaphorical code-switching, a state of affairs in which switching languages “enriches a situation, allowing for allusion to more than one social relationship within the situation” (Blom & Gumperz 1972: 408). Unlike situational code-switching, where the interlocutor or context drives the language choice, metaphorical code-switching conjures what Gardner-Chloros called “the metaphorical ‘world’ of the variety” (2009: 59). From an open-ended question such as “what are your thoughts on living in Italy?” Ndiaga directs the conversation toward the topic of race. He appropriates the voice of a fictional character that has

been abused and controlled to illustrate his marginalized position in society. By using the adjectives “nero” “brutto” and “vivo” in Italian, he voices the speech of someone else. By switching to Italian for these operative words and by changing the content of the conversation to focus on race, Ndiaga imposes the notion of exclusion in order to position himself as an outsider in his social environment. Paradoxically, he also signals his stake in *italianità*: living in Italy and learning Italian opens the door to an Italian identity that he partially embodies through using Italian for the operative words.

For these informants, one of the prerequisites for existing in an Italian space is the need to construct their blackness:

P: *...en Afrique ça va être différent parce que là on ne parlera pas de, euhh, blacks. Non. Tu as vu? Mais bon. Je sais que tu, tu dois comprendre un peu ce que je suis en train de dire.*

M: *Oui. Bien sûr.*

P: *Voilà. Je ne veux pas trop rentrer dans les détails.*²⁸ (Professore, 24 April, 2010)

It is important to note that while the questions in the interview guide do not specifically raise the question of race unless prompted by the informant, it was discussed in the majority of the interviews. Professore’s formulation of race is similar to what Ibrahim tells of his own experiences of becoming black in response to his social environment signaling him as black. Ibrahim introduces the concept of a *social imaginary* when discussing the process by which the black youths in his study come into their blackness. The social imaginary is “a discursive space or a representation in which they are already constructed, imagined, and positioned and thus are treated by the hegemonic discourses and dominant groups, respectively as Blacks” (1999: 353).

Professore implies that he was constructed as black when he left Africa for Europe, and he has difficulty accepting this heightened awareness of his black identity.²⁹ First of all, he is arguably affected by the social processes of racism based on the way he refuses to discuss the matter in detail. Secondly, he chooses to use “black” instead of “noir” after some hesitation.

There are various reasons for Professore to use the English word to refer to blackness. For instance, talking about a racial feature in a foreign language can lessen the impact of the word. An informant in Paris explains the current tendency to use “black”: “*Ils ne peuvent pas utiliser le mot ‘noir’ parce que le mot ‘noir’ est tabou*”³⁰ (Ajuma, 13 December, 2009).³¹ Just as Zentella (1997) notes cases where those in her study switched languages to avoid a taboo word (97), using descriptive terms concerning race in a foreign language serves the same purpose. By using a word borrowed from English, one avoids the connotations attached to the French word.

Another possible explanation is that the use of the word black signals the African diaspora. The manner in which Professore includes the interviewer in the conversation gives credence to such conjecture. His body language belies his implicit understanding of me, the interviewer, as a fellow black person. However, I do not pursue the subject because Professor prefers to not go into detail. Rather, he simply leads me to believe that he assumes that because of who I am (an African-American), I must understand. When I verify his assumption, his “voilà” ends the discussion: there is no need to say more. Thus, by including me directly in this discussion of race, he creates the boundary of us vs. them in which I become part of the us. The racial identity that he assigns to me (and that I accept) separate us from the identity that he gives to the Italian people.

While it is not possible to know all the specific experiences the shape Professore’s perception prior to our encounter, the data from other informants shed light on the types of

racially charged experiences that are now common in Italy. For instance, Abi has had a difficult time during her stay there. The following excerpt further demonstrates how language makes manifest the us/them schism:

Moi, un jour, où j'ai prends le bus, et je rentre et je fais, j'ai le VI quatre Italiens. Mais les enfants. Mais, elles m'ont fait, quelque chose. Ça me mal jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Je ne pas oublier ça...Regarde le nero, là, là le ner:.. Quand je parle au téléphone ils criaient 'oua oua oua oua oua'. J'obligeais de dire, je le dis 'mais si te plaît'. On dit 'Ici c'est italien. C'est chez nous. Vous êtes des ner:.. Mamma mia, ça me blesse. Ça me mal. Ça me mal...' ³² (Abi, 28 March, 2010)

Several aspects of this incident on the bus with the Italian youths must be highlighted. The first is the blatant signaling of her color “nero.” The youths position her as the Other by highlighting her skin, a trait that contrasts with their view of Italian society. This word has a tremendous effect on Abi as it is the only content word in this excerpt that is in Italian. (I will treat “mamma mia” as a discourse marker separately.) “Nero” is directed at her in a discriminatory manner, and she, in turn, keeps it in its original form. By revoicing it in Italian, Abi conveys the original hatred behind the word and the effect it has on her. She also emphasizes the word through repetition and through elongation of the “R” sound. ³³ By choosing to voice a key word in Italian, Abi highlights the word’s effect on her.

Butler explores the injurious nature of language: “to be called a name is one of the first forms of linguistic injury that one learns” (1997: 2). It is only fitting then that Abi would internalize this word with its specific connotation in Italian, when she has limited command of the Italian language. It must be mentioned that the word “nero,” in referring to a person, is not necessarily an insult in Italian. Its connotation varies from a descriptive marker to a derogatory

comment depending on context.³⁴ Judging from Abi's retelling, the use of "nero" in this case is highly offensive. Butler asks, "Why should a merely linguistic address produce such a response of fear?" (1997: 5). She answers this question, in part, with the following:

One comes to "exist" by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*. The terms that facilitate recognition are themselves conventional, the effects and instruments of a social ritual that decide, often through exclusion and violence, the linguistic conditions of survivable subjects.
(1997: 5)

Abi exists because she is recognizable as Other, an identity that is not welcomed by those who are taunting her. Her skin color is what separates her, excludes her, and it is this appellation that stays etched in her mind, resurfacing in its Italian form in a discussion that is predominantly in French. The simple act of labeling by skin color is not necessarily injurious by itself. However, because people use skin color as an excuse to exclude others economically and socially, a simple word becomes injurious.

Abi's skin color is not the only part of her identity that the youths attack. Upon hearing her speaking in Wolof, they imitate her with "wawawawawa" to the point that she cannot concentrate on her phone call. She recalls their reasoning as: "ici c'est italien. C'est chez nous." Those who taunt her are further positioning her as Other by drawing attention to her language. They create a boundary in which those who speak Italian can enter. Furthermore, as hurtful as the racial insult is, it is the linguistic insult that she enunciates as the more injurious act: "Mamma mia, *ça me blesse. Ça me mal.*" She is wounded because of the attack on her mother tongue and because of her continued exclusion from the society in which she now lives.

“Mamma mia” is an exclamation that has been picked up by several of the informants and is often used to express emotion. While Abi seldom employs Italian words throughout the interview, in this instant this phrase best describes her injury. Abi feels like an outsider in Italy and expresses this sentiment through different discourse strategies, conveying a bleak and disheartening picture.

Blackness is experienced in this way in Italy for a number of reasons. For example, discussing how denial plays a role in Italian discourse on race, Portelli argues that part of the reason for the lack of introspection on the part of Italians with regards to race relates to how they position themselves (and have done so since colonization) as normal and unmarked: “[f]or instance, jokes and songs from the colonial period are never about a white person and a black person, but always about an *Italian* and a black person” (2003: 30). This racializing of the Other has not encountered resistance because there has never been black voices to question it: “We are ‘us,’ and they are ‘the other:’ we had no active and sizable black community, in our past, to educate us to the fact that we, too, may be other to someone else” (Portelli 2003: 30). But since current demographic changes are increasing the number of people who identify as black, adding to both visibility and audibility, the strength that comes from numbers facilitates discussions about one’s place in society.

One only needs look to France, as do the Senegalese I interviewed, to see the effects that a critical mass of people have on a society. The prolonged existence of Senegalese immigrants, and African immigrants in general, means that France has been forced to think of where non-traditional inhabitants fit in the nation. France’s extensive post-colonial network and the fact that they have overseas departments and territories that have predominantly black populations also engender discussions on race and national identity, albeit reluctantly. As for everyday

experiences, there is a sense that more options are available for people of color in France, even if many have questioned what they see as discriminatory practices that impede integration:

In Francia se vedi la polizia, vedi polizia black. Se vai al municipio, vedi un sindaco.³⁵

Se vai al aeroporto, vedi un pilota black. Dovunque vai. Qua, non c'è un poliziotto black.

Non c'è un barman black...Ma qua tu vedi per strada la gente che vende i CD. (Karim 2 March, 2010)

In fact, according to Karim, an implied notion of economic class is part and parcel of the status of immigrant. Karim portrays the positioning of the immigrant as an obstacle, which relegates them to undesirable jobs with low social capital (such as CD vendors) and hinders their access to positions that garner respect. Karim seems to depict a sense of belonging that is contingent upon the roles a given community occupies in a society. This is made obvious by Karim's juxtaposing the respected professions of police officer, mayor, and pilot to which Africans have access in France, with the eschewed profession of street vending, one of the few job options available to African immigrants who enter Italy, especially for those without papers.³⁶

However, not all discussions of identity and belonging among the informants in Italy are negative. There are plenty of examples where informants take a more optimistic approach to their position in society and to possible improvements in the way members of the dominant group view them, which, in turn, suggest a desire to question the nature of *italianità* and where they fit. Returning to the notion of home the following informant is able to create a home space in both France and Italy:

Al livello culturale, strutturale, mentalità, sto molto meglio in Francia perche sono abituato al sistema sociale, culturale, la lingua. Ho amici. In Italia, conosco

molto bene l'Italia e vedo la mia dimensione africana più in Italia. Forse io, da Senegalese o Francofono, la dimensione occidentale, in Italia è il mio punto di equilibrio. Nel senso della famiglia, colore humano, l'improvvisazione un po', la nozione del tempo è più vicino a Africa spesso, anche il sole e il clima. Ho più i miei dimensioni africani in Italia. (Ibou, 19 February, 2010)

Ibou's reasons for feeling more at home in France are related to how accustomed he is to France's social and cultural system, and the French language. He was a French language instructor in Senegal. However, this command of the language or affinity towards certain social structures is not enough to sway his overall feeling of comfort in Italy. He sees the values placed on family, the slower pace, and the climate as some of the factors that bring out his African dimension, factors that are indispensable for him. Many of the informants in Italy mention similar reasons for feeling a connection with Italy. For Ibou, this connection has led to a proactive transformation of Italy as home, in that his Senegalese wife and child live with him outside Rome, and he does not discuss the prospect of returning to Senegal. Ibou represents someone who, regardless of any exclusion perpetuated by the dominant culture, has decided to set up roots and integrate.

There are also examples of humorous discussions of nationality and the destruction of boundaries and borders. In the following excerpt we see questions of identity being evoked consciously in natural conversation and in a manner that plays on words and languages in a creative way. In the following conversation, Idi (I), a friend (F) and Bachir (B) joke about being Senegalese over a meal at the Senegalese restaurant:

I: No mi piaciono i senegalesi, e per questo io ho tornato³⁷ italiano adesso.

Capito? [everyone laughs] I senegalesi parlano troppo, capito. Hai visto questo?

Come no?

F: Chi è italiano? Sei italiano?

I: Sì.

F: Meno male.

M: [laugh]

F: **Boy, yow yaa doon naan fii?** [It was not you who was drinking here?]

I: No è male che cosa?

F: Perché sei italiano adesso. Noi siamo dei senegalese, capito?

B: *Je suis fier d'être sénégalais* [I am proud to be Senegalese].

F: **Wax ko si italien** [Say it in Italian].

I: Ecco, io, grazie a tutti--

F: **Jox ko si ndox mi mu naan si italien.** [Give him water so he can drink it in Italian].

I: **Bokkul si italien.** [That's not part of the Italian language].

F: **Waaye benn la** [It's the same thing].

I: **Asstaf four la** [Forgiveness from God/ It's not ture]. (Senegalese Restaurant
12 February, 2010)

While the conversations at the restaurant are normally in Wolof unless a non-Wolof speaker is being addressed, it makes sense for Idi to begin this topic in Italian, as he is discarding his Senegalese identity. Since he has decided he does not want to be Senegalese because they talk too much, he claims an Italian identity. The friend (F) challenges Idi by suggesting he is

drunk for saying such a thing, using the word “boy” to address him, a word taken from English but having been appropriated in Wolof. He also jokingly says something to the effect of “Thank goodness” with “meno male”. This phrase in context could also mean good riddance. However, either through a misinterpretation or a play on words, Idi transforms “meno male” into “no è male” in his next turn. The other person’s response seems to suggest an us vs. him framework. “Noi” includes all the Senegalese, but Idi has now defected, which is not necessarily a bad thing in F’s mind. While this exchange is obviously in jest as there is laughing in the background and a lack of seriousness in their voices, Bachir’s interruption “je suis fier d’être sénégalais” conveys a need to voice pride in his identity.

The language choice is worth noting. It is the only phrase in French in the whole exchange. This causes me to ask why Bachir would use French to profess his Senegalese heritage when Wolof has been used a couple of turns earlier by F. I raise this point because the use of French is particularly important, due to F’s command in Wolof, in which F tells the defector Idi to use Italian to express his pride in being a new Italian. F engages Idi throughout, culminating in his telling Idi to “drink the water in Italian.” Being Italian has transformed from being simply an identity marked by the language spoken to being an identity that encompasses every aspect of living. Idi retorts by arguing that drinking is not included in the Italian language, an argument that F dismisses. As if this exchange and the languages used are not interesting enough, Idi gets the last word, electing to use Arabic to do so. While a translation is “Forgiveness from God,” a more context specific translation is “it’s not true.” In other words, Idi decides to negate F’s words once more.

The linguistic intricacy of this exchange mirrors the complexity surrounding where the Senegalese fit in discussions of *italianità*. Even though Idi presents his claim on Italianness in a

humorous manner, he shows that the nature of Italianness deserves to be negotiated. He stands in contrast to Bachir who uses the opportunity to reaffirm his “Senegality.” Meanwhile F, through instigation, creates a space where these reflections on identity and nationhood can flourish. What is most evident by the exchange is that identity is dynamic and that these conversations should be allowed to play out not only among friends but also on the national stage.

Conclusion

Throughout the article, various types of code-switching have been analyzed to show different reasons for speakers’ use of linguistic and discursive features in specific instances. This type of analysis is important because it sheds light on identity claims; specifically, it highlights the ways in which Senegalese immigrants switch between languages and how this switching illustrates boundaries formed through understandings of inclusion and exclusion. Boundaries are not only created by the dominant culture, they are also reinforced by those affected by this exclusion. The first excerpts show how a desire to return home can accentuate the us vs. them schism. The content of the conversation highlights nationality as an identity marker and the code-switching to Wolof demarcates a linguistic boundary. A discussion of race in the subsequent excerpts underlines one of the most important factors that the informants in my study say contribute to a sense of exclusion. Expressing ideas about race through various languages with the words *noir*, *nero*, and *black*, the informants demonstrate how code-switching is used as a tool to emphasize feelings of exclusion. Other excerpts, such as Ibou’s, show a more positive understanding of positionality within the Italian context. Meanwhile, the final excerpt shows that a person’s understanding of social markers such as nationality is dynamic and exists through sites of negotiation. While Idi jokes about changing nationalities, he constructs this new-found nationality through language. The multilingual language use in these vignettes reveals something

of the speakers' perceptions of the surrounding world—an Italian world—and specifically how these Senegalese informants perceive and engage with the social and geographic boundaries in their own lives.

As seen here, the desire for migrants to return home comes not just from right-wing discourse but from the migrants themselves who feel a lack of belonging in their new country of residence. However, there are many factors at play that keep migrants living in a place to which they have difficulty connecting. Because of these logistical concerns, many are starting to make do in receiving countries such as Italy, and even setting down roots. Even without the intention of staying, they are doing just that, and therefore becoming a veritable part of the landscape. As Senegalese immigration becomes more established and long-term, there will be, and already has begun, a generation of Senegalese-Italians, and African-Italians in general, whose hybrid identities will further complicate what it means to be Italian, making honest discussions about *italianità* all the more necessary. Khouma, for instance, shares his experiences analyzing his own *italianità* and writes novels that grapple with the role of blackness in Italy, demonstrating that *italianità* is something to be negotiated.

In this more globalized world and more diverse Italy, people with Italian citizenship are not necessarily going to be white, and as the number of non-traditional Italians swells, people like the immigration officer in Khouma's story will have a harder time in denying these new Italians their Italian nationality. Listening to these migrant voices can add a human element to often highly politicized discussions of immigrants and their place in the nation. By focusing on a specific group of people in a specific locale, this paper has contextualized a general phenomenon that is seen in many iterations throughout the world. It has shown how real-life migrant experiences interact with the historical and social complexity of a particular site. Using

ethnographic research, it would be worth studying other migrant groups in Italy (including those who seem to occupy a more privileged position) who bring their own historical baggage and have their own unique interactions with the host country because of a myriad of factors. By understanding how a variety of immigrants perceive their identities and the sites in which these identities are constructed, one has a more multifaceted perspective when engaging in debates about immigration, inclusion, and national identity.

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Appendix

Senegalese informants in Rome who are quoted (pseudonyms used)

Name	Age	Date	Sex	LM	Additional Languages Spoken	Education	Yrs in Italy
Bachir	30	2/12/10	M	Wolof	Fr, It, ~Latin		
Ndiaga*	36	2/14/10	M	Pulaar	Wolof, Fr, It, Eng	High school	8
Ibou*	42	2/19/10	M	Pulaar	Wolof, Fr, Eng, It, ~Russian	University	12
Karim	32	3/2/10	M	Sereer, Wolof	Fr, Eng, It, Spanish	High school	3
Abi	35	3/28/10	F	Mandinka	Wolof, ~Bambara, Fr, ~It, ~Sp	Middle school	1

Idi*	33	4/10/10	M	Wolof	Italian, ~French	Elementary	6
Biondo	34	4/10/10	M	Wolof	Pulaar, Eng, Fr, It		5
Professore	40	4/24/10	M	Wolof	Fr, It, Eng, Sp	Masters	5

* indicates principal informant

Demographic breakdown of all Senegalese informants in Rome

17 males, 8 females

Aged 23-42

Mean age: 33

Five in their 20s, sixteen in their 30s, four in their 40s

Maternal languages spoken: Wolof, Pulaar, French, Diola, Bambara, Mandinka, Mandjak, Sereer

Transcription conventions

- . The period indicates a falling intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a sentence
- ? The question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
- ,
- ::: Colons indicate stretching of the preceding sound, proportional to the number of colons
- A Hyphen after a word or a part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption.
- [] Brackets enclose translations, and descriptions of conduct where necessary [e.g. trails off]
- // Words between back-slashes are transcribed with the phonetic alphabet for instances in which a language's conventional writing conventions are inadequate.

Language Key

Italian, *French*, **Wolof/Arabic**, English. If only one language is used in the excerpt, standard print is used. For words that appear to be hybrid forms of more than one language, italics and underlining is used simultaneously: *Hybrid*.

¹ See Jaksa (2011) for her discussion on sports and national identity formation.

² Kyenge, in discussing the hostile reception she and Balotelli have received at times, told Cazzullo: “[I]o fischiano per lo stesso motivo per cui insultano me: perché siamo degli apripista. Lui il primo centravanti nero della nazionale, io la prima ministra nera. Tentano di indebolirci, ma non ci riusciranno.”

³ According to Caritas (2012), of the over 4 million foreigners living in Italy, 27.4% come from the European Union, 23.4% from other European countries, 22.1% from Africa (both North and Sub-Saharan), 18.8% from Asia, and 8.3% from the Americas.

⁴ According to Caritas (2012), 53.9% of immigrants identify as Christian, of which 29.6% are orthodox, 19.2% are Catholic, 4.4% are protestant; in addition, 32.9% of total immigrants are Muslim; .1% are Jewish; 5.9% are from traditional Asian religions; and 7.2% are defined under “Other.”

⁵ Shore, in talking about the formation of a European identity, contends that “as barriers between European nation-states are eliminated, so the boundaries separating Europe from its Third World ‘Others’ have intensified – and Islam (particularly ‘fundamentalism’) has replaced communism as the key marker for defining the limits of European civilization” (2000: 63). Both political and physical attacks against Muslim immigrants show how this religious othering has been problematic in Italy.

⁶ This article in no way tries to speak for the racialized experience of all immigrants and recognizes that the vast majority of immigrants in Italy are subjected to some sort of racialized discourse just by virtue of being immigrants. As Pagliai notes, “many racializing discourses in Italy today create distinctions between ‘natives/Italians’ and ‘immigrants/non-European/Others.’ The largest immigrant groups are Albanians, Moroccans, Chinese, and Romanians. These groups experience a lot of discrimination and are subject to racializing discourses” (2011: E96). Sniderman *et al* demonstrates through questionnaires that while Italians were disposed to view Africans as “inferior by nature” (2000: 31), they had a tendency to blame Eastern European immigrants “for increasing problems of crime, unemployment, housing shortage, and taxes” (34). More importantly, they show that hostility to immigrants as a group was more evident than hostility to those identified as black (128). Nevertheless, the intention of this article is to problematize constructions of blackness in Italy, noting how historical and contemporary contexts influence the ways in which people interact with their environments.

⁷ Lombardi-Diop and Romeo mark the Italian colonial period from its first formal colony in Eritrea in 1890 to its loss of Libya as well as Albania and the Dodecanese Islands in 1943: “In the period between 1890-1943, Italy claimed colonial rights over Eritrea, Somalia, parts of Libya, Ethiopia, the Dodecanese Islands, and Albania” (2012: 1).

⁸ For systemic racism in the administration of the Ethiopian colony, see Sòrgoni (2002: 41).

⁹ Verdicchio highlights the notion of the Southern Italy as a colonial subject with the section entitled “The Risorgimento and the Exclusive Nation: Unification as Colonial Subjugation” (1997: 22).

¹⁰ It is important to stress that this creation of national identity was arguably only somewhat successful. Verdicchio argues that “Unification was a failure around which the fiction of Italian culture was constructed” (1997: 155). He adds, however, that “there persists a view of Italy as a unified and homogenous nation” (156).

¹¹ See Gramsci for further discussion of the Southern Question (2000: 171-185). See Verdicchio as well not only for discussions on the Southern Question and the construction of race and ethnicity in the Italian context (1997: 21-51), but also on the Italian diaspora and its role in creating an Italian identity and in formulations on race (99-117).

¹² See Mellino for a discussion of political scientist Giovanni Sartori’s disavowal of the link between racism and xenophobia (2012: 90). For scholarship that warns of the dangers of downplaying racialized rhetoric in Italy, see Mellino as well as Portelli (2003) and Lombardi-Diop (2012: 175).

¹³ The 2013 census shows there are 383,464 foreigners out of a population of 4,039,813 living in Rome. More information can be found through Statistiche demografiche ISTAT (the Italian Institute of Statistics). Demo.istat.it.

¹⁴ Italy follows Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. See Mudu (2006: 422) for more information. The figure provided by the Caritas 2012 census was 87,311 Senegalese residents or 2.1% of the total foreign population. Senegal is the most represented sub-Saharan African country. This number marks a huge increase from the 47,762 Senegalese in the 2004 Caritas report.

¹⁵ According to 2010 census data from INSEE, there were 79,475 Senegalese immigrants in Metropolitan France, not including French citizens of Senegalese origin. More information can be found at www.insee.fr. I would note that, unlike in France, where family reunification and educational opportunities have traditionally attracted a wide range of migrants including women, the vast majority of Senegalese arriving in Italy, especially Rome, migrate for economic reasons and are primarily male. Riccio demonstrates that “Senegalese migrants resident in Italy were mainly men migrating as individuals, following the paths shaped by migratory networks. The number of women has been growing through family reunion, although much less so than in other migrant communities” (2008: 220). In addition, reliance on money earned abroad has paved the way for an important remittance system where in 2007, over one billion dollars were sent to Senegal, constituting 7.6% of the national GDP (<http://www.un-instraw.org/data/media/documents/Remittances/UNDP%20project%20local%20dev/1-FACT%20SHEET%20SENEGAL-ENweb.pdf>). Riccio shows how these migrants are often celebrated as heroes in Senegal (2008: 225).

¹⁶ This figure is based on a 1990 study by the *Haut Conseil de la Francophonie* (Cissé 2005: 104).

¹⁷ The Peuls and the Toucouleurs, who speak Pulaar, comprise the second largest group at 24 % followed by the Sereer at 15%. Other groups include the Lebou, Jola, Mandinka, Soninke, among others (Cissé, 2005: 101).

¹⁸ Most discussions of foreign language learning are not found in academic but in marketing texts. For instance, a study by the British Council has found that Senegal has the highest level of English of any country in West Africa. More information found at <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/201301250596.html>.

¹⁹ One online text in particular speaks of the important of learning Chinese for employment opportunities. See http://english.hanban.org/article/2014-06/27/content_542801.htm.

²⁰ For more information on language use in Senegal see Trudell & Klaas (2009), Cissé (2005), and McLaughlin (2001). For a detailed look at code-switching and urban linguistic varieties in Senegal, see Swigart (1994).

²¹ See appendix for more detailed demographic information on the informants as well as transcription conventions.

²² For the interviews, I told the informants that they could speak any of the languages in which I was at least conversational (English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Wolof). Interviews tended to be in Italian, French or English. Recorded natural conversations were primarily in Wolof, Italian, or French.

²³ Kramersch used home as a metaphor with regard to foreign language learning, arguing that through awareness of different contexts and perspectives, foreign language learners “make themselves at home in a culture ‘of a third kind’” (1993: 235). Kramersch has more recently suggested, however, that “third place” as a spatial metaphor seems too static in an increasingly globalized world. She worries that “predicated on the existence of a first and second place that are all too often reified in ‘country of origin’ and ‘host country,’ third place can be easily romanticized as some hybrid position that contributes to the host country’s ideology of cultural diversity” (2010: 200). Kramersch thus proposes reframing “the notion of third place as symbolic competence, an ability that is both theoretical and practical, and that emerges from the need to find appropriate subject positions within and across the language at hand. The multilingual subject is defined by his or her growing symbolic competence” (200).

²⁴ Biondo was a nickname given to him upon arriving to Italy because of his dyed-blond dreadlocks.

²⁵ In the interviews, “M” always refers to me, the interviewer.

²⁶ Professore is a nickname. While this is his interview, Ndiaga, who has also been interviewed, is present.

²⁷ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088939/quotes>.

²⁸ N: *...in Africa that is going to be different because there one doesn’t talk about, euhh, blacks. No. Understand? But anyway I know that you, you must understand a bit of what I am saying.*

M: *Yes. Of course.*

N: *There you go. I don’t really want to go into detail.*

²⁹ It is important to note that the European understanding of race and ethnicity with regard to Senegalese immigrants may vary greatly from the Senegalese perspective. A European might assign the classification of black or African or more specifically Senegalese. A Senegalese immigrant in Europe might also accept these very same terms in describing themselves. However, most of my Senegalese informants were also quick to distinguish their own ethnic differences with other Senegalese, in the framework of the various multiethnic societies found all over the African continent. Being Wolof or Peul or any of the other numerous ethnic groups was as important as being Senegalese.

³⁰ “They can’t use the word ‘noir’ because that word is taboo.”

³¹ The informants in France are part of a larger study that compares experiences of Senegalese in Paris and Rome.

³² “*Me, one day, where I catch the bus and I return and I do, I have saw four Italians. But children. But, they did something to me. That bad me until today. I no forget that...Look at the black, there, there the black:::. When I speak on the phone they yelled ‘wawawawawa’. I had to say, I say him ‘but please’. They say ‘This is Italian. This is our home. You are blacks:::. Oh my, that hurts me. That bad me. That bad me...’* (The translation reflects Abi’s use of non-standard French.)

³³ Referring to a study on Jamaican English in London, Gardner-Chloros writes “that code-switching is used [...] to ‘animate’ the narrative by providing different ‘voices’ for the participants in the incident which is described” (2009: 3).

³⁴ See Faloppa for a historical and contemporary discussion of words to describe Blacks in Italian (2004: 99-128).

³⁵ In standard Italian it would be *sindaco*, meaning mayor.

³⁶ Even with comparisons being made with France, a deliberate focus on transnationalism is outside the scope of the current analysis. See Kane for discussions on Senegalese transnationalism (2011: 8).

³⁷ In standard Italian it would be *io sono diventato italiano*.

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